

Preparing for the Eschaton: A Theology of Work

by

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A thesis

presented to the University of Waterloo

and Conrad Grebel University College

in fulfilment of the

thesis requirement for the degree of

Master of Theological Studies

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2010

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## Abstract

Work occupies a significant part of our lives, and yet it is often not given sufficient attention. Certainly there is much consideration given to finding a career, and succeeding in work, but not enough to how our work affects and defines us as human beings. The default Christian position has been that we must find our vocation, what we have been called by God to do, and that will result in satisfying meaningful labour. However, vocation has not necessarily led us to be more satisfied in our work, or to solve the many issues related to work. This thesis suggests that we may find a new method of understanding our work by returning to some important themes of Christian faith. The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us a hope for the future, and allows us to reconsider our place within the narrative of history. Along with resurrection, the hope of new creation gives us a goal to work towards and a future existence which we may anticipate in the present. This anticipation of the future can change how we work, and give us reason to reconsider our understanding of our work in the present.

## Acknowledgements

A project such as this is primarily a solitary endeavour, but it would not exist except for the assistance of a number of important people. First of all, many thanks to my supervisor Jeremy Bergen for his careful reading and helpful suggestions throughout the entire process. As well, thanks to Stephen and Joanne Mawhinney, and Joe Velaidum for their feedback at various stages. There are many others, too many to name, who with brief comments or longer conversations have helped me to clarify my thoughts, and I appreciate all of those encounters also. Finally, to my wife Nicole, who has endured the many trials and tribulations of marrying an academic: a million thanks, I could not have done it without you.

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# 1. Introduction

Christians in modern Western society are sometimes faced with a dilemma when considering their work. Work is central to who we are as human beings. We cannot exist without work which provides our food, shelter, and clothing. For many people, forty or more hours of their week is spent working. Work is also a basic element of our human co-existence. After two people have met for the first time, the conversation often turns towards work with the simple question “What do you do?” Despite the importance of work in our lives, it seems we often have difficulty relating our Christian faith to our work. Certainly we are implored to act honourably and ethically in our work, but this is not something that we can identify as unique to Christians, nor unique to our work.

One option is to attempt to inject Christian faith into our work. This can be as simple as imitating the love of Jesus among our coworkers, or it may be a more intentional system of evangelization. If we are called to a secular work environment among non-Christians, then our work is a platform for witnessing opportunities. This attitude has important implications. First, work is divided into secular and sacred. The only important work that we do is ministry, regardless of whether we are part of the professional clergy or the laity. Second, an extension of the first, is that any secular work

we may do has lost its value. It may be useful to provide for our needs and to allow for evangelism, but there is nothing to redeem it as work. While some Christians are satisfied with this attitude towards work, there are many who are not.<sup>1</sup>

As a result, there are a number of theologies of work, which attempt to explain the why and how of human work. The concept most frequently employed in theologies of work is vocation. The idea of vocation suggests that we have all been called to a particular occupation or life situation in which we should serve God. Some people are called to secular work, and some to professional ministry. While it is not often stated explicitly, the idea of vocation generally prioritizes a religious vocation over a secular one. While workers can serve God within a secular vocation, many modern Western Christians assume that God is better served within a religious vocation. But, is this actually true? Shouldn't secular workers be able to appreciate their work from a Christian perspective as well? It seems that this issue has not yet been fully explored. As a result, for many Christian workers, religious life and secular work remain mostly separated.

Thus, the aim of this theology of work is to promote, and perhaps even to redeem, secular work.<sup>2</sup> Christian faith should be meaningful in all aspects of human life, including secular work. There is value in secular work, and we must not present it as a lesser

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1. For example, the "God at Work" course by Ken Costa "aims to equip Christians in finding purpose in their every day work, and to live it out effectively." Ken Costa, "About the Course," <http://godatwork.org.uk/course> (accessed September 27th, 2010). As well, Lumunos (formerly Faith@Work) goal is "helping you figure out how to spend your time and energy (something we name "call")." Lumunos, "About Us," [http://www.lumunos.org/About\\_Us.htm](http://www.lumunos.org/About_Us.htm) (accessed September 27th, 2010).

2. Unless specifically stated otherwise, any references to human work will be to secular, rather than religious, work. While many of the topics throughout this thesis could apply to religious work as well, the primary focus here is for workers outside of religious organizations.

alternative. For persons involved in religious work, even if they are struggling with some aspects of their work, it is relatively easy to assign value to their work. The question guiding this project then, is how do we understand and appreciate our secular work? This thesis suggests that the best way to answer this question is eschatologically. It will be argued that examining work from the perspective of the future new creation provides a unique and important method for Christians to understand human work in ways that were not previously possible.

In the process of arguing for the importance of this eschatological perspective, this project can be loosely divided into two parts. The following three chapters discuss the problems that we face, and then examine both historical and current attempts to understand work. Chapter 2 will define work, and then discuss the problems of alienation and meaninglessness which often plague our work. All workers must attempt to find meaning in the work they do, and attempt to situate their work within a larger narrative of human life. The third chapter takes a closer look at the issue of vocation beginning with the interaction between the Protestant Reformation and capitalism as viewed by Max Weber. The idea of secular work as a legitimate way to serve God that was presented by Martin Luther has persisted since, although not without some disagreement. Other theologians see little value in human work as such and prefer other ways of explaining the calling of God. For example, Karl Barth understands work as only one aspect of a more general calling from God, and emphasizes the entire human life. Chapter 4 continues the look at vocation by discussing a number of contemporary theologians who

have written theologies of work. Some, such as John Paul II, incorporate vocation into their theology, while others, for example Miroslav Volf, believe that vocation is no longer a suitable way to understand work and explore other options.

The second half of this project explores important theological themes in preparation for developing a theological method to understand human work. Chapter 5 is focused on the human person, and the role of humanity in the history of the world. Resurrection is the key theme that affirms the importance of the physical body for humanity. As well, resurrection is important in order to orient our understanding of all creation within a historical narrative. The sixth chapter provides an eschatological framework by examining the theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg. The priority of the future is a key aspect of Pannenberg's theology, and the future plays an important role as Pannenberg discusses God, the reign of God, and human identity. The concept of anticipation helps us understand who we are as human persons in relation to God. The final chapter discusses in greater detail the concept of new creation, returning to the writings of N.T. Wright, Miroslav Volf, and Darrell Cosden. Finally, the anticipation of our future work in the new creation is examined as a method to improve our understanding of our present work, particularly in the themes of rest, mission, ecology, beauty, and love.

Finally, the limitations of this project must be discussed. There is not a comprehensive and complete theology of work developed here. Rather, the material discussed will hopefully provide a starting point for individuals to develop a personal theology of working. There are many ways that Christian faith can impact a person's

work, but it is often the case that faith does *not* have an impact. This is not a blueprint for how faith and work should interact, but can provide individuals another method with which to consider their work, and perhaps the possibility of improving their understanding of why they do what they do.

## 2. The Problem of Work

Over and over again I have asked myself why should not my lot be the common lot. . . . Indeed I have been ashamed when I have thought of the contrast between my happy working hours and the unpraised, unrewarded, monotonous drudgery that most men are condemned to.

William Morris<sup>1</sup>

For most people in the world today, at least those who are between the early teenage years and retirement age, the issue of work is tremendously important. It is expected that individuals in modern Western society will be involved in one or more of the following processes: preparation for work through education; seeking paid employment; working and progressing along a career path; or enjoying retirement. There are a few exceptions to this traditional path, such as those who are medically unable to work, homemakers, or the fabulously wealthy, but even these individuals are usually involved in some sort of work activity even if it is not paid employment. An individual who simply does not work is generally considered to be an aberration, living outside of societal norms. Yet, despite the prominence of work in our lives, relatively little thought is given to the why and how of work. Even understanding what work *is* can be problematic. When the term “work” is

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1. E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 309, quoted in Joanne B. Ciulla, *The Working Life: The Promise and Betrayal of Modern Work* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), 65.

used, paid employment is most often being referred to, but this then excludes volunteer work, work in the home, and student's academic work. Work as paid employment is viewed as necessary and largely unavoidable, but understanding work on a larger scale is often very difficult.

One difficult aspect of understanding work is understanding job satisfaction. For some people the possibility of enjoying work is not even considered because their work is so necessary to provide food, shelter, and clothing every week.<sup>2</sup> However, some people are able to enjoy their work, some are content with their occupation, and some struggle to endure their jobs. Determining whether a particular person may or may not enjoy a particular job is not an easy task, and perhaps not even a possible one.<sup>3</sup> Attitudes towards work are very complex, and are influenced by numerous factors, many of which are not quantifiable. One factor of particular importance seems to be the greater purpose of work. Whether it be helping others, improving the community, or leaving a legacy for children, people want their work to have some meaning beyond the paycheque.

These questions related to the purpose of work are central to how work is understood. Can work lead us towards the possibility of a better future? What hope is promoted because of our work? It seems that many people wish to believe that work does serve a purpose, even if the reality of their daily work is closer to hopeless drudgery.

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2. For example, according to Statistics Canada, over 3 million Canadians (9.4% of the population) are living in a "low income situation." "Income of Canadians," <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/100617/dq100617c-eng.htm> (accessed June 17th, 2010).

3. "National culture, job design characteristics, and person-environment fit" are three criteria which can influence a worker's motivation and satisfaction. Gary P. Latham, and Craig C. Pinder, "Work Motivation Theory and Research at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century," *Annual Review of Psychology* 56 (2005): 485-516.

Before attempting to provide an answer to these questions, it must first be asked why we seek a greater purpose for work. Why are our day-to-day activities not sufficient in and of themselves to keep us satisfied? What is the problem with work?

Some people may want to suggest that the problem with work is self-evident. After all, we work for the money and work for the weekend. We certainly don't work because we enjoy it. An appeal to the book of Genesis can be made as well. The ground is now cursed, and we eat only by the sweat of our brow. What was once leisurely gardening has become endless toil. This negative view of work seems to be the default position in our society. For example, Studs Terkel describes his book *Working* as being "about daily humiliations."<sup>4</sup> Those who do enjoy their work are either incredibly fortunate, or incredibly naive. Alain de Botton presents a view that is perhaps typical as he concludes his examination of work in *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work* in this way:

Our work will at least have distracted us, it will have provided a perfect bubble in which to invest our hopes for perfection, it will have focused our immeasurable anxieties on a few relatively small-scale and achievable goals, it will have given us a sense of mastery, it will have made us respectably tired, it will have put food on the table. It will have kept us out of greater trouble.<sup>5</sup>

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4. Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day And How They Feel About What They Do* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), xi.

5. Alain de Botton, *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2009), 326. See also the statement by Stanley Hauerwas in which he proclaims the best thing about work is that it is "a hedge against boredom." Stanley Hauerwas, "Work as Co-Creation: A Critique of A Remarkably Bad Idea," in *Co-Creation and Capitalism: John Paul II's Laborem Exercens*, ed. John W. Houck, and Oliver F. Williams (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 48.

## Defining Work

Although beginning with this negative view of work has its appeal, for the simple reason that so many people have negative attitudes towards their work, there should first be an attempt to better understand what work is, before it is so easily condemned. Stanley Hauerwas suggests that “the best definition of work is ‘that from which the rich are exempt.’”<sup>6</sup> While this may be accurate and amusing, it does not really help us understand work in any significant way. Countering Hauerwas’ brevity, Miroslav Volf offers this definition of work:

Work is honest, purposeful, and methodologically specified social activity whose primary goal is the creation of products or states of affairs that can satisfy the needs of working individuals or their co-creatures, or (if primarily an end in itself) activity that is necessary in order for acting individuals to satisfy their needs apart from the need for the activity itself.<sup>7</sup>

Volf’s more comprehensive definition is useful, but is perhaps overly complex. Everyone already “knows” what work is; a definition of work shouldn’t be difficult to interpret. Volf’s focus on the satisfying of needs doesn’t seem to match the intuitiveness which the concept of work should have for us. As well, many people may feel that their daily work is not honest or purposeful or methodologically specified. Volf’s definition is acceptable, but it is not ideal.

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6. Ibid., 50. While this chapter is not directly concerned with a theological examination of work, theologians such as Hauerwas will be incorporated in this section in an attempt to find a definition that is suitable for this project as a whole.

7. Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1991), 10-11.

Richard Higginson arrived at a very helpful definition of work when he suggested that work is “any activity undertaken with a sense of obligation.”<sup>8</sup> This concise definition allows a certain freedom in understanding work, in that work is not restricted to paid employment, but also allows suitable separation from leisure activity. We are obligated to go to our job in order to pay the bills, obligated to cook a meal in order to feed our family, and obligated to clean our home in order to maintain a suitable living environment. However, leisure activities, which may otherwise resemble work, are kept separate. Baking muffins is an obligation for the professional chef, and thus work, but baking muffins on a Saturday morning could be a leisure activity for a lawyer.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the usefulness of the definition suggested by Higginson, a definition of work, no matter how suitable, will not give us a full understanding of work. Hannah Arendt is very helpful in furthering our understanding of work by explaining her understanding of different aspects of work. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt refers to what we might generally call work as the *vita activa*, and divides it into three separate categories. The first is labour, which Arendt suggests is “the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body. . . . The human condition of labor is life itself.”<sup>10</sup> Labour offers the closest connection to the Genesis narrative of work. Labour in

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8. Richard Higginson, *Mind the Gap: Connecting Faith with Work* (Warwick: CPAS, 1997), 7., quoted in David H. Jensen, *Responsive Labor: A Theology Of Work* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2006), 3.

9. However, this definition is not perfect. Obviously we must make exceptions for activities such as breathing, eating, and sleeping, which humans are obligated to do, but which cannot be considered work.

10. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1998), 7.

the modern world is activity that is equivalent to the tilling of the earth and stewardship of creation; it is what we need to do in order to stay alive.

The second aspect of the *vita activa* that Arendt suggests is what she calls work itself. For Arendt, “Work is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not imbedded in, and whose mortality is not compensated by, the species’ every-recurring life cycle. . . . The human condition of work is worldliness.”<sup>11</sup> Work is not concerned with human life, but with that which “transcends” human life. To work is to build a bridge or to design a computer program, to construct things which, barring their untimely destruction, will continue to exist after the creator’s life has ended.

The final aspect for Arendt is action. While both labour and work can be understood on an individual basis, action reminds us that human life is communal, and that life always involves interaction with the rest of humanity. “Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world.”<sup>12</sup> In a narrow sense, action can be reduced to politics, the attempt to determine how we should live with and for others. But, in a more general sense, action encompasses serving coffee, business meetings, and nearly all situations in which other people are directly involved in our activities.

These three dimensions of the *vita activa* that Arendt describes are very helpful, as nearly all human work<sup>13</sup> can be described by one of these terms. We can now more easily

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11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

determine what we are doing when we work. While this is beneficial, we must still move further to determine the greater purpose of our work. When we labour, we sustain and promote life, which is a valuable end in itself, and the creation of worldly objects is often extremely important and useful. However, action, human interaction, is perhaps the key element which makes us human. Even as we attempt to understand work, we must also remember that our work aids us in understanding ourselves.

Work may not be the key element by which we can understand ourselves, but, with Arendt, we can state that work *discloses* who we are. “This disclosure of ‘who’ in contradistinction to ‘what’ somebody is—his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide—is implicit in everything somebody says and does.”<sup>14</sup> What we do, and how we do it, is an expression of our selves. While Arendt discusses this in her chapter on action, it can likely also apply, though perhaps to a lesser extent, to her ideas of labour and work.

This is possible because there are always aspects of action in our labour and work. Labour to sustain life and work to create something worldly do not exist in a vacuum, but take place for, with, or because of others. This interaction helps us to determine the value of our work. In *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, Matthew Crawford expresses this as he describes his work.

I try to be a good motorcycle mechanic. This effort connects me to others, in particular those who exemplify good motorcycling, . . . my work situates me in a particular community. The narrow mechanical things I concern

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13. While the “work” dimension that Arendt describes is useful, in this project the usage of the term “work” will, following Higginson, indicate “any activity undertaken with a sense of obligation.”

14. Ibid., 179.

myself with are inscribed within a larger circle of meaning; they are in the service of an activity that we recognize as part of life well lived. . . . In this conversation lies the potential of work to bring some measure of coherence to our lives.<sup>15</sup>

This self-disclosure, which helps to explain the value of our work, can only take place within a community, or as Arendt says, “in sheer human togetherness.”<sup>16</sup>

## The Problems of Work

When self-disclosure in work is obscured or lost, the community that we work in is threatened. If the worker is no longer able to express herself in her work, if the real worker is hidden, then the community that works together is reduced to a group of people who are merely near each other and who perform similar tasks. The action which helped to give our work value is missing. As Arendt writes, “Without the disclosure of the agent in the act, action loses its specific character and becomes one form of achievement among others.”<sup>17</sup> As action is removed from our labour and work, and as the community which surrounds our labour and work dissolves, we become alienated from our work.<sup>18</sup>

An inquiry into the problems of work is impossible without discussing Karl Marx and alienation. According to Marx’s theory, alienation is the result of the separation of producer from product.<sup>19</sup> Bringing the issue of alienation into a modern context, imagine

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15. Matthew Crawford, *Shop Class As Soulcraft* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 196-97.

16. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 180.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., 210.

19. Judy Cox, “An Introduction to Marx’s Theory of Alienation,” *International Socialism*, <http://>

a computer programmer who wants software to help him manage his household budget. He outlines the capabilities and limitations of the program, writes the code, tests for bugs, begins using it for his own personal use, then shares it with some friends, and eventually releases the software as a commercial product which is sold worldwide. He is undoubtedly responsible for this particular product, and is intimately connected with it. Every time that he hears of someone who uses his program, he can be proud of his accomplishment.

On the other hand, imagine a computer programmer in India who is employed by a company which has acquired the contract for building billing software for a large American grocery chain. She is assigned, along with seven other programmers, the task of coding the Accounts Receivable module of the billing software. Her portion of the program performs no meaningful actions until it is combined with the work of dozens of other programmers. She will never use the whole program herself, nor will she ever buy groceries from this large American chain. This latter scenario expresses Marx's concept of alienation. The programmer has no real relationship with the results of her work.

We are alienated from our work when we no longer have any connection with the product of our work. Perhaps what is produced is shipped around the world and we are not a part of the community that actually receives and uses it. Perhaps our work consists of filling out forms and dealing with paperwork, and we have no real conception of what product is produced or what service is actually offered. Perhaps our task has been

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[/pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj79/cox.htm](http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj79/cox.htm) (accessed September 27th, 2010), par. 17.

reduced to a simple technique which requires no real skill, and in which we can not feel any pride in the result. While these scenarios are only examples, the sentiment behind them most likely resonates with many workers.

Of course, our modern world is very different from the world that Marx experienced. Creating an actual physical product is no longer the norm for workers. Joanne Ciulla writes that “People in goods-producing jobs feel alienated from their product because they do not use their intellect to produce it. People in service jobs feel alienated from their service because they do not always use their real emotions when giving the service. Both feel they are going through the motions of producing something that has little to do with who or what they are.”<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, Matthew Crawford argues that the concept of alienation has changed in our modern times, and that there are other ways of avoiding alienation, using the example of an autoworker. A worker assembling one part of a car cannot feel connected to the finished product, but she can feel pride from being an employee of a corporation and a worker in a factory that makes quality vehicles. The important aspect is not necessarily a connection to a discrete product, but involvement within a community.<sup>21</sup>

The idea of alienation put forward by Marx may have changed, but, despite Crawford’s suggestion, it is still relevant, and can be adapted to help us understand work in modern society. Another problem which is closely related to alienation, and which perhaps fits better within the modern world of work presents itself. That problem can be

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20. Ciulla, *The Working Life*, 124.

21. Crawford, *Shop Class As Soulcraft*, 186-90.

summarized by the phrase “just a job.” Many people feel that they do not perform meaningful work, but rather have a job which provides for their material needs. Ciulla suggests that “When we want to minimize the importance of our work or distance ourselves from our work, we say, ‘It’s only a job.’ This means that it’s nothing personal, because it’s just a piece of work that we do to get paid.”<sup>22</sup> Yet workers desire something more. The idea of a “job” is depressing for many people. The sentiments of Nora Watson can be echoed by many. “I think most of us are looking for a calling, not a job. Most of us, like the assembly line worker, have jobs that are too small for our spirit. Jobs are not big enough for people.”<sup>23</sup>

The problem may be that, as Henry David Thoreau is quoted as saying, “Americans know more about how to make a living than how to live.”<sup>24</sup> Daniel Yankelovich writes that the key features of the American work ethic are related to being a good provider, being independent, being successful, and gaining self-respect.<sup>25</sup> However, when one goes to work merely to earn a paycheque, it is often very difficult to attain these ideals. For those working at “jobs,” all that may be required of them is “a sheer automatic functioning.”<sup>26</sup>

With “just a job,” work is reduced to “wage labour.” The most important part of a job is to simply show up. According to Adam Smith, “workers receive compensation for their loss of freedom at work, not for the product they make.”<sup>27</sup> Instead of doing

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22. Ciulla, *The Working Life*, 33.

23. Terkel, *Working*, xxiv.

24. Daniel Yankelovich, “The Meaning of Work,” in *The Worker and the Job: Coping With Change*, ed. Jerome M. Rosow (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 19.

25. *Ibid.*, 22.

26. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 322.

something that they are interested in, or that they want to do, a jobholder goes to work. So long as they are able to perform above the minimum level of quality or productivity that is mandated, they will continue to be paid. Unfortunately, for many, this leads to “a Monday through Friday sort of dying.”<sup>28</sup>

## Meaningful Work

For many people, the goal is to move beyond a “job,” and to find “meaningful work.” Of course, the idea of meaningful work is not some static ideal that everyone is searching for, but will vary from individual to individual. Some people will only be satisfied by work that helps the less fortunate. For others, meaningful work is found when they are continually challenged on a creative or intellectual level. Being involved in a business that serves the local community and is intimately involved in community affairs is meaningful for some workers as well. There are certainly a great number of careers that might fulfill one or more of the conditions for meaningful work. This is most likely because meaningful work is concerned with “the social and moral qualities of a job”<sup>29</sup> and not the actual work that is done.

The difficulty in this is that our search for meaning in our work can be masked by false meaning and faux-importance. It is natural for humans to want to understand the

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27. Ciulla, *The Working Life*, 85.

28. Terkel, *Working*, xi.

29. Ciulla, *The Working Life*, 107.

work that we do, and to find meaning in our work. But, businesses and organizations realize this as well, and attempt to create meaning and importance in work that otherwise offers very little. One way that this is attempted is in the creation of a sense of solidarity and togetherness by organizing workers into teams, even though the actual work is almost entirely done on an individual basis. Activities at work that are meant to engender bonding or community do so only on a superficial level, if at all.<sup>30</sup>

Ciulla believes that work is meaningful if it makes life better in some way. This can be physically, emotionally, spiritually, environmentally, intellectually, or various other ways. Work is meaningful if the worker or someone else cares about the work and benefits from it. At the very least, even if the work itself does not directly benefit someone, it should at least make meaning possible outside of work. If a person's wages supplies her physical needs, and she is able to volunteer outside of work, her work can be meaningful in that way. Ultimately work should, either directly or indirectly, allow people to make the world a better place.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, Matthew Crawford sees the search for meaningful work to be connected with the search for self-reliance, and that "both ideals are tied to a struggle for individual agency."<sup>32</sup> That we are actually *doing* something may be one of the prerequisites for meaningful work. At the end of the day, are we able to see or know that we have accomplished something? It is usually quite easy to see the results of work in the manual

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30. Ibid., 138-41, 224-5.

31. Ibid., 225-27.

32. Crawford, *Shop Class As Soulcraft*, 7.

trades, which is part of the reason that Crawford promotes them. But there does not need to be a physical, tangible goal for a worker to have a sense of individual agency. Two aspects that are important for meaningful work are the quest for improvement, and a goal towards which we can aspire to.

First of all, we should be able to reflect on our work and realize that we are more skilled than we were two months ago. This can not simply be the ability to produce more or to produce faster, but to actually be better at our work. Crawford identifies this as “room for progress in excellence.”<sup>33</sup> This progress must be intrinsic to the task we are doing. Crawford identifies a famous study in which children who are rewarded with prizes or treats for something that they already enjoy doing, such as drawing, are less likely to improve their skills and will find the activity less enjoyable in the future.<sup>34</sup> The extrinsic motivation that the rewards offer becomes more important than the intrinsic motivation which the activity itself previously offered. Paid work does endanger this quest for improvement, but meaningful work will retain some aspect of progress towards excellence.

Related to the first, but also important in its own way, is the idea of a goal for our work. Why are we doing what we do? For work to be meaningful, the goal towards which we work must be meaningful. “Busy work” is often viewed as the least interesting type of work possible. However, if there is a clear goal of what we are working towards, or a

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33. Ibid., 194-96.

34. Mark R. Lepper et al., “Undermining Children’s Intrinsic Interest with Extrinsic Reward: A Test of the “Overjustification” Hypothesis,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 28, no. 1 (1973): 129-37.

skilled and experienced worker that we are trying to emulate, it is much easier to consider our work to be meaningful. Furthermore, as we move closer to the goal, we should be able to see more clearly the meaning that our work has. “There is a progressive *revelation of why* one ought to aim at just this, as well as how one can achieve it.”<sup>35</sup> We should be able to identify the why of our work, and ideally that why should have relevance outside of our work as well.

## The Narrative of Work

Understanding the why of our work is part of the process of situating our work within a larger narrative. We seem to automatically attempt to find a small place for ourselves in some sort of bigger story. Richard Sennett describes the nature of narrative in his book *The Corrosion of Character*. “Narratives are more than simple chronicles of events; they give shape to the forward movement of time, suggesting reasons why things happen, showing their consequences.”<sup>36</sup> Narratives are always present in our lives, implicitly if not explicitly, and our work should fit into our life narrative.

If our work cannot be situated within some sort of larger narrative, it is almost certainly not meaningful. The idea of narrative seems to bring together the elements of meaningful work espoused by Ciulla and Crawford. The social and moral aspects of work

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35. Crawford, *Shop Class As Soulcraft*, 207.

36. Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: the Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: Norton, 1998), 31.

that are not always easy to express when they are isolated, begin to fit together when they are situated within a larger narrative. And then we are able to find a place for ourselves, as workers, within the narrative. There is naturally a *telos* to the narrative that we create. There is a goal, often that of a better world, towards which we can move.

Within this narrative, there is a reason and purpose for our work. On some level, someone is benefitting from the work that we do. There is someone who is lacking something, and who requires something from us. As Paul Ricoeur writes, “Because someone is counting on me, I am accountable for my action before another.”<sup>37</sup> This thought confirms Crawford’s argument concerning the “struggle for individual agency.” Someone needs something from us, and by fulfilling that need, we are actively doing something with our work.

However, individual agency is not nearly common enough in our world today. Hence Sennett’s critique: “This is the problem of character in modern capitalism. There is history, but no shared narrative of difficulty, and so no shared fate. Under these conditions, character corrodes; the question ‘Who needs me?’ has no immediate answer.”<sup>38</sup> Without a proper narrative, we do not know that our work benefits others, or society as a whole. If this is the case, how are we able to consider our work to have meaning?

Of course, it is possible to create a false narrative which seems to answer these challenges. But, we can assume that these narratives which promise much but deliver

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37. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. K. Blarney (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 165, quoted in Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character*, 146.

38. *Ibid.*, 147.

little will not stand the test of time. Sennett declares that “a regime which provides human beings no deep reasons to care about one another cannot long preserve its legitimacy.”<sup>39</sup> Here Christians must carefully consider the values and narratives that guide their lives. As Sennett states, we have “no shared narrative of difficulty and so no shared fate.” Many of the narratives presented in our modern society are weak or nonexistent. For example, a popular refrain expressing one possible narrative is “Look out for number one.” While this narrative may be popular, the focus on individualism is at odds with the focus on community and charity espoused by the Christian tradition. Is there a better alternative?

N.T. Wright identifies two primary narratives which generally guide the lives of individuals in the modern West. The first is labelled as “Evolutionary Optimism” and views human existence as inevitable progress towards a better future. We will eventually end up in some sort of perfect utopian society. Wright argues that this “myth of progress” is not acceptable for Christians, because it does not adequately deal with the problem of evil, as it only hopes that evil will at some point disappear. The other option that Wright identifies is “Souls in Transit.” This narrative suggests that humans are really eternal souls who just happen to inhabit physical bodies on earth. Eventually the earth and our bodies will be abandoned as we spend eternity in heaven (or hell). Wright also rejects this option as inconsistent with Christianity, and we will examine the reasons for this in greater detail, and also discover a more suitable alternative, in chapter 5.<sup>40</sup>

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39. Ibid., 148.

40. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 79-91.

## Conclusion

This brief sketch of work identifies some of the key issues that need to be dealt with whenever we try to think about work. Understanding what our work is, and why we work as we do, are two very difficult tasks. Many people today have not been able to fully understand their work, and therefore feel alienated in their work, or are stuck with “just a job.” Many are still searching for meaningful work, or are still trying to figure out what would give meaning to their work. The narratives which guide modern life seem to be generally unhelpful when it comes to understanding our work, but there is still hope. There needs to be a narrative which helps us to understand work, and also gives meaning to our work. For now though, the different approaches that have been used to explain the varieties of religious and secular work in the world will be examined.

### 3. Secular Work and Religion

The prince should think: Christ has served me and made everything to follow him; therefore, I should also serve my neighbor, protect him and everything that belongs to him. That is why God has given me this office, and I have it that I might serve him. That would be a good prince and ruler. When a prince sees his neighbor oppressed, he should think: That concerns me! I must protect and shield my neighbor. . . . The same is true for shoemaker, tailor, scribe, or reader. If he is a Christian tailor, he will say: I make these clothes because God has bidden me do so, so that I can earn a living, so that I can help and serve my neighbor. When a Christian does not serve the other, God is not present; that is not Christian living.

Martin Luther<sup>1</sup>

There are essentially two ways in which secular work can be understood from a religious perspective. Some people are unwilling to admit that work has any real value, and argue that work is only a necessary evil in this sinful world. Others will state that we have been given a task in this life: for example, a vocation to find and fulfill. In this case, work can be valuable, and secular work can be a fitting way to live for God. Because both work and religion play such central roles in the lives of many people, both of these possible perspectives should be carefully examined. To begin, Max Weber is one scholar who has made some very important contributions to this discussion, and sets the stage to consider

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1. Frederick J. Gaiser, "What Luther Didn't Say About Vocation," *Word & World* 25, no. 4 (2005), 361. Gaiser has taken this quote from the German edition of Luther's Works.

both the positive and negative views of work. Weber approaches the topic of work from a sociological perspective, but his thesis, and the discussion surrounding it, is a very good introduction to the theological debate on this issue. As Weber has brought renewed attention to the idea of vocation, a further examination of vocation and calling, particularly as found in the writings of Martin Luther and Karl Barth, should be pursued. With their help, the strengths and weaknesses of the concept of vocation will be more clearly seen.

## Max Weber

Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* has been tremendously influential in the 20th century. Regardless of whether or not one agrees with Weber, his text merits an important position in this project. Weber describes two primary attitudes towards work and wealth. The first is a pre-capitalistic spirit which Weber refers to as traditionalism. "A man does not 'by nature' wish to earn more and more money, but simply to live as he is accustomed to live and to earn as much as necessary for that purpose."<sup>2</sup> The second attitude is the capitalistic spirit which is now the norm in the Western world, which Weber defines as that "which rests on the expectation of profit by the utilization of opportunities for exchange."<sup>3</sup> However, if it is natural to want to work

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2. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 60.

3. *Ibid.*, 17.

only as much as necessary, Weber sees the need for a major shift in attitude in order for the capitalistic spirit to emerge.

While there are hints and precursors to capitalism found earlier in history, Weber believes that the first important move towards modern capitalism is made by Martin Luther. Prior to Luther, monastic life was viewed as a useful path by which to please God and earn his favour. Secular work was not helpful for this purpose, but not necessarily detrimental either. With the doctrine of *sola fide*, Luther viewed faith as the only way to earn salvation, therefore the monastic life served no real purpose, and was in fact just the avoidance of real work. Thus, “the fulfilment of worldly duties is under all circumstances the only way to live acceptably to God.”<sup>4</sup> There is introduced the idea of a calling for each person, and worldly activity becomes the primary method of fulfilling one’s calling, and thus the best way of pleasing God with one’s life.

However, this in itself does not lead towards a capitalistic spirit. Weber understands the later reformers as providing the key impetus behind this shift. While his argument is that Calvinists, Pietists, Methodists, and the Baptist sects all contributed to this move, Weber’s discussion of Calvinism is a suitable example for understanding his thesis. The concept of “calling” that is found in Luther is expanded by Calvin, and opens the way for a system which leads to capitalism. For Calvinists,

the elected Christian is in the world only to increase the glory of God by fulfilling His commandments to the best of his ability. But God requires social achievement of the Christian because He wills that social life shall be organized according to His commandments, in accordance with that

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4. Ibid., 81.

purpose. The social activity of the Christian in the world is solely activity *in majorem gloriam Dei*.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, work in the world does not contribute in any sense to a person's salvation, for that would contradict the doctrine of *sola gratia*, but work and success in this life can be viewed as "a sign of election" for the next life.<sup>6</sup>

This idea then develops into something like an economic imperative. "For if that God . . . shows one of His elect a chance of profit, he must do it with a purpose. Hence the faithful Christian must follow the call by taking advantage of the opportunity."<sup>7</sup> Thus, hard work and worldly success became the mark of a good Christian. Of course, there still remained an important ascetic aspect to work, in that earned wealth was not to be enjoyed or abused, and the temptation of great wealth had to be continually combatted.<sup>8</sup> Even with these limitations, Weber sees in these beliefs the beginnings of modern capitalism. The commitment to hard work combined with the refusal of enjoying wealth resulted in the spirit of capitalism which has determined the shape of the modern world.

Although, Weber's thesis has become very well-known, even outside the academic world, he is not without his detractors. A lively debate has begun over this issue,<sup>9</sup> and while there are many worthy scholars on both sides of the debate, Swedish author Kurt

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5. Ibid., 108.

6. Ibid., 115.

7. Ibid., 162.

8. Ibid., 170-72.

9. This debate has not yet ended. For example, Lutz Kaelber identifies three recent articles which either support or oppose Weber's thesis. Lutz Kaelbar, "Rational Capitalism, Traditionalism, and Adventure Capitalism: New Research on the Weber Thesis," in *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism as Grand Narrative: Max Weber's Philosophy of History*, ed. William H. Swatos Jr, and Lutz Kaelbar (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 139.

Samuelsson's work *Religion and Economic Action: A Critique of Max Weber* will suffice as a key example of those opposing Weber's views. After examining the evidence for the Protestant Ethic's influence on capitalism, Samuelsson finds no reason to accept Weber's view of history.<sup>10</sup>

The fundamental problem that Samuelsson sees in Weber's text is the dismissal or redefinition of any capitalistic tendencies that non-Protestants displayed. For example, Weber suggests that within the Catholic Church, capitalistic action "was tolerated, but . . . somewhat dangerous to salvation."<sup>11</sup> However, contrary to this view, Samuelsson offers the case of the French Catholic Jacques Savary. In his 1675 book, *Le Parfait Négociant*, Savary aims to support and instruct young men in the art of business. "Godliness and the love of God are what apprentices ought to have always before their eyes; without them, God will never bless their trade and they will never succeed in their enterprises."<sup>12</sup> Weber could certainly have used this sort of language in support of his theory, supposing it had originated from a Protestant author.

Another key problem that Samuelsson discovers in Weber's thesis is the Puritan attitude towards wealth. One of the most prominent and influential Puritan books was John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Weber does not see a conflict between capitalism and faith, as he suggests that "the isolated economic man who carries on missionary activities on the side takes the place of the lonely spiritual search for the Kingdom of Heaven of

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10. Kurt Samuelsson, *Religion and Economic Action: A Critique of Max Weber*, trans. E. Geoffrey French (New York: Harper Touchbook, 1961), 154.

11. Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 74.

12. Samuelsson, *Religion and Economic Action*, 62.

Bunyan's pilgrim, hurrying through the market-place of Vanity."<sup>13</sup> Samuelsson however views the major emphasis of *Pilgrim's Progress* to be anti-wealth and anti-capitalism. According to Samuelsson, "the businessmen whom Christian and his companion Faithful meet in Vanity Fair are wicked men, striving to become rich by satisfying men's desire for beautiful but vain objects. To renounce the world, not to serve it by fulfilling the daily call, is the way to salvation."<sup>14</sup>

One final example of the disagreement between Weber and Samuelsson is Benjamin Franklin. Weber upholds Franklin as an individual who exemplifies the spirit of capitalism, and quotes Franklin at length. However, Weber does confess that Franklin "was a colourless deist"<sup>15</sup> and Samuelsson views this admission of the "secularised" nature of Franklin's attitude to be "so damaging that Weber's thesis really falls to the ground."<sup>16</sup> As a result, it seems impossible to conclude that there is a direct connection between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Samuelsson argues that these two concepts which Weber attempts to bring together "are so vague and universal as to be incapable of evaluation by the technique of correlation."<sup>17</sup>

There are two other important critiques of Weber that deserve mention here as well, both of which invert Weber's thesis in interesting ways. H.M. Robertson suggests that it is not the Protestant Ethic which influenced the spirit of capitalism, but rather "the

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13. Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 176.

14. Samuelsson, *Religion and Economic Action*, 39.

15. Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 49-50, 53.

16. Samuelsson, *Religion and Economic Action*, 55.

17. *Ibid.*, 148.

growing strength of an independent spirit of enterprise”<sup>18</sup> which influenced the Protestant Ethic (and also the change of economic attitude that can be found among the Catholics). Charting a similar path, Amintore Fanfani argues that since both pre-capitalistic ideas and religion are related to faith, the same circumstances affected the change in religious attitudes and the rise of the capitalistic spirit.<sup>19</sup> Both authors believe that the spirit of capitalism, regardless of its cause, was more influential than any changes in religious attitudes or ethics.<sup>20</sup>

With these criticisms in mind, it is possible to accept a qualified version of Weber’s thesis. To clarify Weber’s position, it is important to remember that there is not a steady continuous progression from the Protestant Reformation towards the form of capitalism that we experience today. Donald Nielsen identifies the “cyclical” nature of Weber’s view of history, which has repeated patterns of “reversal” and “revival.”<sup>21</sup> Within these cycles are no doubt instances where the Protestant Ethic propels, restrains, or is indifferent to, the spirit of capitalism. The modern capitalistic spirit has no doubt been shaped by Protestant

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18. H.M. Robertson, “A Criticism of Max Weber and his School,” in *Protestantism, Capitalism, and Social Science: The Weber Thesis Controversy*, ed. Robert W. Green (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1973), 72.

19. Winthrop Still Hudson, “The Weber Thesis Reexamined,” *Church History* 57, no. 1 (1988), 63.

20. An interesting alternative to this idea of a waning of faith is found in Walter Benjamin's brief fragment “Capitalism as Religion.” He writes that “Christianity in the time of the Reformation did not encourage the emergence of capitalism, but rather changed itself into capitalism.” Walter Benjamin, “Capitalism as Religion,” in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926* (Cambridge: Harvard Belknap, 1996), 261. For a more detailed examination of Benjamin's thoughts, see Michael Löwy, “Capitalism as Religion: Walter Benjamin and Max Weber,” *Historical Materialism* 17, no. 1 (2009): 60-73.

21. Donald A. Nielsen, “*The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism as Grand Narrative: Max Weber’s Philosophy of History*,” in *The Protestant Ethic Turns 100: Essays on the Centenary of the Weber Thesis*, ed. William H. Swatos Jr, and Lutz Kaelbar (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 71.

(and Catholic) ethics, and religious attitudes have certainly also adapted themselves to the capitalist system.

Weber's thesis has been very influential, and the idea that the Protestant ethic was in some sense responsible for the capitalist spirit has helped to legitimize capitalism from a religious perspective. As well, Weber has contributed to how work is understood on an individual basis. If secular activity is good, and pleasing to God, then it is a relatively easy transition to the idea that each person has a unique secular calling, a vocation, through which they may serve God. The concept of vocation becomes a common way to understand work in a positive light.

### Vocation: A Positive View of Work

In order to better understand vocation, this examination will continue with *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Luther's understanding of vocation is an important shift in thinking about work. Weber sees in Luther's usage of "*Beruf*," and in the English word "calling," a new meaning which was not present before: "the valuation of the fulfilment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume."<sup>22</sup> In time, Luther began to see a person's vocation as "a special command of God to fulfil these particular duties which the Divine Will had imposed upon

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22. Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 80.

him.”<sup>23</sup> Weber moves quickly on to discuss the development of this idea by the Calvinists and Puritans, however, Luther’s idea of vocation deserves further examination.

Anytime Luther and work are discussed together, there is the danger of leaping immediately to the grace versus works debate, and then being unable to move beyond it. To clarify then, for Luther one is saved only by faith through the grace of God. Justification by works is not possible. However, this does not mean that works should be avoided, or that it is impossible to do good works. This is not a question of salvation, but of how a Christian should live. Weber was on the right track in understanding Luther’s use of *Beruf* as a shift away from spiritual work and towards earthly work. However, he does seem to largely miss the point. Luther’s intention is not to legitimize secular work so that the laity may be prioritized over the priesthood. Work, whether secular or religious, is not about fulfilling a specialized individual duty. Rather, all believers are called to servanthood; all believers are members of the priesthood.<sup>24</sup>

For Luther, the purpose of work is not to earn God’s favour, but to serve others. In *The Freedom of a Christian* Luther writes “I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ.”<sup>25</sup> And in his *Treatise on Good Works*, “Our own self-imposed good works lead us to and into ourselves, so that we just seek our own

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23. Ibid., 84-85.

24. Karlfried Froehlich, “Luther on Vocation,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1999), 201.

25. Martin Luther, *Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 31:367.

benefit and salvation. But God's commandments drive us to our neighbor's need, that by means of these commandments we may be of benefit only to others and to their salvation."<sup>26</sup>

What Weber may have missed is that vocation is not simply one's occupation. The individual is the primary beneficiary of his or her occupation, but this is not true of vocation.<sup>27</sup> Vocation describes what we do in this world, while we await the next. We live in a time of conflict, torn between earth and heaven, and between the old self and the new self.<sup>28</sup> Vocation describes life as a whole. Life cannot be reduced to only work, but includes all of our relationships and situations. Thus, vocation is not about fulfilling a certain duty in life, but about serving God and serving others in all aspects of life. Vocation is not solely about one's work, but about one's life-work.

## A Rejection of Vocation

While the idea of vocation has often been used to portray human work in a positive light, this is not always the case. One method that has been used to elevate human work is found by focusing on the idea of work found in Genesis, and attempting to align human vocation with the commands given to Adam and Eve. God is Creator, and we are called to be stewards and caretakers. Humans reproduce to fill the earth, labour to

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26. Ibid., 44:71.

27. Marc Kolden, "Luther on Vocation," *Word & World* 3, no. 4 (1983), 390.

28. Ibid., 383. Or between the inner and outer person. See Kathryn A. Kleinhans, "The Work of a Christian: Vocation in Lutheran Perspective," *Word & World* 25, no. 4 (2005), 394-96.

till the ground, and perform their “tasks that facilitate the orderliness and vitality of the other living things.”<sup>29</sup> This does correspond well with Luther’s view of creation, in which “God continues his creation every day, making it new.”<sup>30</sup> Humanity does not merely work to fill in the time until the end, but is consistently participating in the act of creation.

However, there are two significant problems with this view in our modern society. The first is that very few of us today actually interact with creation in our daily work. How is the computer programmer or the office clerk supposed to steward creation? Second, this view of work is opposed by a common Christian understanding of the future and heaven. Slogans such as “this world is not my home” make it difficult to fully engage with concerns of this world, when it is the world to come that matters. We are forced into some sort of cognitive dissonance, where we should work hard and work well, even though we don’t impact creation and our work will ultimately all fade away.

In addition, it is difficult to maintain this understanding of vocation with a secularized explanation of the world. When the origin of the world is explained by the Big Bang theory (or some other cosmological theory), and human and animal life is explained with evolution by natural selection, the idea of God and humanity working together to maintain creation becomes much less tenable.<sup>31</sup> Thus, while we should not

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29. Robert R. Ellis, “Creation, Vocation, Crisis and Rest: a Creational Model for Spirituality,” *Review & Expositor* 103, no. 2 (2006), 311.

30. Louis T. Almen, “Vocation in a Post-Vocational Age,” *Word & World* 4, no. 2 (1984), 134.

31. *Ibid.*, 132. Of course, that these modern scientific theories conflict with a traditional understanding of creation and Genesis is not cause to reject these theories. Rather, we should recognize that some interpretations are too simplistic, and that attempts to develop a scientific model based on the Genesis accounts is moving too far beyond the text.

ignore the concept of vocation as stewardship of creation, it is not well-suited to being our primary understanding of vocation in our present world.

It is not just modern secular thinking that challenges this idea of vocation. There are many Christian theologians who find little value in the concept. The idea of vocation can become dangerously close to “hubris and idolatry,” as it “illicitly elevates the significance of [mundane] activity to divine status of God’s work as Creator and/or Redeemer.”<sup>32</sup> Douglas Schuurman identifies Karl Barth, John Howard Yoder, Jacques Ellul, and Stanley Hauerwas as modern theologians who are critical of vocation. As one example, Hauerwas does not see humanity as being able to partake in the work of creation alongside God, but believes that we can be identified as God’s representative, who “instead reflects what [the creator’s] activity had already accomplished.”<sup>33</sup>

Hauerwas is expressing the view that placing a high value on our work too closely equates humanity with God. Ellul shares in this critique in his article “Work and Calling.” A positive view of work, such as the idea of vocation, is not a valid interpretation of our work, because, according to Ellul, work “does not represent a service to God. It is an imperative of survival, and the Bible remains realistic enough not to superimpose upon this necessity a superfluous spiritual decoration.”<sup>34</sup> There are some aspects of life which are not laudatory, but which are simply necessary for humans to exist on this earth, and Ellul includes work among them.

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32. Douglas J. Schuurman, “Protestant Vocation Under Assault: Can It Be Salvaged?,” *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1994), 31.

33. Hauerwas, “Work as Co-Creation,” 46.

34. Jacques Ellul, “Work and Calling,” *Katallagete* 4 (1972), 8.

Ellul also understands the problems of alienation from our work which has further reduced what value work may have had. “Wage-earning . . . reduces work to nothing more than a commodity. The individual whose work is sold in this manner can have no initiative, no joy; work can no longer be the expression of his personality, since he has no other objective than to produce the objects which will enter into the commercial circuit.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, Ellul finds no redeeming value in work, and thus opts to reject the concept of vocation entirely.

The conclusion to this line of thinking for Ellul is that work in this world is “condemned” and “cursed.” Work is primarily connected to the fact that we are fallen, sinful creatures. “Consequently, it is ‘normal,’ in that [work] is alienating, overwhelming and insignificant. We should accept the feeble stupidity of it as being the mark of the absurdity itself which constitutes our lives. Therefore, work has no ultimate value, no transcendental meaning. Before God, it is that which allows us to survive and which characterizes us as human beings.”<sup>36</sup> As a general rule, if there is a situation where our work is good or beneficial, Ellul states that “we must be conscious of an exceptional event, a grace, a gift of God for which we must give thanks.”<sup>37</sup> Finally then, Ellul sees our understanding of work as “dialectical.” Work is usually necessary and negative, but there still remains the possibility of some good. Ellul concludes by saying:

Calling no longer concerns what we had so long thought it did—an entry into an order (of life, of the world) willed by God as such, and to which one

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35. Ibid., 11.

36. Ibid., 13-14.

37. Ibid., 14.

adheres by vocation. Rather, calling is an entry into a disorder (although apparently 'ordered') established by man, and this disorder will be upset and put into question each time we seek to express our calling.<sup>38</sup>

## Karl Barth

Karl Barth is another theologian who has given the idea of calling an important place in his writings. According to Barth, God intends human life to be that of “an active, effective and creative subject, and therefore an active life.” However, work is not how humans can fulfill this call to an active life. Work is merely the “this worldly element in the active life. . . . The life which is obedient to the command of God is much more than work. Even in so far as work is included, it is not in itself and as such that which is demanded of man.” This active life should be understood as “a correspondence to divine action,” not as “a continuation or development.”<sup>39</sup> Here, Barth has a similar attitude to Luther, as correspondence results in an obligation to service. The ultimate form of an individual's active life is found in “co-operation in the inward and outward service of the Christian community.”<sup>40</sup>

While work is an important part of the calling from God to be a human person, we must be careful not to attribute too much value to this service. Barth states that humanity “does not do anything special by working.”<sup>41</sup> Human work is obedience to God, but is not

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38. Ibid., 16.

39. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2004), III/4, 470-74.

40. Ibid., III/4, 515.

41. Ibid., III/4, 520.

sharing in the work of God; work has only an earthly and creaturely character. However, this obedience to God requires “whole-hearted loyalty to the earthly and creaturely work.”<sup>42</sup> In this sense, work is an essential part of being human. Indeed, Barth is able to state that work is “man’s active affirmation of his existence.”<sup>43</sup>

Thus, work, as this affirmation, is one way to respond to the call of God. The idea of calling has sometimes been equated with vocation, and then sometimes reduced to a person’s paid occupation. Like Luther, Barth does not allow the idea of vocation to be limited to occupation. Whereas Luther accomplishes this by focusing on service to the neighbour, Barth directs attention to the individual’s calling from God. Vocation is a person’s place and activity in the world, and is separate from, but still intimately connected to, a person’s calling from God. “Vocation (*Beruf*) for Barth is the totality of the individual’s socio-historical context which that individual brings to the hearing of the divine call (*Berufung*).”<sup>44</sup>

Barth’s idea of vocation cannot be simply or definitively stated however. This is because vocation must always be understood on an individual basis. God deals with each person directly, on his or her own; each person has a unique calling from God. It is the calling from God, and the response to the calling, which defines who a person is; the decisive choice of a person’s life is the response to the calling. “The choice of vocation

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42. Ibid., III/4, 523.

43. Ibid., III/4, 518.

44. Rhys Kuzmič, “*Beruf* and *Berufung* in Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*: Towards a Subversive Klesiology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 3 (2005), 265. Kuzmič’s article guides the discussion for much of this section.

can never be more than either a preparation for or a consequence of the true and decisive choice. In reality it will always be both. But this means that it will be a secondary choice.”<sup>45</sup> What this means for Barth is that vocation, as a secondary choice, cannot be a destination or a resting place. “Vocation is ‘the place of responsibility’ (D. Bonhoeffer), the [starting point] of all recognition and fulfilment of the command, the status of the man who is called to freedom by the command.”<sup>46</sup> As a person’s vocation is only a starting point, it is an important but incomplete aspect of a person’s place in the world.

The result of this line of thinking is that vocation cannot be restricted to a single occupation or task within one’s life. An individual cannot decisively decide that she will be a doctor, and then live contentedly knowing that she has fulfilled her vocation. God calls one *as* a person, not merely *to* a vocation. Vocation is not set in stone, but is the response to

the calling and command of God summoning man to obedience with the abilities and gifts with which he has been endowed, and therefore the claim of the One who as his Creator and Lord knows him and his vocation and aptitude better than he does himself. This means that what God requires of him does not have to coincide with what he himself regards as the nature and scope of his vocation. The limits set for man may in fact be wider or narrow [*sic*] than he thinks. He will not, therefore, try to make an iron law, binding on both himself and God, out of what he thinks to be his real ability and capacity, or even out of what he thinks he knows of his deepest inner tendencies. On the contrary, he must always be prepared to let himself be pushed beyond what he regards as the limit of his aptitude or held back from it, to tell himself that he must give himself credit for much more or presume a little less than has so far seemed right to him. As the command of God comes to him, God decides and says where his real limit is.<sup>47</sup>

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45. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4, 597.

46. *Ibid.*, III/4, 598.

47. *Ibid.*, III/4, 628.

Thus, in fulfilling our vocation we are called to act, freely, but in obedience to God. We should strive to work hard and to do good work, always aware that our work is not an end, but is one aspect of living our lives and responding to the calling of God. That our occupation and other activities do not have ultimate importance should not discourage us, for it is still a necessary and good aspect of our existence. We should simply remind ourselves that it is not our occupation, but our relationship with God which defines us.

As Barth acknowledged above, the idea of vocation as “a place of responsibility” is acquired from the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In his incomplete *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer states that:

Luther's return from the monastery to the world, to the 'calling,' is, in the true New Testament sense, the fiercest attack and assault to be launched against the world since primitive Christianity. Now a man takes up his position against the world *in* the world, the calling is the place at which the call of Christ is answered, the place at which a man lives responsibly. Thus the task which is appointed for me in my calling is a limited one, but at the same time the responsibility to the call of Jesus Christ breaks through all limits.<sup>48</sup>

As important as the concept of calling that we have from Barth and Bonhoeffer is, it may be too broad to directly answers our questions concerning work. For Barth, calling is “obedience with the abilities and gifts” given by God. This cannot be reduced to simply a person's work. If a person's work is just one aspect of a person's calling, then another category may be needed to fully explore human work as work. Our understanding of work should perhaps be developed within the narrower confines of work itself, rather than the broad realm of human life as a whole.

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48. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 251-52.

## Conclusion

Despite the opposition that is offered by Luther, Barth, and Bonhoeffer, a traditional view of work persists still. Work, when it is portrayed in a positive light, is commonly understood using the idea of vocation.<sup>49</sup> Is there still value to be found in the concept that equates vocation with work? Weber argued that “God requires social achievement of the Christian” and books on the topic of How to Find Your Vocation<sup>50</sup> seem to still perpetuate this idea. The idea of vocation that places each person into a particular occupation for life does not seem to fit in modern Western society. A traditional, narrow understanding of work as vocation has to be rejected.<sup>51</sup> One alternative is to follow Ellul and impose strict limits on the value of human work. However, while there is always failure and futility in human work, there is also joy and self-fulfillment to be found. Our work and our calling seem to have more value than Ellul’s idea of upsetting the disorder of the world allows for.

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49. Equating work and vocation is of course most commonly found in the Roman Catholic tradition, but is still present for Protestants as well. One example is “Develop a Biblical Theology for Your Vocation,” <http://www.mondaychurch.org/theology> (accessed September 28th, 2010), which offers Bible studies for particular vocations, such as accounting, engineering, and health care.

50. For example, John Adair, *How to Find Your Vocation* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2002), Renee M. LaReau, *Getting a Life: How to Find Your True Vocation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), and Erica Sosna, *Finding Your Vocation: A Coaching Programme to Help Young People and Find Their Ideal Work* (Brighton: Pavilion Publishing Ltd, 2010).

51. While not rejecting the traditional idea of vocation, some modern Christian authors are adapting the idea of vocation to modern society. For example, Rick Warren’s *Purpose Driven Life* contains a “contemporary compilation of vocation ideas” and the “prosperity gospel” emphasizes the rewards of work. Lake Lambert, III, *Spirituality, Inc.: Religion in the American Workplace* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 15.

The second alternative is the proposal by Barth and Bonhoeffer to incorporate vocation into the larger calling of a person by God. One's work becomes a starting point and a place of responsibility from which one can respond to God. There is certainly value with this idea, as work cannot be neatly separated from the larger human life. However, issues of work in the modern world require more attention. How do we deal with alienation and job dissatisfaction if we do not explicitly have a theology of work? A careful, more detailed study of work which explores work as work may be necessary.

A third possibility then is to develop a theology of work which moves beyond the idea of vocation. Miroslav Volf takes this approach in his book *Work in the Spirit*.<sup>52</sup> He believes that the concept of vocation is unable to deal with issues of alienating or degrading work, or to assist in improving work conditions. Volf also argues that the modern realities of frequent career changes and multiple jobs is inadequately dealt with by the the idea of vocation. Volf instead begins with a doctrine of *charisma* and builds a theology of work on that base. Volf's proposal and other contemporary theologies of work will be examined in the next chapter. A decision on which option is most appropriate will have to wait until that exploration is complete.

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52. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 106-10.

## 4. Contemporary Theologies of Work

The Church must concern Herself not only with such questions as the just price and proper working conditions: She must concern Herself with seeing that work itself is such as a human being can perform without degradation – that no one is required by economic or any other considerations to devote himself to work that is contemptible, soul destroying, or harmful. It is not right for Her to acquiesce in the notion that a man's life is divided into the time he spends on his work and the time he spends in serving God.

Dorothy Sayers<sup>1</sup>

While there once seemed to be a great neglect of work by theologians, in recent years there has been a marked increase in the number of texts devoted to this topic. One of the earliest in the contemporary revival of interest in work, and also one of the most important, is Pope John Paul II's encyclical letter *Laborem Exercens* [*On Human Work*] from 1981. John Paul II focuses on sharing with God in the work of creation, and this concept of co-creativity has been incorporated into nearly all subsequent theologies of work. Thus, co-creativity will serve as a common element to guide the examination of the theologies of work proposed by Miroslav Volf, Armand Larive, Darrell Cosden, and David Jensen.<sup>2</sup> In many ways this chapter is a direct continuation of the previous chapter, as

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1. Dorothy Sayers, "Why Work?," in *Creed or Chaos?* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1949), 58.

2. Other recent books which may be of interest but which are not discussed in this chapter are: Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of This World: Inquiries into Calling, Career Choice, and the Design of Human Work* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989); Douglas J. Schuurman, *Vocation: Discerning Our Callings in Life* (Grand

these modern writers interact with and build upon the questions concerning work and vocation which have been considered previously.

## John Paul II

John Paul II, in *Laborem Exercens*, argues that work “is always relevant and constantly demands renewed attention and decisive witness.”<sup>3</sup> Beginning with the command to fill and subdue the earth that is found in Genesis, work has been fundamental to the understanding of human life. Though unavoidably toilsome and difficult, our work is one of the ways that humanity defines itself. As well, according to John Paul II, “human work is a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question.”<sup>4</sup>

The initial command for humanity to fill and subdue the earth provides the foundation for John Paul II’s view of work. In fact, this command so dominates his understanding of work that he is able to write that “Each and every individual, to the proper extent and in an incalculable number of ways, takes part in the giant process whereby man ‘subdues the earth’ through his work.”<sup>5</sup> Humanity must control and “dominate” creation in its work in order to properly fulfill God’s command.

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Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) and Jane Seybold-Clegg, *Toward a Theology of Work: Spirituality in the Corporate World* (South Bend: Lirio, 2008).

3. John Paul II, *On Human Work: Laborem Exercens* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1981), 3.

4. *Ibid.*, 7.

5. *Ibid.*, 11.

There are two key ways of thinking that John Paul II suggests should shape our understanding of human work. The first is to prioritize the subjective human aspect of work over the objective aspect of work that deals with techniques and results. This is because “the basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done, but the fact that the one that is doing it is a person.”<sup>6</sup> Work is so fundamental that it will contribute to a person becoming “more a human being.”<sup>7</sup> The second way is to prioritize labour over capital, because the value of a human person is greater than any economic wealth or growth. By following these two ways, we can more easily approach a proper Christian understanding of work.

John Paul II concludes that the best way to develop a spirituality of work is to understand human work as sharing in the work of the creator, a concept which is usually identified as co-creation. There is a similarity to be found between human work and the work that Jesus did in his life and on the cross. In both cases, the work should contribute to the good of the entire human race. Our thinking about the results of our work should involve an expectation of growth and new life. John Paul II connects this with our hope for the future as he writes that “The expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one.”<sup>8</sup>

*Laborem Exercens* received a significant response from the academic world after its publication.<sup>9</sup> While the response was largely positive, there are three main complaints that

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6. Ibid., 14.

7. Ibid., 15.

8. Ibid., 60.

9. For example, Gregory Baum, *The Priority of Labor: a Commentary on Laborem Exercens: Encyclical Letter of*

were raised. The first issue is that of self-actualisation through work. Miroslav Volf objects to the idea that a person's work may increase the dignity or worth of a person. Volf prefers the term "self-expression through work."<sup>10</sup> The second issue is the focus on the command in Genesis to subdue the earth. Volf argues that unless this focus is qualified in some way, it can lead to the neglect of ecological concerns, and potentially the exploitation of the earth.<sup>11</sup>

A third objection is to the idea of co-creation that John Paul II promotes in his encyclical. Stanley Hauerwas sees the work of humanity not as creating, but as maintaining God's creation. Rather than being co-creators, human beings are God's representatives. "A representative is not a co-creator. A representative does not 'share by his work in the activity of the creator,' but instead reflects what that activity had already accomplished."<sup>12</sup> While the idea of co-creation is somewhat controversial, it has also been extremely influential, and is the most important aspect of *Laborem Exercens*. It is a key element in the other theologies of work throughout this chapter.

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*Pope John Paul II* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982) and John W. Houck, and Oliver F. Williams, eds. *Co-Creation and Capitalism: John Paul II's Laborem Exercens* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1983) directly respond to *Laborem Exercens*, and most theologies of work that follow are indebted to the efforts of John Paul II.

10. Miroslav Volf, "On Human Work: An Evaluation of the Key Ideas of the Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37, no. 1 (1984), 73.

11. *Ibid.*, 74.

12. Hauerwas, "Work as Co-Creation," 46.

## Miroslav Volf

Following in the footsteps of John Paul II, Miroslav Volf produced an important volume, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, in 1991. As his title suggests, Volf argues that we should take a pneumatological approach to work, focusing on the *charisms*, the gifts and talents, which have been given to each person by the Spirit. Because the Spirit is so important to Christian life in general, “the pneumatological understanding . . . makes it possible to understand work from the *center of Christian faith*.”<sup>13</sup>

One of the key theological foundations for Volf's view of work is the concept of “new creation.” Volf follows Jürgen Moltmann quite closely in his depiction of this idea. This eschatological theme of new creation is emphasized because Volf sees eschatology as the primary message of the New Testament.<sup>14</sup> There is a choice between two possible options to describe the end of the world: *annihilatio mundi* and *transformatio mundi*. These two options provide us with two very different ways of understanding human work.

If we follow the path of *annihilatio mundi*, and believe that the world will be destroyed and created anew, then human work is significantly devalued. Volf argues that “Since the results of the cumulative work of humankind throughout history will become

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13. Miroslav Volf, “Human Work, Divine Spirit, and New Creation: Toward a Pneumatological Understanding of Work,” *Pneuma* 9, no. 1 (1987), 185.

14. Miroslav Volf, “Eschaton, Creation, and Social Ethics,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995), 135.

naught in the final apocalyptic catastrophe, human work is devoid of direct ultimate significance.”<sup>15</sup> The alternative, *transformatio mundi*, provides us with a very different perspective on work. If the world is transformed into a new creation, then the work that we do is not discarded. “Rather, after being purified in the eschatological *transformatio mundi*, [the results of human work] will be integrated by an act of divine transformation into the new heaven and the new earth.”<sup>16</sup> This transformation allows our flawed work to still have a place in the new creation, thus promoting humanity to the role of co-creators.

If the idea of *transformatio mundi* is accepted, a turn to the Spirit must be made in order to properly understand our work, because according to Volf, the “Spirit is the agent through which the future new creation is anticipated in the present.”<sup>17</sup> The Spirit provides us with the ability and desire to work in preparation for the new creation. The gifts, or *charisms*, of the Spirit guide all aspects of human work. “*Charisma* is not just a call by which God bids us to perform a particular task, but is also an inspiration and a gifting to accomplish the task.”<sup>18</sup>

Volf believes that this pneumatological understanding of work is superior to the traditional vocational understanding of work for a number of reasons. First, there is no ambiguity between an individual’s spiritual and secular calling because both are prompted by the Spirit. Second, the constant appeal to the Spirit provides a grounding for our view of work and makes it more difficult to misunderstand our work by glorifying or

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15. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 89.

16. *Ibid.*, 92.

17. *Ibid.*, 102.

18. *Ibid.*, 114.

demeaning the human aspect of work. Third, this view of work is not challenged by the variety of jobs that many people hold throughout their lives as the idea of vocation is. Finally, a pneumatological view of work is also compatible with the fact that many people now hold more than one job at a time.

This combination of new creation and *charisms* make it possible for Volf to conclude that work is “an end in itself.” In this world there is necessarily an instrumental aspect to work, as we must produce and earn in order to survive. However, Volf believes that it is still possible for individuals to *subjectively experience* their work as intrinsically valuable, and to understand work as an end in itself. Work is a “fundamental dimension of human existence,” and thus should be enjoyable and valuable *as work*.<sup>19</sup>

Ultimately, we should understand work as a gift from God. Volf states that “God gives, and therefore we can work. God gives, and therefore we can succeed in our work.”<sup>20</sup> Part of this gift is that our work will not be temporary and meaningless, but will be preserved, either in God’s memory, or “as actual building blocks of [the] new world.”<sup>21</sup> Although Volf objected to some of the key concepts in *Laborem Exercens*, his theology of work is still quite compatible with the idea of co-creativity that was suggested by John Paul II. All human work should be understood as being important and valuable, as it shares in the work of God. So long as our work is guided by the Spirit, and does not

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19. Ibid., 193-94.

20. Miroslav Volf, “God at Work,” *Word & World* 25, no. 4 (2005), 384.

21. Ibid., 392.

oppose the Spirit's work, our work will be preserved by God as this world is transformed into the new creation.

## Armand Larive

Armand Larive is an Episcopal priest and carpenter who has contributed to the current discussion of work with his 2004 book *After Sunday: A Theology of Work*. He presents a more practical theology by focusing on how we can better understand the goodness of work. The initial concept that Larive identifies is the “ambivalence” of work. The idea of work that is found in Genesis has both positive and negative aspects. While work allows us to act in the service of God, tilling the earth, and producing food, work also is labelled as toil, having been tainted by Adam and Eve's disobedience. Ultimately, the positive aspects should take priority in our understanding of work. Taking an approach that is similar to John Paul II, Larive suggests that humanity has been placed in the role of “created co-creators.”<sup>22</sup>

By virtue of this position as created co-creators, humanity must acquire a different understanding of work. The secular understanding of work defines the worker primarily by occupation. However, Larive believes that this understanding of personal vocation is actually secondary. “But within vocations, *there is something to be* and not just *something to do*. And *what there is to be* stands behind *what there is to do*.”<sup>23</sup> What the simple idea of

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22. A term which Larive has adopted from Philip Hefner. Armand E. Larive, *After Sunday: A Theology of Work* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 73-75.

“occupation” misses, is that not only may we be called to a particular work, but also called to be a good worker and a good person.

Of course, there are many obstacles that impede this good work. Larive lists a total of nine “barriers” which must be overcome.<sup>24</sup> One of the most significant barriers is the ideal of perfection. Larive states that the idea of perfection is too much influenced by Greek philosophy, and is not helpful in day-to-day life. As well, he sees the biblical understanding of perfection to be closer to a concept of maturity or open-heartedness. Another barrier consists of the two traditional methods of considering God. The kataphatic method uses symbols and metaphors to speak about God. The apophatic method describes God using negative language, by listing attributes and behaviours that do not describe God. Larive proposes another method which he calls *metemphatic*.<sup>25</sup> This method focuses not on characteristics of God, but on experiences that are shared by humans and God.

An additional barrier is the bias against attributing any real value to human work because of the doctrine of grace. Larive refers to this as a “firewall” for which Augustine and Luther are primarily responsible. He believes that a proper understanding of grace does not invalidate the good fruit which is produced by work. As well, there is a barrier in common Christian teaching that reduces the Christian life to good moral behaviour. This focus on “personal piety” can have little influence for Christians doing secular work,

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23. Ibid., 28.

24. Larive’s summary of these nine barriers is found in Ibid., 149-55.

25. “*Metemphatic* has the sense of ‘emphatic,’ but the prefix, deriving from *meta*, ‘among,’ indicates a shared value between one or more people *as well as* God, regarding some event or thing.” Ibid., 46-47.

and can do little to oppose the principalities and powers which are active in the world. Finally, there is a barrier related to the relatively impoverished position that the laity holds in the church. Larives states that “The laity are acknowledged to be at the core of the church, rather than the clerical hierarchy, but in actual practice, the laity are the clientele of the ordained.”<sup>26</sup> Despite the problems posed by these barriers, Larive believes they can be overcome. The solution is to identify more closely with the idea of humanity as “created co-creators” and draw on different aspects of the Trinity.

One of the ways to develop the idea of “created co-creators” is to focus on “the eschatological promise of Christ, beckoning toward the doing of new things.”<sup>27</sup> Larive suggests that these “new things” are primarily concrete and attainable earthly things, rather than idealized and unattainable heavenly things. Another helpful approach is the division of the work of the Creator into two stages: an initial creation out of nothing, and also a continuous maintenance of creation. This second work of maintenance is one that humanity is called to partake in alongside God.

Finally, with Volf, Larive argues that the Holy Spirit has an important contribution to human work, especially in the elements of skill and rapport. He writes that “Skill has to do with the special abilities people acquire that facilitate their work, and rapport is concerned with the quality of mutual support found among people who work together.”<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, Larive sees that a key “consideration is that of God as householder, where the

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26. Ibid., 153.

27. Ibid., 76.

28. Ibid., 109.

work of the Trinity interacts with the creation and where the fullness of God escapes any notion of scarcity.”<sup>29</sup> Larive concludes

It has been the thesis of this book, however, that common efforts of good work also share equally with the concerns of God. There is not one kind of vocation that is a priori better than another. . . . When God ends each day of creation with the declaration of its goodness, humans can appreciate that goodness. There is no reason why the same should not occur when good music is well performed, or when a child makes a loving Christmas card for a grandparent. Why shouldn't God join in the appreciation of such things?<sup>30</sup>

Thus, our position as created co-creators is affirmed by God's appreciation of the good work that is done in the world.

## Darrell Cosden

Darrell Cosden has also contributed to the discussion with his revised dissertation, published in 2004 as *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation*. Cosden's purpose is to explore the “threefold nature of work” which he understands as “a dynamic inter-relationship of instrumental, relational, and ontological aspects.”<sup>31</sup> The first half of his book examines both Catholic and Protestant understandings of work, and attempts to locate these three aspects of work in contemporary religious thought. The second half contains a more thorough examination of the ontological aspect of work. Primarily building upon the works of Jürgen Moltmann, Cosden argues for the necessity of viewing

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29. Ibid., 164.

30. Ibid., 161-63.

31. Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Bletchley: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 10.

work as ontological. While the topic of creativity is not essential to Cosden's argument, his ontological approach to work is certainly compatible with the concept. One reason for this compatibility is the connection with Volf that Cosden has: they share many similar themes and sources (new creation and Moltmann) in their explorations of work.

The first two aspects of work that Cosden suggests are generally viewed as necessary aspects of human work. Instrumental work serves some external purpose, whether that be a "mundane" physical purpose, or a spiritual purpose. Work can serve a mundane end if it is directed towards the necessities of human survival, or towards the needs of industry and the economy. A spiritual purpose for work is found in the development of the human person. This can take place as character building on an individual level, charity towards those less fortunate, or as a foundation for evangelism.

According to Cosden, "the relational aspect of work refers to work's aim toward appropriate social relationships and/or to some form of human existential realization and fulfillment."<sup>32</sup> Work brings us closer together, and allows us to improve human society, and also helps us define ourselves and give meaning to our lives. Cosden admits that this relational aspect could be considered within the instrumental aspect of work, but believes that it is important enough to warrant special attention on its own.

However, the primary focus for Cosden is the third aspect, the ontology of work. Cosden argues that the correct view is "of work as a thing in itself with its own intrinsic value apart from but of course related to these [instrumental and relational] functions."

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32. Ibid., 12.

Work is not merely an addition to creation which we have to endure because of sin. Rather, “work is understood to be more fundamental to created existence, an ontological reality, built by God into the very structures of human nature and as a result, the natural order.”<sup>33</sup> The second half of Cosden’s book explores this claim in more detail.

The first necessary step for Cosden in determining the ontological aspect of work is teleology. Can we legitimately talk about the ends and purposes of our work? Cosden attempts to show “that it is possible to reason from the descriptive *is* to the prescriptive *ought*.”<sup>34</sup> Cosden builds upon the thought of Alasdair MacIntyre and Oliver O’Donovan in making his argument here. Ultimately, Cosden concludes that teleology is acceptable so long as it involves “a dynamic interplay of both protological and eschatological perspectives.”<sup>35</sup> The current state of the world can not be ignored as we look to the future, because the current order of the world is to be transformed into a new order.

Cosden continues by considering theological anthropology, and particularly the place of humanity in the new creation. The commonly used language of the image of God seeks to establish the place for humanity by looking to the past. For Cosden though, and his primary influence in this section, Moltmann, we should also be looking to the future. Cosden argues that “People, as people, live in the direction of their future.”<sup>36</sup> Human life does not consist of a stable identity, but is a “project” which will develop and change over time.

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33. Ibid., 17-18.

34. Ibid., 83.

35. Ibid., 100.

36. Ibid., 147.

One hurdle which must be overcome in order to rely on the future to define humanity is the issue of the transition from this life to the next. While Cosden does not attempt to explain this process, he does affirm that “human life in the new creation will still be fundamentally a recognizably human life.”<sup>37</sup> Humanity will be transformed, freed from sin and death, into a new creation. Part of this transformation will be the transformation of work, as the curse that was placed on human work in Genesis 3 will finally be lifted. Thus, “we can both return to work as it should have been, and, go beyond what work in the initial creation could ever have been.”<sup>38</sup>

The topic of salvation is key for the final sections of Cosden’s book, which, again drawn from Moltmann, concerns the concepts of sabbath and Shekinah. Both of these ideas are ways of explaining the presence of God, from a temporal and spatial perspective respectively. The result of the presence of God, found in sabbath and Shekinah, is rest. Cosden connects the idea of rest with the idea of work by arguing that while work was prohibited on the sabbath on earth, this will not always be the case. “The restriction on work therefore, as part of the temporal rhythmic work-rest cycle of the sabbath, will pass away. The distinction between ‘work’, ‘rest’, and ‘play’ will disappear.”<sup>39</sup>

Thus, as work is both fundamental to human life in the initial creation and also the new creation, it must be considered as ontological as well as instrumental and relational. Cosden then is able to conclude with his definition of work:

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37. Ibid., 150.

38. Ibid., 157.

39. Ibid., 170.

Human work is a transformative activity essentially consisting of dynamically interrelated instrumental, relational, and ontological dimensions: whereby, along with work being an end in itself, the worker's and others' needs are providentially met; believers' sanctification is occasioned; and workers express, explore and develop their humanness while building up their natural, social and cultural environments thereby contributing protectively and productively to the order of this world and the one to come.<sup>40</sup>

## David Jensen

Theologian David Jensen has also contributed to the recent dialogue on work with his 2006 book *Responsive Labor: A Theology of Work*. Unlike the other theologians discussed above, Jensen opposes the concept of co-creativity, and, as his title suggests, argues for the idea of human work as a response to God's work. He writes that "Our responsive labor is always grounded in God's prior activity. Creativity belongs first and foremost to God, who invites us to respond with work of our own, given to others and ultimately back to God."<sup>41</sup> However, before he outlines his plan of responsive labour, Jensen identifies other key Christian understandings of work.

Jensen sees work as an aspect of human existence that is similar to all other aspects. "Work, like everything else in human life, is claimed and blessed by God, molded anew by God's work."<sup>42</sup> Work can be understood as a curse, painful and unpleasant for workers; the Israelites as slaves in Egypt is an example that Jensen uses to demonstrate

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40. Ibid., 178-79.

41. Jensen, *Responsive Labor*, 41.

42. Ibid., 27.

this idea. Work is also available as an alternative to idleness. Particularly in the monastic tradition, work can help to keep Christians busy and out of trouble. There is also the view of work promoted initially by Martin Luther which understands work as given by God to individuals as a calling or a vocation.

The idea of work as vocation can be extended into a perspective which views work as a sort of salvation. Jensen sees the political thought of Hegel, and then also the writings of Marx as leading in this direction. While this overvaluation of work remains a temptation for some, most Christian traditions avoid this path. Finally, there is also the idea of work as co-creativity. Jensen sees this concept particularly in the writings of John Paul II, Armand Larive, and Miroslav Volf. Jensen critiques the ideas of co-creativity presented by these authors by stating “that they may inadvertently emphasize the agency of the creature at the expense of the Creator. . . . [Co-creativity] implies a cooperation that is often not present in human: most of the time we do not align our work with God’s creativity.”<sup>43</sup>

Instead, Jensen argues that all human work is grounded in God’s work for us. “It is grounded in the life-giving, self-diffusive good of Trinity. The God of Israel and Jesus Christ works for us, freeing us to work for and with each other.”<sup>44</sup> The key point for Jensen is that the difference between Creator and creature is maintained. Humanity is not called upon to do God’s work, but rather has a special task, which is to be in communion

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43. Ibid., 41.

44. Ibid., 44.

with God. The human position is that of children of God, and that relationship defines us. Jensen argues that “We are not what we do; we are whose we are.”<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the most important aspect of human work is worship. Jensen sees this especially in the Eucharist,<sup>46</sup> and finds four key movements which will help us improve our work: taking, blessing, breaking, and giving. For example, the giving that occurs in the Eucharist can be a guide for human work in the world. “Good work allows gifts to increase, so that we can express ourselves through our work and thereby give to others. Taking the rhythms of the Lord’s Table to heart, our work can be an expression of our truest selves: persons gifted with life by God who give to others.”<sup>47</sup>

Jensen concludes with some examples of how good work can be done in the world. One way that this is made possible is by workers taking ownership of their work. This can be done by letting workers be involved in company decisions, rather than simply being told what to do by management. A second important method is to focus on the abundance that is given by God and that exists in creation. Modern economic systems function on a principle of scarcity; there is not enough for everyone. Rather, we must focus on sharing God’s abundance.

Another important method is to provide time for rest as an alternative to work. This can be as simple as keeping the Sabbath, but should also involve requiring a certain

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45. Ibid., 66.

46. In a similar manner, William Cavanaugh also incorporates the Eucharist in his attempt to combat modern economic problems and consumerism. William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

47. Jensen, *Responsive Labor*, 86.

level of minimum vacation time for workers. Also, Jensen sees the availability of stores and businesses at any time of the day and night as contrary to the idea of rest. As well, Jensen argues that the understanding of human work should move away from consumption and towards community. The ideal of constant growth, of the economy and of personal possessions, should be questioned, and work that benefits the community should be promoted and rewarded. Ultimately, for Jensen, the value of work is found by looking at the worker.

Work has meaning not because it stokes the engines of consumer society, not because work is the labor by which we create ourselves, but because human persons do work. Work has value in the global economy because persons in God's image respond to the work God has already accomplished. The measure of good work and economic systems, therefore, must always be measured in terms of their impact on the worker.<sup>48</sup>

## Co-creativity

The theme of co-creativity has been taken up by most of the authors examined so far, and this chapter can conclude by affirming the usefulness of this concept for our understanding of human work. As created co-creators, we are able to partake in the work of God, drawing inspiration from the creation mandate given in Genesis and also our hope for the new creation. In this sense, we can see our work as a means of finding “reconciliation with nature.”<sup>49</sup> We do not have complete control in shaping the world, as

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48. Ibid., 120-21.

49. Dorothee Sölle with Shirley Cloyes, *To Work and to Love: a Theology of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 103-14.

we must be respectful of the world as it currently exists, and also be able to work alongside God's creative activity. However, by working as co-creators, we may be able to find an appropriate place for ourselves, within the world and with God.

First however, the critiques of co-creativity by Stanley Hauerwas and David Jensen should be addressed. Hauerwas argues that humans are representatives and not co-creators. Jensen's argument is twofold: co-creativity presents the danger that the creature may be emphasized over the Creator, and also the problem that normal human work does not reflect God's creative work. While these are legitimate critiques, they are not sufficient to force us to discard the co-creativity concept.

First of all, a theology of work does not exist independently of other Christian doctrines. Only if we forget about creation and salvation would co-creativity cause us to prioritize the creature over the Creator. We are created by God, in the image of God, and do not have existence apart from God; we need Jesus Christ to save us from death. The concept of co-creativity does not suggest that the work of humanity has value on its own apart from God, but rather that we are invited to share in the life and work of God. While we may be representatives, we have been granted a role as independent representatives, able to act and work freely. Here we can incorporate Robert Jensen's concept that God is "roomy."<sup>50</sup> We can share in the work of God without impinging on what rightfully belongs to God.

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50. Robert W. Jensen, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 226.

Second, it is true that in most cases our human work is not in tune with God's creative work. Our work is often directed towards our selfish interests rather than pursuing what is best for others and what shares in God's creative work. However, this does not mean that we are required to discard the concept of co-creativity. If we accept the emphasis on new creation suggested by Volf and Cosden, we can maintain the hope that human work will at some point merit the label of co-creative. We will certainly need God to purify and transform human work, but we may still in some way have contributed to creative work alongside our Creator.

## Conclusion

The three concepts of creation, new creation, and co-creativity seem to dominate these contemporary theologies of work. Each is valuable in its own way, and when combined together present a compelling system for understanding human work. The question that must be asked though, is whether it is a system which can be meaningful for the average person doing ordinary, mundane, secular work. Will the cashiers or the secretaries of the world be empowered in their work as a result? How are they sharing in the creative work of God? The ideas present in these theologies will have to be developed further before we can suggest a proper answer.

Incorporating the idea of calling as proposed by Barth does make this positive response more feasible. If work is only one aspect of the person's response to God's call,

then there is a lighter burden that our work must bear. However, it is still a significant burden. How can ordinary mundane work be involved in a proper response to God? The topics of embodiment, narrative, and eschatology to be examined below will assist in the attempt to find an answer. Then, once that groundwork has been laid, a different approach for considering human work can be suggested.

## 5. Humanity: Our Place in the World

It was the sick and dying who despised the body and the earth and invented the things of heaven and the redeeming drops of blood: but even these sweet and dismal poisons they took from the body and the earth! They wanted to escape from their misery and the stars were too far for them. Then they sighed: 'Oh if only there were heavenly paths by which to creep into another existence and into happiness!' - then they contrived for themselves their secret ways and their draughts of blood! Now they thought themselves transported from their bodies and from this earth, these ingrates. Yet to what do they owe the convulsion and joy of their transport? To their bodies and to this earth.

Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>1</sup>

Nietzsche, the consummate critic of Christianity, voices his strong opposition to the attitudes of the stereotypical heavenly-focused, earth-despising Christians. There is much to be commended in this aspect of Nietzsche's thought, but we do not have to follow him into the realm of the *Übermensch* in order to redeem the physical. Valuing the body and the earthly does not belong solely to Nietzsche, to the atheists, or the humanists. Although it may be obscured in many popular versions of Christian theology, it must be recognized at the outset, that the physical body is very important for Christian faith and practice. Humanity, and Christians especially, have a place *in* the world.

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1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 60.

However, this is not the attitude that all Christians have in this matter. As Nietzsche identifies in his condemnation of the Christian anti-body narrative, there is often a strong body/soul dualism that is embraced in the Christian tradition. It seems that there has often been a temptation to reduce the Christian message to simply “how to get to heaven” (and avoid hell in the process). This is found in the stereotypical evangelistic tactic that poses the question “If you were to die tonight, do you know where you would go?”<sup>2</sup> Even leaving aside the fire and brimstone scare tactics that can accompany this message, this understanding of the future is problematic. The Christian hope for the future becomes only eschatological escapism.

Instead, we must realize that Christianity, and all of human life, is directly connected with the earth and with our physical bodies. While this may seem like a departure from the previous discussion of work, it must be recognized that human work is necessarily physical. Whether it be building, designing, or instructing, there is a physical and material aspect to human life and work. It is necessary to consider the physical as preparation for a theology of work. As the beginning to the second half of this project, this chapter prepares the way for a alternative theology of work by focusing on the idea of resurrection as the key to recovering a proper respect for the physical aspect of creation. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was not only the defeat of death, but also the affirmation of the human person as a bodily creature. The resurrection means that we

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2. Perhaps the most famous example of this type of thinking is Jonathan Edwards’ sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy4yMTo0Ny53amVv> (accessed September 28th, 2010).

cannot think of ourselves as souls who only temporarily inhabit bodies. We are not human if we do not have a body. The implications of the idea of resurrection will then bring us to consider the nature of the human person, and finally to see what place the resurrected person has in the entire Christian narrative. While this chapter and the next do not reference the topic of work directly, the themes discussed are necessary to move forward. In the final chapter they will provide a foundation for a theology of work that provides an alternative to the contemporary theologies of work already mentioned.

## Resurrection

N.T. Wright's opposition to the body/soul dualism often found in Christianity was introduced at the end of Chapter 2. Wright argues that the origin of this attitude, which he labels "Souls in Transit," is found very close to the source of the Christian faith itself. First of all, the Greek philosopher Plato's concept of the Forms has been very influential. The Pure and the Good exist as spiritual ideals, which the physical world can only imitate and aspire to. Ultimately, the physical body is reduced to a cage which serves only to house and imprison the human soul. Second is the teachings of the Gnostics. Platonism is taken further, and an evil god is posited who is responsible for the creation of the evil material world. The good god is responsible for the spiritual realm, and humans need to acquire a certain secret knowledge in order for their soul to go to heaven.<sup>3</sup>

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3. N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 88-91.

Obviously these ideas can prove tempting for Christians, no doubt because the world is often a difficult and unpleasant place to live in. Especially in times and places where there is persecution, these doctrines can be a source of comfort. It can be easier to make it through the day if you are able to say: “This world is not my home. I’m going to a better place.” However, Christians must resist these temptations, and there are three very good reasons for doing so: creation, incarnation, and resurrection.

First of all, Genesis tells the story of God creating the world and everything in it, and declaring that it is good. If God intended the ultimate home for humanity to be in a spiritual heaven, then why would a physical world be created at all? Some may argue that original sin has irreparably marred the physical world, and robbed it of any goodness that was in it, however, even if this is the case we must still acknowledge that originally the physical world was good.

Second, we have the issue of incarnation. God became human in a physical body. This should show that the bodily and material are important, and necessary for being human. Appeals to original sin can also be made here, suggesting that the incarnation was only made necessary to pay the price for sin, and not part of God’s original plan. However, the gospel accounts of Jesus’ life have him frequently healing people—the lame walk and the blind see—and not merely pointing towards a spiritual future. Jesus does not offer just a spiritualizing of life, but it is obvious that the physical body matters as well.

Resurrection is the final, and the most compelling, reason for opposing a Platonic or Gnostic dualism. Resurrection is key because it explicitly displays God's hope for the future. If a spiritual exit to heaven is intended as the future of humanity, then surely Jesus would have indicated that sometime before or after his crucifixion. However, Jesus is resurrected to a physical human body, although transformed, he is still able to eat and be touched. Resurrection is not just a symbol of God's power at work in the world, but is a preview of the path that humanity will follow. Wright argues that resurrection has a grand significance for all of creation. "With the resurrection itself a shock wave has gone through the entire cosmos: the new creation has been born, and must now be implemented."<sup>4</sup> This is not the resuscitation of a single man which can be explained away or ignored; all of creation has been changed.

Wright's *Resurrection of the Son of God* is a comprehensive study of all things resurrection, but we will only look briefly at his exposition of 1 Corinthians 15:42-9.<sup>5</sup> Verse 44 is key to our understanding of this passage. "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body." Here Paul contrasts the *soma psychikon* with the *soma pneumatikon*, most often translated as natural body and spiritual body. It is all too easy for modern readers to misinterpret this verse as referring to a physical body<sup>6</sup> and a spiritual non-body which we will inherit when we get to heaven. Yet it is the body which is the common element here, and it will not be

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4. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3, Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 239.

5. *Ibid.*, 347-56.

6. Which is how the Revised Standard Version and its variants translate *soma psychikon*.

abandoned. Wright understands these phrases as describing what vitalizes these bodies, rather than what constitutes them.

If there is a *soma psychikon*, [Paul] declares - to which the answer is, of course there is: that is the normal sort of human *soma*, a body animated by the ordinary breath of life - then there is also a *soma pneumatikon*, a body animated by the Spirit of the living God, even though only one example of such a body has so far appeared.<sup>7</sup>

For the early Christians then, the resurrection changed how they would understand the world, their place in the world, and their future. Wright concludes that “The first Christians . . . were thereby committed to living and working within history, not to living in a fantasy-world where history had in principle already come to a stop and all that remained was for this to be worked out through the imminent end of the space-time universe. The promised future, both for themselves and for the whole cosmos, gave meaning and validity to the present embodied life.”<sup>8</sup>

## Body and Soul

It is apparent that Christianity needs to be very careful about slipping into a body/soul dualism which neglects the physical aspects of human life. Continuing on this line of thought, the next question to consider becomes the issue of the soul itself. If our future does not consist of our immortal souls living eternally in heaven, what place does our soul have? And is the soul even necessary? The soul has generally been understood as

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7. Ibid., 354.

8. Ibid., 582.

containing the true individual person.<sup>9</sup> My *I* is found in the soul. However, the Christian doctrine of resurrection challenges this thought, as we see that the body is integral to our human existence. What then is the human person? How should we understand ourselves?<sup>10</sup>

This series of questions could quickly lead us into murky anthropological waters, thus, here we will briefly examine the different options that are available for understanding the human person, and see which of these options are most compatible with the Christian faith. There are four general categories into which the different theories of the person can be separated: Reductive Materialism, Radical Dualism, Wholistic Dualism, and Monism.<sup>11</sup>

Reductive Materialism suggests that the human person is defined totally and completely by the body, and can, theoretically at least, be understood completely through scientific processes. The muscles, neurons, and cells that form the body are completely responsible for the thoughts, motives, and actions of the person. From a Christian perspective, this position must be rejected. In the Genesis 2 account of creation, God breathes into *adam* the breath of life. And as we have seen in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul identifies a power of some sort, either *psychikon* or *pneumatikon*, which animates the

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9. For example, the “breath of life” in Genesis 2:7 can be understood as the origin of the soul, and according to Matthew 10:28 the soul can outlast the body.

10. Perhaps further complicating the issue is the question of “non-human persons” as some scientists are now advocating that dolphins be treated as such. Jonathan Leake, “Scientists Say Dolphins Should be Treated as ‘Non-Human Persons’,” <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/science/article6973994.ece> (accessed January 20th, 2010).

11. Joel Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Grands Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 30-31.

body. Reductive Materialism does not seem to be compatible with these aspects of the Christian faith.

The second option, Radical Dualism, is essentially what has been described above when Plato and the Gnostics were discussed. The soul is considered to be the real aspect of the person, and the body is merely a temporary and unnecessary addition. As described above, the Christian doctrines of creation, incarnation, and resurrection preclude this option as well.

Third, Wholistic Dualism views the soul and body as both real and necessary elements of the human person. While one is spiritual and one is physical, it is only when the two are combined that there is a human person. To clarify between these two forms of dualism, we can say that Radical Dualism states that the human person *is* a soul, while Wholistic Dualism suggests that the human person *has* a soul. So long as this distinction is maintained, and the human body is not neglected, Wholistic Dualism is an appropriate anthropological view for the Christian faith. The strengths of this position have resulted in this being the default position for many prominent Christian thinkers, Thomas Aquinas being one example. One qualification that must be noted for Wholistic Dualism is the status of a person after death. According to John Cooper, dualism means “that human persons can exist temporarily without being embodied.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, while the natural state of a person is as body and soul, it is possible for a person to continue to exist as only a soul for a period of time.

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12. John W. Cooper, “The Identity of Resurrected Persons: Fatal Flaw of Monistic Anthropology,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 23, no. 1 (1988), 21. For a fuller treatment of Cooper's argument, see John W. Cooper, *Body Soul & Life Everlasting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

Finally, there are a number of views which are grouped together into the category of Monism. This position is, at least on the surface, similar to a reductive materialist understanding of the person. The distinction is that while the human person is a body, the person is not identical to that body. A person is able to be an independent functioning self, without having something like a soul attached to the body. Kevin Corcoran, in arguing for a particular form of monism called the Constitution View, states that “we human persons are *constituted by* our bodies without being identical with the bodies that constitute us.”<sup>13</sup> He explains his position with the analogy of a copper statue. He argues that the statue has its own identity, and is not identical to the copper that it is made of. This position is somewhat complicated, and at first glance may not seem to be compatible with the Christian tradition, so it will have to be examined in more detail.<sup>14</sup>

Joel Green argues that the biblical image of a human person is primarily monistic. Later philosophic ideas have influenced our understanding of the person more than the perspectives displayed in the Bible. As one example, Green identifies the way that concepts of healing and salvation are often co-mingled in the Bible. There is the story of Jesus healing a paralyzed man found in Mark 2:1-12 (also recorded in Matthew and Luke). Jesus says to the man “Son, your sins are forgiven” and the man is able to get up and walk away. Green states, “Here we find no room for segregating the human person into discrete, constitutive ‘parts,’ whether ‘bodily’ or ‘spiritual’ or ‘communal.’”<sup>15</sup>

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13. Kevin J. Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature: A Christian Materialist Alternative to the Soul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 65-66.

14. The philosophical argument that Corcoran presents is available in *Ibid.*, 65-82.

15. Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, 49.

Another instance where Green sees a monistic view being displayed is in the book of Genesis, as humans are created in the image of God. Sometimes the image of God is understood as referring to a person's soul, or mind, or will. However, Green understands the image of God in how humans relate to God and the rest of creation. Humanity is tasked with having dominion over the earth, and also enjoys a direct relationship with God. According to Green, the reality of human personhood is based upon "the graciousness of God's own covenantal relations with humanity and the rest of creation. The distinguishing mark of *human* existence when compared with other creatures is thus the whole of human existence (and not some 'part' of the individual)."<sup>16</sup>

Thus far, it seems that a monistic view of the human person does fit within the Christian tradition. However, there is one other important difficulty which must be considered if, as Corcoran says, "we are *not* identical with human bodies. . . . we are *essentially* physical creatures that cannot possibly exist if our bodies don't exist."<sup>17</sup> If we are essentially physical, then how do we get from this life to the next? If we are to be resurrected, how can the resurrected person be the same person that we are now? A dualist position mostly avoids this difficulty, as they are able to rely upon the eternal soul to maintain self-identity past death. What options are there for a monist?

Corcoran prefers the option of an "immediate or non-gappy survival."<sup>18</sup> He suggests that God is able to immediately resurrect the individual upon death, thus allowing the

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16. Ibid., 63.

17. Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature*, 76.

18. Ibid., 132-33.

preservation of the self after death. Another possibility is that there is an “intermediate state” which involves a disembodied existence.<sup>19</sup> It is difficult to imagine a disembodied existence if humans are essentially physical creatures, however, John Polkinghorne offers a potentially useful analogy. Polkinghorne suggests that the “soul” is something like an “information-bearing pattern” and not necessarily an immortal spiritual entity. He suggests that this pattern could be remembered by God upon our death, which would provide some sort of disembodied, though less than human, existence, which could then at a future time be returned into a resurrected body.<sup>20</sup>

While these options for an intermediate state are plausible, the proposal made by Joel Green seems to be the most comprehensive and remains the most faithful to the Christian tradition. Green argues that human identity is found primarily in our relations with God, creation, and other persons, and thus, that to be human is to partake in an “embodied narrativity.” We should view death as not “merely the cessation of one’s body, but as the conclusion of embodied life, the severance of all relationships, and the fading of personal narrative. It means that, at death, the person *really dies*; . . . there is no part of us, no aspect of our personhood, that survives death.”<sup>21</sup> This may sound somewhat grim, but Green continues by placing the Christian hope for the future, not in some aspect of the human person, but solely in God. He states that:

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19. Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, 152-65. This concept of an intermediate state would bring monism much closer to a wholistic dualism espoused by Cooper above.

20. John C. Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 105-08.

21. Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, 179.

the relationality and narrativity that constitute who I am are able to exist apart from neural correlates and embodiment only insofar as they are preserved in God's own being, in anticipation of new creation. This reminds us, again, that the capacity for 'afterlife' is not a property of humanity, but is a divine gift, divinely enacted. It also underscores the reality that, in eschatological salvation, we are not rescued from the cosmos in resurrection, but transformed with it in new creation.<sup>22</sup>

We can conclude this section by turning to Wolfhart Pannenberg, who has placed an important emphasis on resurrection in his theology, and whose view of humanity is shaped by the doctrine. In *Jesus—God and Man* he writes, "Life after death' can no longer be thought of as immortality of the soul, but only as another mode of existence of the *whole* man."<sup>23</sup> He also provides a helpful summary of the various monistic views when he writes "that in man there is no independent reality of a 'soul' in contrast to the body, just as there is not a body that is merely mechanically or unconsciously moved. Both are abstractions. The only reality is the unity of the living creature called man, which moves itself and relates itself to the world."<sup>24</sup>

However, the purpose of this section is not to affirm monism above other concepts of the human person. So long as the human body is not neglected or ignored, a view such as wholistic dualism is certainly acceptable. The central point is to remember the goodness of the created physical world, and to remember the future hope of a resurrected

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22. Ibid., 180.

23. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (London: SCM Press, 1968), 87. Pannenberg's theology will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

24. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *What is Man? Contemporary Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 48.

body. If these aspects are not present, the anthropology could be closer to a Platonic or Gnostic perspective than a Christian one.

## The Narrative of History

The themes of relationality and narrativity that Green promotes continue to be very important in this section as well. The question that must now be considered is, “What is our place in the history of the world?” or to put it another way, “What is our story?” It was necessary to first examine the issues involved with the body before beginning to present a comprehensive narrative of Christian history. Issues of creation and embodiment must be dealt with in order to compose a intelligible narrative of who we are as human persons. Richard Sennett was quoted above as saying that narrative “gives shape to the forward movement of time.” Thus, the next step is to form a narrative to counter the narratives of “Evolutionary Optimism” and “Souls in Transit” that N.T. Wright has identified. According to Wright, “History matters because human beings matter; human beings matter because creation matters; creation matters because the creator matters.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, we can see that Christian attitudes towards the physical body are very important to any larger understanding of humanity’s role in the Christian narrative. Our place in the world, and what we do in the world matters. With such a narrative, Christians can move forward with

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25. Wright, *RSG*, 737.

a definite idea of their place in the world. Once this idea of place has been established, it becomes much easier to move forward with a theology of human work.

Here the work of Robert Jenson proves invaluable. Jenson's entire system of thought is saturated with the idea of narrative. More than viewing narrative as an appropriate way to explain faith, he sees Christianity itself as being the product of narrative. "Christianity is the lived-out fact of the telling and mistelling, believing and perverting, practice and malpractice, of the narrative of what is supposed to have happened and to be yet going to happen with Jesus-in-Israel, and of the promise made by that narrative."<sup>26</sup> This narrative that guides Christianity is simply the gospel. Jenson does not let the gospel be reduced to a book, to beliefs, or morality, but instead maintains that "the gospel is what it is."<sup>27</sup> It will be shown below how, in Jenson's view, this story shapes the Christian faith.

Jenson begins his book *Alpha and Omega: a Study in the Theology of Karl Barth* with "An Introductory Cliché": "Christianity is an historical religion."<sup>28</sup> And while Christians recognize the historical nature of Christianity, the historical past and present are often devalued in favour of the heavenly future, as we have already seen. What happens in this world isn't important compared to what will happen in the next. It doesn't matter what happens to the body, so long as your soul is safe. However, this

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26. Robert W. Jenson, *Story and Promise: A Brief Theology of the Gospel about Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 1. See also Robert W. Jenson, "How the World Lost Its Story," *First Things*, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2010/03/how-the-world-lost-its-story3/how-the-world-lost-its-story> (accessed March 24th, 2010). Jenson admits that his arguments in *Story and Promise* are only applicable for a modern world, and this later article attempts to recover a place for narrative in postmodern society.

27. Jenson, *Story and Promise*, 1-2.

28. Robert W. Jenson, *Alpha and Omega: a study in the theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Nelson, 1963), 13.

anticipation of heaven which overrides all present earthly concerns is an undesirable misrepresentation of Christianity. According to Jenson, “[The preacher] must show the meaning which life has, not in itself and not in atemporal abstractions, but in Jesus the Christ.”<sup>29</sup>

When we examine the meaning of life in Jesus the Christ, life must not be limited to a picture of a heavenly Jesus sitting at the right hand of the throne of God. Jesus is both fully God and fully human. It must be remembered that Jesus lived an earthly life with a physical body. As Luther said, “No my friend! Where you set God before me, there you must set his humanity with him!”<sup>30</sup> The Christian narrative needs to deal with the entire life of Jesus, that is, with the life of Jesus as a human man in Israel, and as a member of the Trinity. According to Jenson,

This human personality [Jesus] is then an identity of God in that before the Father in the Spirit he lives the mutual life that God is, in that not only is he born in created time of the Virgin but is born eternally of the Father, in that not only is he judged and delivered to death by Pontius Pilate but is delivered over by the Father's judgment. And, vice versa, this identity of God is a human personality in that he fully participates in the converse that constitutes human community.<sup>31</sup>

Just as Jesus must be identified as a historical human person, there is a similar approach when an attempt is made to identify God. God is known because of what God has done in history. Jenson provides the example that in the Old Testament, if “asked who God is, Israel’s answer is, ‘Whoever rescued us from Egypt.’ Likewise the New Testament

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29. Ibid., 16.

30. *Vom Abendmahl Christi: Benennung*, WA 29: 338, quoted in Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 257.

31. Jenson, *Systematic Theology vol 1*, 137-38.

church answers the question ‘Whoever raised Jesus from the dead.’”<sup>32</sup> Today, “The church is the community and a Christian is someone who, when the identity of God is important, names him ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.’”<sup>33</sup> While there is always the temptation to reduce Christian faith to a series of propositions which must be believed, in reality it is always a historically grounded narrative which shapes our lives and our understanding of the world.

The human narrative, the human story, must always be connected to the God who created the world; who became human in the person of Jesus Christ, lived, died, and was resurrected as a human person; and who will transform the world into the new creation. Jenson states that “Father, Son, and Spirit are three *personae* of the story that is at once God’s story and ours. Insofar as the triune narrative is about us, it is about creatures; insofar as it is about God, it is about the Creator.”<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, it is the same story, as both humanity and God are part of this triune narrative.

While it is easy to incorporate Jesus into our shared vision of God and humanity, the key role that is also played in the narrative by the Holy Spirit must not be neglected. “The Spirit is God as his and our future rushing upon him and us; he is the eschatological reality of God, the Power as which God is the active Goal of all things... .”<sup>35</sup> In this sense God *is* a narrative, embracing the past, present, and future within the Trinity.<sup>36</sup> Humanity

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32. Ibid., 44.

33. Ibid., 46.

34. Ibid., 110.

35. Ibid., 160.

36. This is a somewhat controversial statement. For example, Francesca Murphy objects to this idea of God as a story, and to Jenson in particular. For example, she refers to Jenson as a ‘Cinematic Modalist’ because the God

can participate in the narrative of God by believing in the Father, living with the Son, and being called forward by the Spirit.

Just as God exists in community as the Trinity, it is within the joys and struggles of human community that we learn to form and express the narrative of our lives and the world. The Christian community is often identified as the Body of Christ. Jenson takes an interesting path in connecting the Body of Christ with the larger story of God. He makes the connection by returning to the resurrection. “Jesus’ resurrection as confessed by the church is a bodily resurrection, with or without an emptying of the tomb. Somehow there now exists a body that is the living Jesus’ human body.”<sup>37</sup> The issue Jenson sees that occasions the “somehow” in his statement is our modern understanding of the universe. We can no longer imagine a place called heaven that exists above the earth, and therefore we have lost a place for the physical body of Jesus to inhabit.<sup>38</sup> Jenson asserts that this is not a problem for Christians, for we know that the body of Christ exists as the church and in the Eucharist. “[Jesus] needs no other body to be a risen man, body and soul. There is and needs to be no other place than the church for him to be embodied, nor in that other place any other entity to be the ‘real’ body of Christ.”<sup>39</sup>

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Jenson describes is like a ‘film-strip’ played out over time, and whatever part of the film-strip is being played determines which identity of God is currently present. Francesca Aran Murphy, *God Is Not a Story: Realism Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 263-68.

37. Jenson, *Systematic Theology* vol 1, 201.

38. Ibid., 201-03.

39. Ibid., 206. This has some interesting implications for the idea of an intermediate state described above. If Jesus’ intermediate state is as the Body of Christ here on earth (although Jenson does not specifically identify this as an intermediate state), then perhaps persons who have died could be integrated into the Body of Christ, and thus continue to exist until resurrection.

It is here then that the idea of community is fulfilled, in the Body of Christ, in the church. By our inclusion in the Body of Christ, we have fellowship with one another, with Christ, and through Christ, God. We are not limited to the narrative of our personal lives, or of our neighbourhood, but we are able to join in the narrative of God. Jenson writes:

The church, we have said, exists in anticipation. What she anticipates is inclusion in the triune communion. In the End, the *koinonia* [fellowship] that the risen Christ and his Father now live in their Spirit will become the mutual love in which believers will limitlessly find one another. The church exists to become that fellowship; the church's own communal Spirit is sheer *arrabon* [guarantee, downpayment] of that community.<sup>40</sup>

If we are part of this community, and share in the narrative of God, and anticipate sharing in the triune communion, what does this mean for our lives? How do we live in light of this information? According to Jenson, “As actors in the drama, we are like players in a play for which concluding scenes are not yet written. We have a working script for the parts we can already rehearse; we call it holy scripture. The author holds conferences with us, and we trust him. We know who the hero is. And we know the play is not a tragedy.”<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusion

In bringing together these two themes of embodiment and narrative history, the beginning stages of a path to follow can be formulated. First of all, the hope of simply

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40. Jenson, *Systematic Theology* vol 2, 222.

41. Robert W. Jenson, “Christ as Culture 3: Christ as Drama,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6, no. 2 (2004), 197.

getting to heaven can not be the primary guiding factor for how we live out our lives, and what we are moving towards. Second, the role that we play must be connected with the larger community of Christians and the triune God. To understand ourselves we need to encounter others (and also allow others to encounter us). Third, the role that we have to play in the narrative of humanity and the world (which is also God's narrative) must be conceived in terms of the physical. To be human we must have a body, thus everything we do must involve our body.

This first point is largely based upon the work of N.T. Wright, particularly in *Surprised by Hope*. While living eternally in heaven is a valid hope (though perhaps somewhat misguided),<sup>42</sup> there is something else awaiting us. As described in Romans 8, it is the whole creation which awaits redemption. Our eschatological hope is not about escaping the world that we now inhabit, but is for a transformed and renewed creation in which to live. We are not intended to abandon the world, for it is our home.<sup>43</sup> However, the topic of eschatology is too large to be dealt with sufficiently here, but will be discussed in greater detail below.

Second, we can see that it is only within community that we can fulfill our purpose as human beings. To live in Christ, and for Christ to live in us, is not reducible to a personal one-on-one relationship with Jesus Christ. Rather, we must seek out other believers, and situate ourselves firmly within the Body of Christ. It is there that we will be

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42. See Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 194-201.

43. Peter Rollins reinterprets the rapture in a parable which has God turning towards "The ones who would forsake heaven in order to embrace the earth." Peter Rollins, "The Rapture," <http://peterrollins.net/blog/?p=118> (accessed January 22nd, 2010).

able to participate in God's narrative. But, this relationship within the Body of Christ can not mean excluding the rest of the world. Living within some sort of "Christian bubble" is beneficial to no one. We must seek out and embrace those who are suffering, lonely, and poor. In those activities we recognize that our community is not restricted to the traditionally religious or "Christian." We are truly living as the Body of Christ when we are, as Bonhoeffer wrote, "living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, problems and perplexities . . . taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world."<sup>44</sup>

Third, it is not enough to lift up someone's spirits if their body has needs as well. "Care of souls" can be a very good and useful task, but it should not have an unfair priority over physical care. We may not be able to perform healing miracles, but we should still be paying careful attention to the physical and material needs of the people around us. A family unable to afford a meal needs food more than they need evangelization. As human persons, we are completely connected with our bodies. Neglect of the body is neglect of the person.

As these points are brought together, it is clear that what is ultimately sought after is, as Michael Goheen puts it, "an interpretation of cosmic history that gives meaning to human life."<sup>45</sup> N.T. Wright believes this interpretation of history can primarily be found in the Bible. Wright sees an incomplete but ongoing drama being played out. He divides the story into five acts: creation, sin, the history of Israel, Jesus Christ, and the life of the

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44. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 370.

45. Michael W Goheen, "The Urgency of Reading the Bible as One Story," *Theology Today* 64 (2008), 470-71.

church. Like Jenson, Wright believes that the Body of Christ must continue the drama by living out the completion of the fifth act.

This 'authority' of the first four acts would not consist—could not consist!—in an implicit command that the actors should repeat the earlier parts of the play over and over again. It would consist in the fact of an as yet unfinished drama, containing its own impetus and forward movement, which demanded to be concluded in an appropriate manner. It would require of the actors a free and responsible entering into the story as it stood, in order first to understand how the threads could be appropriately drawn together and then to put that understanding into effect by speaking and acting with both innovation and consistency.<sup>46</sup>

Finally then, we can seek out our place within the narrative of God. God has created the world, has chosen the people of Israel as his own, has become human as a Jewish man named Jesus, although blameless has been crucified, has been raised from the dead, is with us now in the Spirit, is awaiting the End when all of creation will be renewed, and calls us forward into communion with the triunity that is God. We, as small, insignificant humans, have been chosen to participate in this narrative, as human individuals, and as the Body of Christ. Jenson has identified the gospel as the story behind Christianity, and it has also now been identified as the story of all creation, and that we are called to participate in it. As we act, we respond to the story already told, and strive towards the new creation and resurrection that is our ending.

As we learn from this narrative, we will recognize that Christians must not become despisers of the body and the earth. We are too closely connected to the physical and material. If our theologies separate us from the body and the earth, they are separating us

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46. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1, Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 140.

from who we truly are as human beings. This must be remembered as we move forward to consider how and why we work. The theology of work to be developed in the final chapter requires the foundations of resurrection, body and narrative before it can be established.

## 6. The Future is Coming

Eschatology means the doctrine of the Christian hope, which embraces both the object hoped for and also the hope inspired by it. From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day. For Christian faith lives from the raising of the crucified Christ, and strains after the promises of the universal future of Christ. Eschatology is the passionate suffering and passionate longing kindled by the Messiah.

Jürgen Moltmann<sup>1</sup>

Jürgen Moltmann has become well-known for his *Theology of Hope* and the emphasis on the future throughout his writings. His eschatological thinking has been influential in theologies of new creation as well as theologies of work. For example, both Miroslav Volf and Darryl Cosden have already incorporated Moltmann into their examinations of work.<sup>2</sup> As they have shown, Moltmann does provide an excellent basis for a theology of work. However, aside from the possibility of following Volf and Cosden too closely, there is good reason to turn from Moltmann in this project. Thus, Wolfhart Pannenberg, a

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1. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 16.

2. Moltmann was Volf's doctoral supervisor at the University of Tübingen, and Moltmann wrote the foreword to Cosden's *Theology of Work* in which Cosden interacts closely with Moltmann's ideas on work.

contemporary of Moltmann will be the focus of this chapter. As will be discussed, Pannenberg's perspective on the future brings him to the concept of anticipation. Anticipation will be the key feature of the theology of work proposed in the final chapter.

Pannenberg has been an extremely prolific and influential theologian in the second half of the 20th century, and one of the defining characteristics of his theology is the central position which is given to eschatology. Pannenberg argues that the future should have priority over the past and the present. He suggests that "eschatological hope serves as a criterion for evaluating the present situation, but it also provides a source for illuminating and directing our ways through the history of this world."<sup>3</sup> Here Pannenberg's theology will be examined, and the way that his view of the future affects the doctrines of creation, God, and ontology. While there is not a direct discussion of Pannenberg in relation to work, his theology does provide an eschatological basis for examining human work in the final chapter.

Before looking at Pannenberg's view of the future directly, the key concept which is needed to make his argument comprehensible is the love of God, which he understands as "the origin of all reality." Creation is meaningful, and is described as good because it is the result of an intentional act of God. "Each event will be understood primarily as something in itself, as a work of creative love and not simply as a consequence of past

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3. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Historicity of Nature: Essays on Science and Theology* (West Conshohocken, Penn: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008), 53.

events or of invariable laws.”<sup>4</sup> As Pannenberg explains, God creates in love and in freedom.

The contingency of the world as a whole and of all individual events, things, and beings has its basis in the omnipotent freedom of the divine creating. Precisely by this freedom of its origin, that things are or are not becomes an expression of divine love. God had only one reason to create a world, the reason that is proclaimed in the fact of creation itself, namely, that God graciously confers existence on creatures, an existence alongside his own divine being and in distinction from him. Part of this creating is the continuity of creaturely existence. Only as it continues to be does creaturely existence acquire the independence of its own being distinct from God’s. We see here the intention of the Creator, which is inseparably connected with the act of creation and which has the existence of creatures as its goal.<sup>5</sup>

While creation does receive independence from God, this independence is not to be understood as being disconnected from God. “The goal of all creation, not just humanity, is to share in the life of God.”<sup>6</sup> While sharing in the life of God is the goal, the life of God is quite different from the life of humanity. Unlike the created world, which has a present reality and will have a different future reality, “the eternal God does not have ahead of him any future that is different from his present.” God is his own future, and Pannenberg understands this as “perfect freedom.” “The eternal God as the absolute future, in the fellowship of Father, Son, and Spirit, is the free origin of himself and his creatures.”<sup>7</sup> God, as absolute future, is Creator. As will be evident below, this is central to all of Pannenberg’s theology. As well, this is central to the idea of new creation which will

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4. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 67.

5. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1-3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991-1998), II, 20.

6. *Ibid.*, II, 136.

7. *Ibid.*, I, 410.

be returned to in the final chapter. Humanity will share not only in the life of God, but also in the creative work of God. This collaboration allows for a new perspective on human work.

## The Priority of the Future

In an early essay titled “Appearance as the Arrival of the Future,” Pannenberg introduces his ideas concerning God’s future which continued to be an important aspect of all of his later theology. Pannenberg writes “that in the ministry of Jesus the futurity of the Reign of God became a power determining the present.”<sup>8</sup> The Reign of God is not yet fully realized in the world, but in and through Jesus Christ, it is still present and active. In Jesus, the Reign of God is real and thus able to affect the present world, in fact to determine the present. The presence of the Reign of God is not simply a side-effect of the Incarnation, but is integral to the way that God is working in the world. The future Reign of God is active in the world, and according to Pannenberg, “The future *wills* to become present; it tends toward its arrival in a permanent present.”<sup>9</sup> This type of thinking is fairly counter-intuitive, but can be explained by looking at how Pannenberg understands the future.

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8. Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Appearance as the Arrival of the Future,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 35, no. 2 (1967), 111-12.

9. *Ibid.*, 118.

The common view of the future is that it does not actually exist. The future is viewed as something that we may look forward to and plan for, but not as something real. We understand the world in terms of cause and effect; the actions we perform in the present will determine the future. The future can only be real when it becomes present, and thus cannot truly *exist* as future. However, Pannenberg offers a different perspective on the future. If we consider the concept of time not as the ultimate means of understanding creation, but as being contained within eternity, we can begin to understand the future as having a “definite reality.”<sup>10</sup> Pannenberg explains that this makes sense from a Christian perspective because “the end of time borders on eternity: God himself is the end of time, and as the end of time he is the final future of his creation. This does not entail the annihilation of time, but the lifting up of temporal histories into the form of an eternal presence.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, time, all of time, when it is ended will be taken up by God, and will exist in God’s eternal presence. But, it is not just that the future now has a definite existence which we can await. The future cannot be understood as simply the result of current events and actions. If this was the case, the future would in a sense already be determined. Instead, as Pannenberg writes in another important early article, “Theology and the Kingdom of God,” “future and present are inextricably interwoven.”<sup>12</sup> The future has a power of its own by which it may affect the present.

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10. Christiaan Mostert, *God and the Future: Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Eschatological Doctrine of God* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2002), 92-93.

11. Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Constructive and Critical Functions of Christian Eschatology,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 77, no. 2 (1984), 138.

12. Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, 53.

Pannenberg then goes further and suggests that the future is actually the source of the present.

In every event the infinite future separates itself from the finite events which until then had been hidden in this future but are now released into existence. The future lets go of itself to bring into being our present. And every new present is again confronted by a dark and mysterious future out of which certain relevant events will be released. Thus does the future determine the present.<sup>13</sup>

If the present is determined by the future, then we must give priority to the future. The future is more important than the past. One way that this may be seen is with the example of the action of the Spirit. The Spirit does not just react to events in the past or present world, but acts freely and does something new. As we receive life from the Spirit now, we are receiving the first fruits of the Spirit from the eternal life that we will one day possess.<sup>14</sup> Another reason for giving priority to the future is because God is so closely connected to the future. In fact, Pannenberg argues that “all experience of the future is, at least indirectly, related to God himself.”<sup>15</sup> The result of this line of thought for human life is that the meaning of our lives is to be found, not from our present circumstances, but from the future that will be. This has become generally known as “eschatological ontology” and it will be returned to again at the end of this chapter.

The most important aspect of the priority that Pannenberg assigns to the future is the concept of creation from the future. In “Theology and the Kingdom of God,” quoted

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13. Ibid., 59.

14. Mostert, *God and the Future*, 101. Cf. Robert Jenson's description of the Spirit: “The Spirit is God as his and our future rushing upon him and us; he is the eschatological reality of God, the Power as which God is the active Goal of all things, as which God is for himself and for us those ‘things not seen’ that with us call for faith and with him are his infinity.” Jenson, *Systematic Theology vol 1*, 160.

15. Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, 61.

above, Pannenberg refers to a “dark and mysterious future.” However, it is now seen that this future is neither dark nor mysterious, but is illuminated by the love of God. Rather than an idea of God focusing on the act of creation prior to history, Pannenberg sees God as acting from the future. Christiaan Mostert explains that “instead of imagining God to be *behind* every moment in the past and the present, pushing the present into the future, God is better thought of as being *in front of* every past and present moment, allowing it to participate in that part of God’s future that is most immediate to it.”<sup>16</sup>

Pannenberg carefully connects the ideas of creation and eschatology in his *Systematic Theology*. “Creation and eschatology belong together because it is only in the eschatological consummation that the destiny of the creature, especially the human creature, will come to fulfillment.”<sup>17</sup> It is not enough to begin with the creation story and then attempt to understand our position in the world. Only by viewing the entire story, from beginning to end, will we be able to truly make sense of the world and our place within it. We can see the importance of God being both the First *and* the Last. God is before and after time, and yet still involved within time.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, Pannenberg does not find an acceptable understanding of history “in the idea of an original creation supplemented by continuous creation.”<sup>19</sup> Instead, Pannenberg seeks a different method of understanding creation, which he finds in Jesus Christ. The event of the incarnation, and the eschatological proclamation that accompanies it, requires

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16. Mostert, *God and the Future*, 143.

17. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, II, 139.

18. *Ibid.*, II, 140.

19. *Ibid.*, II, 142.

a new attempt at understanding the world. Concerning this proclamation of Jesus, Pannenberg writes:

Its core content—the coming rule of God and our human relation to its future—is the criterion of a critical sifting and reinterpreting of everything that has been handed down. In Jesus, creation itself is set in the light of the eschatological future and becomes a parable of the divine rule. To be sure, Jesus does not directly call creation the work of the coming God, but this view rests on the sense that typifies his message and that runs from the future of God to the world's past and present.<sup>20</sup>

Mostert attempts to summarize Pannenberg's thought on the priority of the future: "As the power of the ultimate future, God 'pushes' the historical future away from Godself and lets it become the present."<sup>21</sup> If this vision of God acting from the future is accepted, our ideas of God, creation, and humanity must be reconsidered. As well, our human work is no longer a matter of building up or building towards an ultimate goal. Rather, there is a future which God "releases" which we will receive as we continue to work.

## Doctrine of God

Obviously, these ideas of the priority of the future, and of creation from the future, have important implications for Pannenberg's idea of God. God can no longer be thought of as simply being responsible for creation at the very beginning, but instead acts from the future. However, this does not mean that God is in any way distant from creation.<sup>22</sup>

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20. Ibid., II, 145.

21. Mostert, *God and the Future*, 163.

22. Pannenberg is certainly not some sort of reverse Deist who sees God as being absent from the world until the future becomes present and real.

Rather, God is involved in creation, and furthermore, allows what happens in the history of creation to constitute who God is. This allows human work to gain a new significance, as the work done in history can potentially directly affect God. Here is one example of Pannenberg's strong commitment to a trinitarian theology: God creates the world, but also enters the world as a human being, and continues to bring life through the Spirit. The events of the life of Jesus of Nazareth are events in the life of God, and God cannot be understood apart from the life of Jesus Christ. God is intimately related to the history of creation.<sup>23</sup>

An extension of this connection with creation is that God is defined by the Kingdom of God. God cannot truly be God unless he rules over creation. As this is not currently the case, at least not completely, Pannenberg will say "that, in a restricted but important sense, God does not yet exist. Since his rule and his being are inseparable, God's being is still in the process of coming to be."<sup>24</sup> Just as God entered the world in a preliminary way in the person of Jesus Christ, he will definitively be in the world when the Kingdom of God is fully present in the eschaton. "Only in the future of his Kingdom come will the statement 'God exists' prove to be definitely true. But then it will be clear that the statement was always true."<sup>25</sup>

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23. Ibid., 154-56.

24. Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, 56. An interesting comparison could be made here with Paul Tillich, who argued that God is not a being who exists, but is Being Itself. The important difference of course is that while Tillich works from the past, where God is the Ground of Being, Pannenberg has eschatology in mind. God does not *yet* exist, but will in the future.

25. Ibid., 62.

For Pannenberg, the idea of the Kingdom of God can only be understood by returning to the Trinity.<sup>26</sup> Mostert identifies two key aspects of Pannenberg's trinitarian doctrine. The first concerns the mutuality of the Father, Son, and Spirit. "God's deity includes God's rule over all created things, and this is achieved only through the Son and the Spirit. Thus the relation of the Father with the Son and the Spirit involves a mutual dependence, which requires seeing the trinitarian relations not only as relations of origin but also as eschatological relations."<sup>27</sup> The second point is that speaking of the personhood of God or the unity of God is only possible in trinitarian terms. God can only be God as the Trinity. Pannenberg introduces a unique perspective on the Spirit to support his focus on the Trinity. We can avoid understanding the Trinity as three persons working independently "by means of the idea of the Spirit as a dynamic field of force. The Spirit is both the divine essence common to the three Persons and the third Person of the Trinity."<sup>28</sup>

Thus, Pannenberg's doctrine of the Trinity has important implications for the idea of the Kingdom of God. God's rule is not simply the result of God being a static God from the very beginning of creation, but is "the result of the common activity of the three Persons."<sup>29</sup> This common activity, and the fullness of God's rule, is not yet complete. We

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26. Mostert, *God and the Future*, 183-201.

27. *Ibid.*, 188.

28. *Ibid.*, 211. The idea of Spirit as field is paralleled by the idea of field in modern physics. See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, I, 382-84 for Pannenberg's explanation. This is one example of the close engagement with science that Pannenberg often incorporates in his theology.

29. Mostert, *God and the Future*, 212.

must wait, in anticipation, for the eschatological reality of the Reign of God. Pannenberg explains his view of the future Kingdom of God in Volume 3 of his *Systematic Theology*:

God's revelation in history also has the form of an anticipation of the definitive manifestation of his eternal and omnipotent deity in the event of the consummation of all time and history. The truth of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is dependent, then, on the actual inbreaking of the future of God's kingdom, and we maintain and declare it today on the premise of that coming. The coming of the kingdom is the basis of the message of Jesus, and without the arrival of this future it loses its basis. To be sure, the future of God's kingdom is already present by the work of Jesus among those who believe in him and his message, as is its power to change their lives on earth. It has been made manifest in the event of the resurrection of Jesus. But whether we are correctly describing what happened then depends still on something that has yet to take place: the coming of the reign of God in all its power and glory. As the work and history of Jesus were essentially an anticipation of this reign, and as they depend on the future of the ultimate coming for their meaning and truth, so do the liturgical life of the church, the presence of Jesus Christ at celebrations of his Supper, and the saving efficacy of baptism, along with the Christian sense of election and faith's assurance of justification. As regards its content and truth all Christian doctrine depends on the future of God's own coming to consummate his rule over his creation.<sup>30</sup>

For Pannenberg, the eschatological reign of God is not the finale to a story that has begun long ago. Rather it is the basis for the entire history of creation. Without God's future rule over his creation, the life of Jesus and of the Church is called into question. And, as mentioned above, the life of God is also called into question. But, when the Kingdom of God is present, God is also present. "The reality of God, then, is the creative arrival of this powerful future in the event of love. In his creative, redeeming, and sustaining arrival, God's future demonstrates his power."<sup>31</sup> Thus, it can be seen that the Kingdom of God is a necessary aspect of God's existence.

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30. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, III, 531.

31. Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, 70.

Pannenberg continues by explaining three different ways that the Kingdom of God, and thus God's existence, is made real in creation at the end of time: as the fulfillment of human society, as the end of history, and as the coming of eternity into time. This first aspect of the Kingdom of God takes place on many different levels, from individual to cosmic. This is closely related to the Jewish hope for the renewal of the world, which brings a new earth and new heavens. As this cosmic renewal takes place, all people are involved, even the dead are resurrected. Furthermore, all people are rescued from the troubles of poverty, greed, discrimination, and unjust social systems. When the Kingdom of God comes, individuals are reconciled to each other and to society as a whole.<sup>32</sup>

The second way that the coming Kingdom of God makes itself present is as the end of history, that is, the eschaton. There are two different ways eschaton should be understood. The eschaton means that history comes to an end, but also that history has reached its completion, or fulfillment. Both of these aspects are found to relate to the Kingdom of God when we realize that history does not end in nothingness, for example the destruction of the universe, but rather ends in God. Pannenberg states that "As the finite is bounded by the infinite, so are time and the temporal by eternity. The end of the temporal, of time and history in general, thus means transition to eternity. This can mean participation in God's own eternal life."<sup>33</sup>

The final way that the Kingdom of God is expressed is the coming of eternity into time. According to Pannenberg, everyone, both creatures and human persons, have "a

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32. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, III, 584-85.

33. *Ibid.*, III, 594.

desire for a totality of life that they do not yet fully possess.” The only way this can be fulfilled is beyond death, by “unbroken participation in the eternal life of God.” However, it is only by the work of the Spirit that we are able to “overcome the separation from God that the ego’s wanting to be as God has caused.”<sup>34</sup> The relationship of God that results when separation is overcome is the coming of eternity into time. This has happened already with Jesus Christ, and is occurring now as well, albeit not openly. Pannenberg states that “the eschatological truth is already a present reality even if in hidden form.”<sup>35</sup> By participating in the Kingdom of God now, we are able to participate in the eternity of God. This participation may also be possible, in a small but significant way, through human work. If this is the case, then a new understanding of what meaning our work has is possible.

### Eschatological Ontology

Participation in the Kingdom of God is our future hope, yet we are able to participate in it in another way, right now, by anticipating the coming Kingdom. This anticipation is not just an empty hope, or a dream for the future. God is the power of the future, and thus the future determines our identity. And, even more than determining our identity, the future determines our very existence. Pannenberg writes that “On the path of their history in time objects and people exist only in anticipation of that which they will

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34. Ibid., III, 601.

35. Ibid., III, 605.

be in the light of their final future, the advent of God.”<sup>36</sup> We cannot understand ourselves from a perspective grounded in the present, but must anticipate our future existence. We are created from the future. We are who we will be. Likewise, as we shall see in the final chapter, we cannot understand our work from our present perspective, but are better served with a perspective from the future.

Considering Pannenberg’s concept of the priority of the future and his emphasis on the coming of Kingdom of God, this idea of our future existence being determinative for our current existence is not very surprising. Perhaps the best explanation for this idea of anticipation is found in his *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*. The two most important examples of anticipation are Jesus’ message of the Kingdom and his resurrection from the dead. “In both cases the future . . . is viewed as already and actually having broken into history. The final reality is present.”<sup>37</sup> These examples of anticipation of the future are concrete and true in the life of Jesus, and thus, by sharing in the life of Jesus, we are also able to live in anticipation of our future.

However, there is an important qualification that must be made here. This anticipation of the future is only valid if the future that we are anticipating becomes present and real. As Pannenberg explains, “Anticipation is therefore always ambiguous; its true significance depends upon the future course of experience.”<sup>38</sup> This possibility that the future may not be what we anticipate seems like it may be reason enough to discard the

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36. Ibid., III, 531.

37. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. Philip Clayton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 95.

38. Ibid., 96.

idea of anticipation entirely. We do not know exactly what the future will hold, so how can we be certain of our identity?

The answer to this objection is found simply by remembering that our hope for the future is located, not in our own wishful thinking, but in the God of the future. According to Pannenberg, our current relationship with God is reason enough to live in anticipation.

But since, according to Christian doctrine, God as Creator is already related to each of his creatures in love, all created life is to be understood as a form of participation in the divine eternity, however weak or limited this participation may be.<sup>39</sup>

Our anticipation, even though it is ambiguous, can be confirmed by our current relationship with God.

Anticipation of the future may be a valid perspective from which to understand ourselves, but are we also able to say that anticipation determines who we are? Pannenberg argues that because there are always changes and adaptations occurring throughout a thing's existence, we can only definitively know what a thing is at the end of its existence. However, once we know what a thing is, once we know its "essence," this knowledge of its essence has "retroactive power." For example,

A zinnia is already a zinnia as a cutting and remains one during the entire process of its growth up to blossoming, even though the flower bears its name on account of its blossom. If there were only a single such flower, we could not determine its nature in advance; and yet over the period of its growth it would still be what it revealed itself to be at the end. It would possess its essence through anticipation, though only at the end of the

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39. Ibid., 97.

developmental process would one be able to know that this was its essence.<sup>40</sup>

We can see how this retroactive power may apply to a thing such as a flower, but it can also be true of a human person because of Jesus Christ. In Jesus, we are able to see the end of our “developmental process.” Exemplifying the Kingdom of God, and resurrected from the dead, Jesus was, and is, who we will be. Pannenberg identifies the two ways that things may “be what they are, . . . retroactively from the outcome of their becoming on the one hand, and on the other in the sense of anticipating the completion of their process of becoming, their history.”<sup>41</sup> Since, we cannot yet experience the retroactive means of becoming who we are, we must anticipate who we will be.

One of the potential problems with this reliance on the future is that of determinism. If we are defined by what we will be in the future, do we presently have any choice or control over who we are? Do we have free will? It may be one thing to say that a zinnia cutting is retroactively a zinnia, but should we say the same thing about a human person? David McKenzie addresses this question in his article “Pannenberg on God and Freedom.” One possibility that would retain human freedom is found with process theology with which Pannenberg does interact occasionally. However, Pannenberg does not accept the possibility that God does not control, or even know of, the future and maintains his idea of “God as the Power of the Future.”<sup>42</sup>

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40. Ibid., 105.

41. Ibid., 107.

42. David McKenzie, “Pannenberg on God and Freedom,” *The Journal of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1980), 324-29.

Despite this language, there are two ideas which Pannenberg is able to employ to avoid falling into a determinist position. The first is that the future cannot act as a cause upon the present in the same way that the past is able to. The future cannot be an “efficient cause.” The second reason is related to the method of God’s rule. God does not rule by means of his omnipotence, but through love. God does not maintain absolute control over the universe, but has “determined” that creation exist independently apart from God.<sup>43</sup>

A similar critique is described in Benjamin Myers’ article “The Difference Totality Makes.” Scholars such as Brian Walsh, Niels Henrik Gregersen, and James K. A. Smith have argued that Pannenberg’s priority of the future, and his picture of the future as a unified totality, overwhelms and destroys creaturely difference. Myers explains the critique by stating that “Pannenberg’s ontology of the future is fundamentally a system of violence. Difference, particularity and multiplicity are merely evils to be overcome at last in the timeless eternity of the future.”<sup>44</sup>

Myers believes that the response to this critique is found by looking again at the doctrine of the Trinity. “The unity-in-distinction of the trinitarian persons” provides a basis by which “Pannenberg can affirm all creatures’ eschatological participation in God without thereby undermining the particularity of each individual creature and the proper distinction between each thing and God.”<sup>45</sup> After comparing Pannenberg’s argument with

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43. Mostert, *God and the Future*, 179-81.

44. Benjamin Myers, “The Difference Totality Makes: Reconsidering Pannenberg’s Eschatological Ontology,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 49, no. 2 (2007), 147.

45. *Ibid.*, 150-51.

the work of Robert Jenson, Myers suggests that what Pannenberg has in mind is a “narrative totality” which results in “a gathering up of all creatures into a harmonious interrelatedness which properly defines each creature and gives it its meaning.”<sup>46</sup>

While there are those with reason to object to Pannenberg’s concept of eschatological ontology, it is still possible to remain a free and independent person in Pannenberg’s system. The love of God and the eschatological future may determine who we are, but this does not negate our capability as human persons who are able to act and think on our own. If we live in anticipation of the future, it is in hope of a future shared with God, not in despair of an unavoidable future which has no meaning for us.

## Conclusion

The final question for this chapter relates to the content of our anticipation. What is the future life which defines who we are? To put it simply, the life we are anticipating is fellowship with God. This fellowship has already been displayed in the life of Jesus Christ, and we look forward to sharing in that life in our future. The Kingdom of God will be complete and active, and humanity will be transformed into new humanity. Pannenberg writes that Jesus Christ is “the eschatological new man, the definitive form of humanity that corresponds to the will of God, to our divine orientation by creation to relationship with God.”<sup>47</sup>

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46. Ibid., 154.

47. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, II, 315.

We anticipate our future participation in the life of Jesus, but also participate in the life of Jesus by our anticipation. Through anticipation, we can begin to align ourselves with the will of God, and move towards fulfilling humanity's purpose of being in fellowship with God. We will not yet experience the fulness and completion of the Kingdom of God until it arrives from the future, but our hope for the Kingdom, our anticipation, indicates its partial presence.

Pannenberg's perspective on the future can have far-reaching effects for the Christian life. As the next chapter explores, anticipation of this coming future changes how we live in the present. As well, the priority of the future can provide a different hope for the eschaton than we might otherwise have. In the final chapter, the idea of anticipation of the future and the ideas of embodiment and narrative previously discussed will be brought together. How do these concepts affect our view of our present world, and most importantly for this project, our work?

## 7. An Eschatological View of Work

Hope for the coming Kingdom knows that ultimate fulfillment is beyond human powers to effect. Yet, far from being condemned to inactivity, we are inspired to prepare this present for the future. Such preparation is the work of hope carried out by love. Conscious of the preliminary character of his achievements, the man of hope is open to more promising answers to the problems that claim his energy. Thus he is opened beyond himself to the future of God's kingdom.

Wolfhart Pannenberg<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, our work is only rarely a “work of hope carried out by love.” How do we become a person of hope who is capable of preparation for the future? If we are people defined by who we will be, through our anticipation, how can this anticipation shape our work in this world? These are the questions which will be dealt with in this final chapter. It may be too much to expect to be able to answer all the problems and issues with human work that were identified in the second chapter, but there can be at least a move towards becoming “open to more promising answers” in the future. Hopefully, these promising answers will provide workers with a new perspective on secular work. Human work may only lead to some preliminary achievements, but these achievements may be enough to help Christians to understand and appreciate the secular work that they do in a new way.

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1. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 126.

Before moving forward to this project's conclusion, there will be a brief summary of the preceding material. As well, the topic of new creation that has been referenced throughout will be more precisely described. Finally, Pannenberg's concept of anticipation of the future new creation will be applied to human work. The idea of anticipation can shape the work that we do now, and also illustrate some of the key concepts which can help us to become workers of hope. For example, considering themes of rest, mission, ecology, beauty, and love can better prepare us for the work that we do.

## A Summary

The second chapter began with a definition of work as "any activity undertaken with a sense of obligation." The sense of obligation that makes work work is not a problem in itself, as there are many good things that we are obligated to do. However, when we are merely earning a paycheck, if we are alienated from our work, or when we have "just a job," this obligation becomes a heavy burden. The goal for workers is to find some sort of meaning in what they do, but this is often very difficult in modern Western society. Large corporations sometimes promote work as meaningful, but that meaning is ultimately found to be shallow and temporary. Work that forces us to perform simple and repetitive tasks often defies our attempts to find meaning in it. The struggle then is to locate a narrative in which we, and our work, have a legitimate place.

Religion has often played an important part in the narrative of work that we have created, particularly with the idea of vocation discussed in chapter 3. The trends identified by Max Weber that linked the Protestant Reformation with the capitalistic spirit of the Western world are closely related to the common idea of vocation. The idea of a specific career or calling which we have to fulfill has been perhaps the most prominent method of understanding our work from a Christian perspective. The concept of vocation does present a fairly positive view of human work, and this positive view has been denounced by those who see little or no lasting value in human work. As has also been seen, other critics state that vocation no longer provides a suitable perspective for understanding work in our modern society. Chapter 4 surveys some of the more prominent discussions of work that have been produced in recent years. John Paul II's important *Laborem Exercens* contains the important theme of co-creativity, which is central to all the authors discussed in the chapter. While Miroslav Volf is one theologian who moves forward the idea of co-creativity with his focus on new creation, David Jensen objects to the idea of co-creativity. The conclusion however, is that, while it may not be applicable for some workers, co-creativity is an important and useful concept in the discussion of human work.

The fifth chapter begins to present the key themes which will inform the eschatological view of work that will follow. The central focus is upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the implications that this has for the human person and the Christian tradition. The resurrection forces us to acknowledge that the human body is essential to

the human person. Different views of personhood are possible within the Christian tradition, so long as the importance of the body is maintained. Just as the physical body is affirmed, the narrative history of the entire creation is also affirmed. To repeat Robert Jenson's statement, "Christianity is an historical religion." Finally, an analysis of the theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg served as a guide to eschatology in chapter 6. Pannenberg has given an important priority to the future in his work, and this focus on the future points towards a different view of God and the kingdom of God. God is the power of the future, and as the kingdom of God arrives from the future, God's power, and indeed God's very existence, will be displayed in full. The priority of the future also affects our view of the human person. If Pannenberg's eschatological ontology is followed, then we know who a person is only at the end of his or her life. We are who we will be.

## New Creation

Following this summary of the ground that has already been covered, the topic of new creation must also be discussed again. This has been mentioned a number of times, however, a look in greater detail at what we are expecting is needed. If we have this hope for the future, the hope of the coming kingdom, what exactly is the content of this hope? As previously seen with N.T. Wright, Christians cannot wait for the world to eventually

progress towards perfection, and neither can we expect for the world simply to cease to exist at the end of time.

The alternative that Wright proposes in *Surprised by Hope* is new creation.<sup>2</sup> He argues that “God intends in the end to fill all creation with his own presence and love. . . . The world is created good *but incomplete*.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, the solution is not to discard the world, or to start over from scratch, but to complete it. Wright discusses Isaiah 65 and 66 as well as Romans 8 in support of his view.<sup>4</sup> Both texts use the metaphor of birth to connect the current creation to the new creation. In Isaiah it is Jerusalem that is giving birth, and in Romans, Paul extends this thought with the image of the whole creation groaning with labour pains.

Wright turns to the book of Revelation to show what this new creation will look like. One way that new creation is explained is using the analogy of marriage. The city, New Jerusalem, descends from heaven, just as a bride arrives on her wedding day. This beautiful city is described as “the dwelling place of God” and now “God himself will be with them as their God” (Rev. 21:3). From this new beginning, God, humanity, and all of creation will live together. As Wright states, “It is only through imagery, through metaphor and symbol, that we can imagine the new world that God intends to make.”<sup>5</sup> However,

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2. See especially N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 93-108.

3. Ibid., 101-02.

4. Other passages are relevant for Wright’s argument as well. For example, Philippians 3 and 2 Peter 3. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 229-36, 462-3.

5. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 107.

this imagery is still clear enough to allow us to hope for and anticipate the future new creation that is described.

If this new creation is what we are to expect, an important issue that must be addressed is the transition from this world to the next. How do we get from here to there? This can be separated into two different categories. The first is the question of how our good works and positive actions are preserved and transformed in the eschaton. The second question concerns our evil work and negative actions. Will they be removed in some way from us or will we still be aware of them?

Examining the latter question, there are three possible ways of responding. One potential answer is found by using the analogy of a tapestry or painting. Evil in this world seems horrible and unnecessary, but they are the dark aspects of what will be a beautiful piece of art once it is completed. However, it is only from God's perspective, or a heavenly perspective, that we will be able to see the whole, and only then will be able to understand why the evil took place. While this solution may be appealing to some, it is strongly challenged by the words of Ivan Karamazov who argues that the single tear of a suffering child makes any explanation of evil unsuitable.<sup>6</sup>

A second possibility is suggested by Miroslav Volf in *The End of Memory*. The mere memory of evil in the world would cause pain and remorse, and would result in a continued existence of evil, and thus prevent perfect existence in the world to come. The solution is that humanity will "forget" the evil that has been done, and continue life with

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6. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew (New York: Bantam Classics, 1981), 295.

only the good remaining. Volf concludes that “Our minds will be rapt in the goodness of God and in the goodness of God’s new world, and the memories of wrongs will wither away like plants without water.”<sup>7</sup>

A third possibility, which shares characteristics of both of the prior suggestions, is promoted by David Bentley Hart. Rather than the analogy of visual art mentioned in the first possibility, he prefers to turn to music. Just as two perfectly opposed sound waves will cancel each other out and result in silence, Hart suggests that God will counter the evil that has occurred in history and effectively remove it. The evils of the past will essentially no longer exist. Hart explains that “It is the promise of Christian faith that, eschatologically, the music of all creation will be restored not as a totality in which all the discords of evil necessarily participated, but as an accomplished harmony from which all such discords, along with their false profundities, have been exorcised by way of innumerable ‘tonal’ (or pneumatological) reconciliations.”<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of which of these proposals is favoured, the important idea to take forward is that “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). The particular method which may be used to achieve this is less important. Thus, it is appropriate to continue on and consider how the good will persist and be transformed into the age to come.

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7. Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 214.

8. David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of The Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 281.

Wright discusses the possibilities for this in a section titled “Building for the Kingdom.” Wright first clarifies that this is not to be understood as building the kingdom, for that is God’s task, but building *for* the kingdom. What we do in this world “is not in vain.” Wright does not attempt to explain how the process of building for the kingdom will eventually work, but he states that

Every act of love, gratitude, and kindness; every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of his creation; every minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or to walk; every act of care and nurture, of comfort and support, for one’s fellow human beings and for that matter one’s fellow nonhuman creatures; and of course every prayer, all Spirit-led teaching, every deed that spreads the gospel, builds up the church, embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption, and makes the name of Jesus honored in the world—all of this will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation that God will one day make.<sup>9</sup>

While Wright provides a powerful statement about what will be included in the coming kingdom of God, the question of the transition has not yet been sufficiently been addressed. How is good in the world able to survive the transition? More specifically, how does the work that we do now relate to the coming kingdom?

## Work and New Creation

New creation is central to the theologies of work presented by Miroslav Volf and Darrell Cosden, and a return to them is useful to see how our work may be preserved and transformed in the eschaton. According to Volf, our hope for the future rests upon the

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9. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 208.

idea of *transformatio mundi*. This transformation allows us to consider “the results of work as ‘building materials’ of the glorified world.”<sup>10</sup> Volf recognizes that the work of individuals generally does not result in a lasting product that can serve as building material, however there are three ways in which human work will last.

The first is the cumulative nature of human accomplishment. Everything that is done today is only possible because of the work done by our predecessors. The second reason is that human work often “leaves a permanent imprint on natural and social environments and creates a home for human beings without which they could not exist as human beings.”<sup>11</sup> Finally, the third reason is that work affects who we are, that is, our personal identity. If our personal identity is shaped by our work in the present, then our identity as resurrected persons will also have experienced this influence.

Because of these three ways that work can serve as building materials, humanity can be viewed as cooperating with God in the work of transformation. Although it is God’s action that will bring about the new creation, humanity is also active in the process. Volf explains that “Through the Spirit, God is already working in history, using human actions to create provisional states of affairs that anticipate the new creation in a real way.”<sup>12</sup> An example of this cooperation is how God not only calls us to perform certain tasks, but also provides “an inspiration and a gifting to accomplish the task.”<sup>13</sup>

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10. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 96.

11. *Ibid.*, 97.

12. *Ibid.*, 100.

13. *Ibid.*, 114.

While these analogies of building are helpful in understanding the transition to new creation, they are not quite sufficient. While the concept of building for the kingdom, or providing building materials, can be exciting and provocative, there is a problem. Most people have difficulty planning and building for the future, even if that future is only 6 months or 2 years away. Planning for the eschaton in this way seems to be, and is, beyond our capabilities. Volf's proposal here seems to share the same problem that the concept of co-creativity generally does. While this may be a beneficial way to understand work for some people, other workers will see nothing in their work which resembles this idea. How does ordinary mundane work fit into this proposal? How should a worker who does not work creatively and who does not produce anything meaningful think about work?

Darrell Cosden takes another approach when dealing with work in the new creation. He argues that work is valuable in the present, not necessarily because work provides building materials for the new creation, but because work will also be present in the world to come. He states that resurrected human life "will still be fundamentally a recognizable human life."<sup>14</sup> Thus, just as work is "an ontological reality in the present creation, . . . it is also a fundamental condition of being human in the new creation."<sup>15</sup>

If this is the case, then our work will have to be justified alongside ourselves so that it will also have a place in the new creation.<sup>16</sup> According to Cosden, this will mean the reversal of the curse placed upon human work in the Genesis narrative. Work will

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14. Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 150.

15. Ibid.

16. Darrell Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 107-08.

return to what it once was, but also transcend its original scope and potential. We will then be able to participate in a sort of “glorified work.”<sup>17</sup> One example of this justification of human work is with the concept of New Jerusalem itself. The image chosen to represent new creation is not an Edenic garden, but a city: “a normal and ambivalent product of human culture.”<sup>18</sup>

This concept of “glorified work” has interesting implications for our definition of work. Work, as “activity undertaken with a sense of obligation,” will no longer exist. Even if we are performing activities similar to work we do now, those activities will be done in freedom and in love, not out of any obligation.<sup>19</sup> In the new creation then, humanity would finally be able to achieve the “free activity” that Marx hoped for, and be able to work as “creative scientists.”<sup>20</sup> As Cosden suggests, “the distinction between ‘work’, ‘rest’, and ‘play’ will disappear.”<sup>21</sup>

How then can the idea of new creation have a positive effect on how we understand our work? Instead of attempting to discover how our present work will be incorporated in the new creation, another option is to respond to what our future activity might be like. As Wright asks, “if God really does intend to *redeem* rather than reject his created world . . . what might it look like to celebrate that redemption, that healing and

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17. Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 157.

18. Ibid., 172., and also Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*, 75-77.

19. This would also apply to all activity that God does. God certainly acts in love and freedom, so based upon our definition, God does not work as such. However, there could be a different definition of work which applies to God and also our future activity in the new creation.

20. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 58-65.

21. Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 170.

transformation, in the present, and thereby appropriately to anticipate God's final intention?"<sup>22</sup>

Wright begins to answer that question by discussing the themes of justice, beauty, and evangelism in *Surprised by Hope*. Another aspect of the answer is discussed in *After You Believe*, in which Wright employs the concept of anticipation. Wright promotes the importance of virtue as a key element of the Christian life which must be developed and encouraged. This virtue is not simply the result of following the rules of the Christian faith, but an anticipation of the lives that we will live. Wright explains that "The practice and habit of virtue, in this sense, is all about learning in advance the language of God's new world."<sup>23</sup> Wright also labels this practice as "eschatological authenticity."<sup>24</sup> The virtues that we now must struggle with and strive after will, in our new lives, be natural and authentic. This concept that Wright employs in the field of ethics applies to all of life, and particularly to the work that we do. Anticipation is how we are able to experience now the "glorified work" that awaits us.

## Our Anticipating Work

Returning to the priority of the future espoused by Pannenberg, it is appropriate to employ the concept of anticipation to our present work. If we are who we will be, then

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22. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 212.

23. N. T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: Harperone, 2010), 69.

24. *Ibid.*, 107.

let us also work as we will work. Of course, we do not have a perfect image of what our future activity in the new creation will be like, and we cannot rely on an exact future, but we can imagine<sup>25</sup> a few important themes that will motivate our actions then, and which can also motivate us now. A few of the possibilities are rest, mission, ecology, beauty, and love. One of the benefits of anticipating themes such as these in order to better understand our work is that each individual worker is able to implement them in their own particular way. As demonstrated with Karl Barth above, our calling from God must be understood on an individual basis. While there is certainly value in seeing the big picture of human work, and attempting to improve the problems and institutions of the working world, it is the situations of individual workers which can most benefit from this line of thinking. It may not be possible to develop a comprehensive theology of work here, but individual persons can incorporate anticipation into their own personal theology of working.

Even though it appears that the idea of anticipating our work in the new creation can be helpful in improving how we understand and perform our work now, there are some concerns that can be raised. The first potential issue that can be considered is whether or not this concept can have any effect on the larger issues of work. Issues of dissatisfaction, alienation and unemployment cannot be ignored when attempting to formulate any sort of theology of work. It is certainly true that the economic structures and large institutions that are so important in the Western world are problematic and need

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25. An explanation of the importance of imagination in considering the future is found in Garrett Green, "Imagining the Future," in *The Future as God's Gift: Explorations in Christian Eschatology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000).

to be reformed. While anticipating new creation could be very helpful in improving this aspect of our working world, an attempt to do so moves far beyond the scope of this project. The global economy has been developed and shaped in such a way that significant changes are extremely difficult to implement. A careful balance between what is desirable and what is immediately realistic must be maintained. A revolution of the entire system to become compatible with the idea of new creation may seem like a good idea to some, but the actual process is likely not feasible.

Thus, the proper reply to this concern is to state that the best application of this concept of anticipation is to the individual. Anticipation of activity in the new creation could be a very helpful process for an individual struggling with his or her work in the present. Perhaps pondering work in the new creation will help an office worker see the small signs of new creation that are already present in her work, or it may prompt a carpenter to create with greater craftsmanship in anticipation of the perfect craftsmanship that may be possible in the new creation. Ultimately though, any value that the task of anticipation may have cannot be guaranteed. It is up to the individual to ask "How can my work now look more like work in the new creation?" Hopefully the answer to that question will prove to be a small but significant step in understanding and improving human work.

A further concern is the issue of that work which cannot be improved by anticipating new creation. Anticipation will not solve all problems related to work, and there will certainly be some work situations which remain meaningless. Perhaps the

process of anticipation will force someone to realize that their work is incompatible with new creation, and move them to search for work that is more suitable.<sup>26</sup> Anticipation should not be used to smooth over and ignore the problems of work. However, if the compatibilities and incompatibilities of work in the present with work in the new creation can be identified, there will be perhaps be additional motivation to reform work as we know it. While the idea of anticipation has potential to change how we understand our work, the ultimate significance of the concept will be determined by how well it can be applied to individual workers and individual work situations. The idea of anticipation can perhaps be most successfully applied for workers who have been unable to see meaning and value in the work that they presently do and who do not see that they are building towards a new creation or anything else meaningful.

Anticipation can provide these workers with another opportunity to appreciate their work. Examining work from the perspective of the future can be a fresh start, not involved with the current attitudes and preconceptions about our work. As some examples, the themes of rest, mission, ecology, beauty, and love are some of the possible ways that anticipation can be applied to our present work, whether that work is currently understood as positive or negative. At the very least, these themes can provide a new perspective on our work, showing workers performing ordinary mundane tasks that there are other aspects of their work which can be appreciated.

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26. Of course, this is not always possible. Some workers are bound to a particular job, because of economic necessity or other reasons. Even if anticipation does not provide a solution to problematic work situations, it may at least provide some additional hope for the future. While this is not a completely acceptable answer, it may be all that is possible until various economic systems that oppress some workers are changed.

## Rest

The concept of rest has an important role in Darrell Cosden's *Theology of Work*, and was discussed briefly in chapter 4. While rest may at first seem to be antithetical to a discussion of work, in this case it must be recognized that rest does not mean inactivity. Rest in the present is understood temporally, as an interruption in our work. However, once the limitations on work have been removed in the new creation there will be no need for a temporal rest, and rest will then be better understood as a spatial concept. Cosden explains that "Rest, for God and us, will cease being a rhythmic resting 'from' in time, and become a resting place, a resting 'in'."<sup>27</sup>

Cosden continues, "thus, eternal rest becomes redirected and applied as a kind of existence, as an eternal living of life characterized by perfect and harmonious relationships between God, humans, and nature."<sup>28</sup> As our living becomes perfect and harmonious, so too does our work. We will then be able to experience free activity and glorified work. We should be able to learn from this vision of our future work, and by anticipating glorified work, improve our present working situation. Work as we now know it, work that requires periods of rest, is not what work will ultimately look like, and thus should not be normative for our understanding of work.

Instead of being ruled and dominated by our work, we should strive to be at peace and harmony with our work. James K. A. Smith defines entering God's rest as "a matter of desiring the right things, and then ordering our desires in light of that desire." He states

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27. Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 170-71.

28. *Ibid.*, 171.

that “when our desire is ordered to and by the love and grace of God, our autonomous desires to make our mark by our own achievements begin to look empty, even silly.”<sup>29</sup> Our desires regarding our work should be shaped by the new creation, where we will be active and working, but where work will not define us or be done out of obligation. Work is important, but it is not of ultimate importance. For many people work is the most important aspect of their lives, and rest from work occurs only when absolutely necessary. Remembering the importance of rest is a good first step in anticipating the glorified work which awaits us.

## Mission

Mission is traditionally viewed as the religious work of evangelism which is to be performed in this world, going out to the non-Christian nations. However, in Nathan Kerr’s book *Christ, History, and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* there is found a different view of mission which fits well with the anticipation of the future that is being discussed here. Rather than participating in a mission *to* the rest of the world, inviting them to a home within the Christian Church, mission can be understood as “an exilic existence as envoys of God’s coming messianic reign.”<sup>30</sup> Kerr suggests that the concept of diaspora, which is so central to the history of the Jewish people, needs to be incorporated into our idea of Christian mission. As this is done, we are able to see that

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29. James K.A. Smith, *The Devil Reads Derrida: and Other Essays on the University, the Church, Politics, and the Arts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 6.

30. Nathan R. Kerr, *Christ, History and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009), 184.

“our missionary encounter with the other is an *embodiment* of an altogether different political act - namely, our ongoing *conversion* to the coming reign of God.”<sup>31</sup>

This rethinking of mission also requires a rethinking of the church, and its relationship with the rest of the world.

The true ‘gathering’ happens where Christ in his apocalyptic historicity breaks into the world in all its contingency and singularity and secularity, and opens it to that mode of life which is in excess of the powers and principalities. . . . For the *ecclesia* is ‘called’ and ‘gathered’ not by the invocation of some ambiguous beyond, but precisely by the pneumatic call of this very *world* as it is being transformed by . . . the irruption of God’s Kingdom. . . . *Ecclesia* occurs as that people which emerge to view as a dynamic movement of *becoming with* the dispossessed other in *identification with Christ*. (In other words, the church does not simply ‘exercise’ an ‘option for the poor’; *ecclesia* happens *as* that very option.)<sup>32</sup>

Kerr’s argument has important implications for how we should live as Christians, and also how we should work. We are called to be in the world, and this means sharing in the life of the world, and also means being defined by this communal living.

Thus, mission is not something we do alongside, or as, our work. Mission is the entirety of our life in the world, journeying alongside others and experiencing transformation as the limitations of the powers and principalities of the world are removed. Thus, individual workers must realize that they are not merely individual workers, but are participants in a larger event. Our work can not leave us separated from the world, and must not involve erecting barriers between us and others. Instead our work should be part of the “dynamic movement of becoming with the dispossessed

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31. Ibid., 188.

32. Ibid., 190-92.

other.” By this movement, this missionary life, we are not only anticipating the new creation, but also participating in the transformation.

## Ecology

As our future hopes are directed towards new creation, we become more concerned about the present creation, and how we are affecting it. Western society has become increasingly aware of the damage that has been done to nature by the human race, and has attempted to introduce changes that will reduce future damage and perhaps even repair damage that has already occurred. Christians should not just affirm this ecological movement, but should also contribute to it in whatever way they can. Indeed, Christians are particularly well-suited to to this task because the eschatological hope of new creation involves all of creation.

Peter Scott is one writer who has made the connection between ecology and eschatology in his article “The Future of Creation.” According to Scott, our eschatological hope must include the fulfilment of not only human nature, but also “non-human nature.” This will lead us to “speak of a common realm of God, nature and humanity in which the actuality and independence of ecological relations are constituted, as dependent and contingent, by the lively actions of the triune God.”<sup>33</sup> Scott concludes by stating that “the future of creation is the consummation by God of nature and humanity. For nature and

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33. Peter Scott, “The Future of Creation: Ecology and Eschatology,” in *The Future as God’s Gift: Explorations in Christian Eschatology*, ed. David Fergusson and Marcel Sarot (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), 94.

humanity are bound together in the incarnation, which is the rationale, origin and destiny of creation.”<sup>34</sup>

Thus, ecological matters are not only a human concern, prompted by a desire to preserve the world for our children and our children’s children, but are matters directly connected to God. It is not our work to preserve creation in a livable state for future generations, for it is the action of God that will eventually bring together nature and humanity. Our present interest in ecology then is to be founded upon our anticipation of our future life. In the new creation, our relationship with nature will not consist of struggle and exploitation, but will be a relationship that has been transformed by God. Thus, as Christians, we should live and work today, in anticipation of our resurrected life, caring for creation. As workers, one simple action towards this goal would be to attempt to make our workplaces less wasteful and more energy-efficient. While this is not a large movement towards caring for creation, it can still be significant, and provides an opportunity for workers to improve how they work in the present.

## Beauty

David Bentley Hart, in his extravagant style, writes about the “undeniable ethical offense in beauty” in *The Beauty of the Infinite*.

There is an unsettling prodigality about the beautiful, something wanton about the way it lavishes itself upon even the most atrocious of settings, its anodyne sweetness often seeming to make the most intolerable of circumstances bearable . . . Beauty seems to promise a reconciliation beyond the contradictions of the moment, one that perhaps places time’s

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34. Ibid., 114.

tragedies within a broader perspective of harmony and meaning, a balance between light and darkness; beauty appears to absolve being of its violences.<sup>35</sup>

The promise of reconciliation that Hart suggests is possible with beauty offers another worthy object of our eschatological anticipation. If beauty is so wanton, we should attempt to mimic that wantonness with our work. The benefits of our work should not be limited to ourselves, or to a select few, but should be available and offered to as many as possible.

However, this universal aspect of beauty is approached by way of the particular. Hart argues that “the eschatological . . . functions as a promise that the verdict of God is on the side of the particular, the name and face of the one lost . . . Which is to say that it is the promise that justice will never forget the other, that the other will always be blessed with an infinite regard and charged with an infinite worth.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, each individual other should be respected and treated fairly in our work. As well, the individual worker can be assured that they are not only a faceless employee, a cog in the machine, but that he or she has value and meaning as a person and as a worker.

In his commentary on the Song of Songs, Robert Jenson offers another perspective as he states that “beauty is realized eschatology, the present glow of the sheer goodness that will be at the end.”<sup>37</sup> We are able to enjoy the present glow of beauty where it appears, and we are also able to create new things which in their own way display beauty.

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35. Hart, *The Beauty of The Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*, 15-16.

36. *Ibid.*, 410-11.

37. Robert W. Jenson, *Song of Songs*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2005), 46.

Jenson suggests that “Beauty is like other anticipations of the end: they are gifts wherever they appear and yet can be simultaneously an assignment for our daily labor.”<sup>38</sup> In our work we should be able to pause to enjoy the gifts of beauty, and also be inspired by beauty, having a goal to aspire towards. This may be similar to creativity, and be lacking for many workers, but where it does appear, it can be a wonderful glimpse of the future.

## Love

The topic of love is almost always included in works of theology, and assumed to be in the background even if it does not play a prominent role. However, it seems appropriate to discuss love explicitly here, as love, and the anticipation of love, provides motivation enough to guide our work all on its own. Of course, love is a motivation for many different varieties of good work. Most people aspire to love what they do, who they work with, and the results of their work. However, our work should be shaped, not by human love which is so variable and temporary, but by the perfect love that God is.

According to Hart, “God’s love is pure positivity and pure activity. His love is an infinite peace and so needs no violence to shape it, no death over which to triumph.”<sup>39</sup> We should strive to express love in our work then as both positive and active, not merely as a response to external factors. It is so oft repeated as to be almost reduced to a cliché, but we should anticipate the perfect love that we will experience by attempting to “love as God loves.”

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38. Ibid.

39. Hart, *The Beauty of The Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*, 167.

Miroslav Volf expresses the idea of divine love in this way: “We, the others—we, the enemies—are embraced by the divine persons who love us with the same love with which they love each other and therefore make space for us within their own eternal embrace.”<sup>40</sup> While we are not capable of emulating this love now, anticipation of the experience of that perfect love can shape how we work and how we understand our work. Our work cannot be an attempt to prove ourselves or to demonstrate our love, but should be a self-less giving. While it remains counter-intuitive, we should struggle to forget ourselves and embrace the other in our work.

## Conclusion

Of course these five items do not represent an exhaustive list of possible ways that we can anticipate our future and consider our work; there are many other themes which may be useful. For example the theme of co-creativity that was so important in chapter 4 can be adapted for these purposes as well. If in the new creation we are freed from the obligations and struggles that characterize our present work, we will be able to express our creativity in our activity then. Anticipating that future freedom to create in our work now could be a useful way to improve our work and perhaps help us to enjoy our work more as well.

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40. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: a Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 129.

Moving beyond the contributions of Volf and Cosden, Pannenberg's concept of anticipation brings us the opportunity to re-situate ourselves within the Christian narrative of history. Rather than just dealing with the past and present, the entire scope of history becomes relevant to our personal lives. Our resurrected existence shapes our present existence, as we realize that our physical bodies and the work that we do are important in the new creation as well as the present one. Workers are provided with an alternative to the normal process of cause and effect. The immediate or long-term effects of human work no longer need to be the central focus, as anticipation of the coming new creation provides a separate source of meaning. The process of anticipation is not a guarantee that we will be able to perform meaningful work, but it is another method we can use to discover meaning in what we already do. For Christians, one aspect of meaningful work can be finding our role in the ongoing drama of history. We know the ending, and we can now move towards it.

A final concern that must be addressed is the question of whether this process of anticipation is actually useful. It is easy to dismiss the idea as being trite and meaningless. Isn't it just another way of saying that "Everything will work out in the end" or "All things work together for good?" Shouldn't we forget about this wishful thinking and actually do something? The response to this line of questioning is found by returning to chapter 5. Do we believe that there is a happy ending to the story of creation? Does the resurrection mean anything for our daily lives? Paul wrote that "if Christ has not been raised, your faith

is futile” (1 Cor. 15:17). However, if Christ has been raised, our faith is valid and productive.

The narrative of history, and the doctrine of new creation, means that our present life is not disconnected from our future life. Creation will be affirmed and transformed, not rejected and destroyed. This transformation means that we can say, with Pannenberg, that the future has important implications for the present. The content of our future life is important in determining the meaning of our present life. Thus, in our work, just as in our life as a whole, we should make sure that the how and why of our present is compatible with our future. We should let the anticipation of our future existence shape our present. We should strive to become workers of hope.

This does not necessarily mean that our work will be dramatically different than the work of others, or change from what it was before. We are still “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (Col. 1:24) in our lives. For most workers, mundane and ordinary work will remain the norm. The anticipation of our activity in the new creation does not promise an immediate transformation of our work, but does allow us to consider ourselves as workers of hope. The work that we do now is not merely a means of survival, or a means of biding time until the end. Our work is connected to our future existence, and is shaped by our future activity in the new creation. Anticipation of our future work is how that future work becomes real in the present. We are who we will be, let us also work as we will work.

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