

## THREE MYTHS OF GOOD HARD WORK

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### ABSTRACT

Work is a large part of life, yet in our generation the church has largely ignored both work and the worker. The result is that three myths about work are prevalent among Christians and damage the church. The first myth is that there is good work and less good work. The second myth is that hard work is good work. The third myth is an outcome of the other two, that the good work of evangelism should not be mixed with economic work. The paper ends by discussing how Luther and Puritans views of work explode these myths and bring perspective to this key part of life.

### THREE MYTHS OF GOOD HARD WORK<sup>1</sup>

Work is one of the most basic of human activities. Whether in hunter/gatherer villages or in the technological societies of the 21st century, work is an integral part of daily existence.

Work can be defined in the aggregate as the way a society provides the goods and services it desires (Friedson, 1990). At the individual level, it is seen as the economic activity by which a person earns a living (Hall, 1986). According to most economists, even those who do not receive a direct wage, such as homemakers, are nevertheless economically rewarded for their labor (Friedson, 1990).

Work takes a significant amount of an individual's time and attention. In the United States employed adults now spend approximately one-third to one-half of their waking hours actually working—and that is not counting time spent preparing for work, traveling to work, thinking about work, or seeking work (England & Whitely, 1990). In other words, work can consume up to a half of our entire life.

Work heavily influences an individual's psychological well-being. For example, in one Gallup survey 83% of the respondents said what they did for a living was an important source of their sense of personal worth (Wuthnow, 1996).

Work can also add significantly to a person's stress level. Some dread their job, feeling that it is meaningless (Franklin, 2001). Others find that dysfunctional relationships with bosses and co-workers add distress to life. Long hours spent working decreases time with the family and can cut into essential health activities such as sleep (Wuthnow, 1996).

The Scriptures talk frequently about work and workers. In Genesis God instructs Adam and Eve to care for the garden. Proverbs is a book for business people, Psalms reflects the inner life of the worker, and characters in the Bible go continuously about their daily tasks from managing large communities (Abraham) to fishing (Peter) and tent making (Paul). Even the apocalypse in Revelation involves the merchants and craftsmen of the world lamenting the fall of Babylon.

Historically, the church also has had much to say about this significant dimension of life. Early church fathers, such as Augustine, discussed work in their theologies, physical work was part of monastic life, and Luther and Calvin preached extensively on occupations. However, in recent generations many of those insights have been lost or ignored. The contemporary evangelical church has little to say about work or the worker. How long has it been since you heard a sermon or at-

tended a Bible study on the subject of work? In a poll of 2,000 regular church attendees, 90% said they had never [emphasis added] heard a sermon or a seminar that applied Biblical principles directly to their work (Sherman & Hendricks, 1987). A literature search for articles on the theology of work published in the last five years, found only two. The message from the church: God isn't interested in what you do for a living as long as you have integrity on the job and tithe your money.

At this point, some readers may be wondering what the problem is. Certainly Christians need to be moral on the job, but does it really matter if they do not know God's view of work?

Yes, it does matter. Theology is a systematic development of the truths of God in an area of life – a truth pattern for practical living (Sherman, 1984). Because the modern church has neglected to develop a contemporary theology of work, Christians have suffered two unfortunate results: one individual, one corporate. Individually, a lack of clear understanding about God's view of work has distorted many Christians' views of themselves and the nature of God. Corporately, this silence has resulted in a significant opportunity for world evangelism being largely overlooked.

Distortion of truth always has serious consequences. Work is a basic human activity, yet the church's silence has allowed Christians to form their own ideas on the subject – and this has cost the church dearly. Specifically, it has led to the prevalence of three damaging myths that Christians have about work.

The first myth is that there is good work, sacred occupations - and everything else. Occupations that are not in Christian organizations or in the helping professions are second-class, fit only for second-class Christians. The 80% of Christians who work in for-profit businesses have had the glory of work removed from their lives so their work life has become spiritually meaningless, a way to mark time until they can do "ministry."

The second myth is that hard work is good in-and-of-itself. Hard work is noble and favored by God. The corollary is that God rewards hard work with financial prosperity. The theological implications of this myth are disturbing and lead to heresies such as the Prosperity Gospel. Many

people think, incorrectly, that this notion originated with Luther and Calvin.

The third myth, which is probably an outcome of the first, is that it is not appropriate to use economic work for the purposes of the good work of evangelization. The consequence of this myth is that a tremendous opening for world evangelism is not being utilized as it could be. Globalization has created an unprecedented opportunity for Christians to spread the gospel to all the world using business skills. Yet remarkably little is said among the churches about this unprecedented opportunity.

The purpose of this paper is to examine these Christian myths in depth and show the consequences of allowing people to believe them. In the final section, we will suggest two propositions that lead toward a more Scriptural view of work for the modern Christian who must deal with the economic systems of the 21st century.

#### **MYTH # 1: THERE IS GOOD WORK AND NOT-SO-GOOD WORK**

When some Christians learn that you are a professor at a Christian college, they apologize when they tell you what they do for a living. They say they are "only" a forensic chemist, or a fireman, or a manager in the DMV, not a pastor or a missionary or working for a Christian organization. This is a reflection of the Christian myth that in the eyes of God some occupations are secular and some are sacred, that there is a value hierarchy of occupations – in short that God approves of some jobs more than others.

This idea comes from the subtle division of the sacred and the secular that is unspoken but pervasive among many Christians. In this myth, vocational ministry – full-time Christian work – is considered more spiritual and therefore more valued by God than other ways of making a living. When it comes to secular occupations, the helping professions such as medicine or teaching are more valued by God. Third on the list of God-approved occupations are those connected to the land, such as farming, or to crafts, particularly hand-made crafts. However God does not value "money making" occupations such as trade or banking or marketing. The figure below repre-

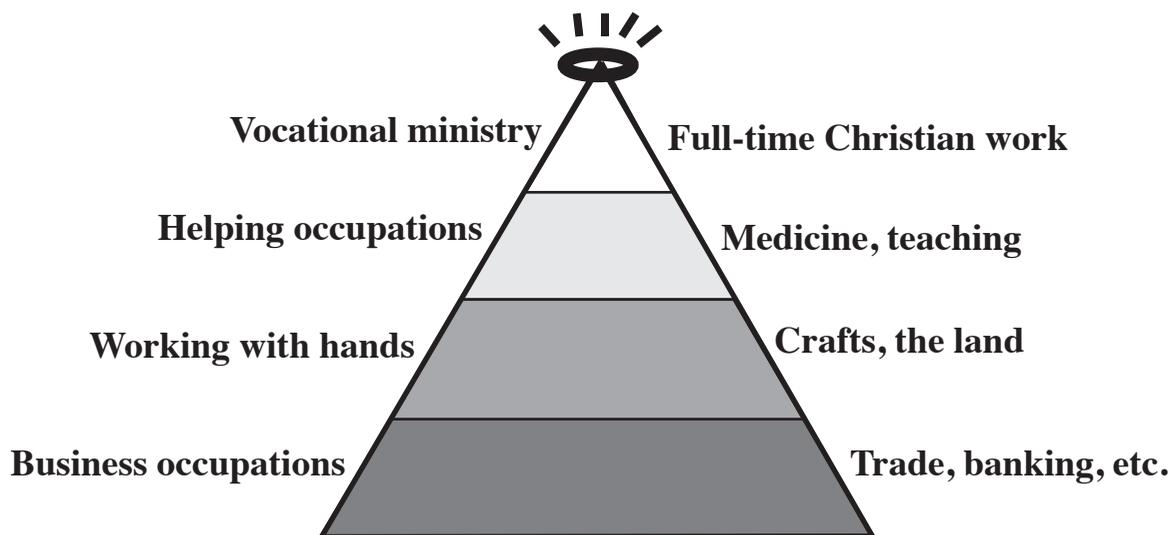
sents this myth.

Many Christians would deny that they think this way but they nevertheless act on these assumptions. For example, the elders of my church set a goal of sending out ten people into full-time Christian ministry in one year. This implied that those people in full-time vocational ministry were in “Christian ministry” and the rest were not. There are many similar examples; the myth of sacred and secular work is insidious in the church.

to treat the worker with fair pay and treatment. Rather, the negative attitudes came from Greek dualism and the sociological impact of slavery (Sherman, 1984). Dualism, which was made popular by Plato, is a variation on the body-mind debate. Dualism maintains that there was a strong division between mind and matter. The realm of eternal ideas, focusing on the mind and spirit, is reality and the source of virtue. The realm of concrete objects and matter, the body, is illusory and the source of the vulgar (Angeles, 1981; Plato,

## Myth #1: Good Work and Not So Good Work

What people think God values, i.e. “*Spiritual Work*”



One of the reasons this myth is so strong is that we inherited tendencies towards dualistic thinking from our church fathers. The first and second century church expanded in a world dominated by Hellenistic culture and the ancient Greeks considered paid work, particularly trade, to be vulgar and degrading because it coarsened the mind for the acquiring of virtue.

This negative attitude towards paid work and business did not come from Scripture. The Bible celebrates work, including business, as a natural part of life and commands the employer

Allegory of the Cave; Republic, Book 7; Cicero Republic). This notion is in direct contrast with the Scriptural view that God made both body and mind/spirit and saw them as a “very good” unity (Genesis 1).

The impact of dualism on work was negative; the wise man shunned paid work in order to keep his mind clear for wisdom. As Aristotle said,

*any occupation, art, or science, which makes the body or soul or mind of the freeman less fit for the practice or*

*exercise of virtue, is vulgar...likewise all paid employments, for they absorb and degrade the mind. (Politics, Book 8, part II).*

The idea that work was vulgar was strengthened by the impact of slavery in the Greco-Roman world. The continuous Roman wars created a never-ending stream of conquered people for the slave markets of the empire. It was relatively inexpensive to buy another human being to do the physical work of life; even a poor Roman could afford a slave or two. This reinforced the notion that a man of wisdom, or at least of property, would not need to labor physically and strengthened the Greek notion that the wise man should not think about economic things. This attitude was particularly pervasive around the time of Christ when approximately half of the population of Rome were slaves to the other half (Scotchmer, 1980).

Unlike the pagan world, the early church gave the slave and the worker value as people. Christ was not a respecter of persons, and slaves and workers were full members of the Church. A Christian could work and be in trade and still be “accepted in the beloved.” Nevertheless, the church fathers were men of their culture, steeped in Greek dualistic learning. One of the consequences of this was the rise of the notion that the clergy who were doing God’s work, work of the spirit, were of higher status than the laity who were working in secular occupations, work of the world. Cyprian for example, argued that the spiritual apostolic succession from Peter promoted the clergy to spiritual heights far above the laity. Ignatius considered the clergy to be the pure mediators between God and the impure laity (Schaff, 1996).

Another consequence was the notion that the aesthetic focusing on the interior life was superior to living a life of worldly affairs. Origen, for example, proposed two types of Godliness: a lower one that applied to all Christians and a higher one that applied to saints and those who separated from worldly affairs and devoted themselves to prayer (Schaff, 1996). Even Augustine contended that manual labor, toil, was part of the curse that Christ redeemed us from. Even so, he felt that it

was better to do manual labor and occupy one’s mind with praise to God, than to work with one’s mind and occupy it with the pursuit of riches (Augustine, [401] 1999). These ideas are Greek philosophy dressed up in Christian vocabulary (Sherman, 1984).

This stress on a division between clergy and laity and on the undesirability of Christians to occupy their mind with trade became part of what Geisler calls the Two-World View (Geisler, 1982). This view argues that a Christian’s life is in compartments; that his or her work world is separate from the church and ministry world and the second is what God really cares about. Geisler says that the Two-World View is the most prevalent heresy among evangelicals today (Geisler, 1982),

The Two World View, one contemporary form of dualism, results in two errors that deprive many Christians of meaning in the large portion of their life given to work:

- Error 1: God is removed from secular work and doesn’t care much about it. Therefore, Christians can do what they want in that compartment of life. We can be lazy, or overwork with impunity, as far as God is concerned. More sadly, God’s indifference to our job means that our secular work has no spiritual meaning as long as we maintain integrity. The job becomes a daily grind or a guilty pleasure.
- Error 2: what God really does care about is the work we do in the church and ministry compartments of our life. Secular work only cuts into time that might otherwise be spent serving God. Therefore the best kind of work for a person who really desires to “serve the Lord” is a Christian ministry or at least a helping profession. Any other occupation does not further the kingdom of God.

Several disturbing implications result from this view. Christ commanded us to “Abide in Me and I in you” (John 15: 4) but the Two-World

View argues that He is indifferent to our economic life if it is in other than ministry. This creates serious questions for the 80% of Christians who work in for-profit jobs. How can they give their entire work life to Christ if He doesn't want their work life? Is the purpose of work to mark time until the Christian can volunteer at church? Is it to make money so he or she can write checks to the church? Do second-class occupations mean there are second-class Christians? Christians in business are left floundering rather than seeing the glory of God in their occupation.

The Two-World View has also left the contemporary church with a largely unacknowledged prejudice against secular work—particularly busi-

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ness. Christian universities downplay or ignore their business schools, churches glorify pastors and missionaries. Lay members apologize that they are “only” lawyers or real estate agents.

Martin Luther saw the danger of this heresy and vigorously opposed it, arguing that God is the Lord of our entire un compartmentalized existence. Later we will explore his arguments more fully and discuss how Christians can implement a holistic approach to their work life.

#### **MYTH # 2: HARD WORK IS GOOD WORK**

The myth that hard work is good work is, in some ways, the opposite of the Two-World View, the contemporary dualism described above. This view, commonly called the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE), embodies the notion that hard work for its own sake is the core of moral life, a measure

of worth and virtue, and a way to give glory to God (Cherrington, 1980; Terkel, 1974). Work, including business, is ennobling, necessary for human development, and inherently valuable ((Nord, Brief, Atieh, & Doherty, 1990). A man or woman becomes a better person by the simple act of working hard at his or her profession (Moorhouse, 1987; Furnham, 1990). According to Weber, labor is even a sign of salvation (Weber, 1958 [1920]).

This notion is deeply ingrained in western thinking and many people, including Christians, unconsciously accept it without reservation. It is almost instinctive for politicians to appeal to the PWE as the ethic “that made our country great.”

Distortion of truth always has serious consequences. Work is a basic human activity, yet the church's silence has allowed Christians to form their own ideas on the subject — and this has cost the church dearly.

Business executives and consultants talk about work as a way to develop people. Professors feel that students should work at their studies as if scholarship was ennobling, necessary for human development, and valuable for its own sake.

Not only are the values associated with the PWE ingrained in society, they are widely reflected in the organizational literature. Even a short consideration indicates that much theory and advice to managers is based on the premise that “work is somehow noble, and that psychologically engaging work is a necessary condition for human development” (Nord et. al., 1990: 25). Some scholars go so far as to argue that PWE assumptions underlie most of western research on organizations (e.g. Moorhouse, 1986; Robertson, 1990).

This myth can be seen as a reaction to the dualistic notion that physical work or trade destroys virtue. However it also lends itself to great errors,

two of which were popularized by Max Weber in his influential book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber asserted that according to the theology of Luther and Calvin, financial wealth was a sign of favor from God and that labor was a means of salvation (Weber, 1958 [1920]). Both of these ideas are not Biblical, nor, incidentally can they be found in the theology of Luther and Calvin.<sup>2</sup>

According to Weber, the Protestants said that wealth was a mark of God's favor. Some Christians extend this notion to the idea that God shows His approval for hard work by giving financial prosperity to the worker. Thus, business success becomes a mark of God's special favor and a mark of special spirituality on the part of the prosperous person. Prosperity Theology as it is called, is as much a heresy as the Two-World View (Chewning, Eby, & Roels, 1990), and most evangelicals rightly reject it.

However there is a more subtle error found in this idea: that it is virtuous to gain wealth. The PWE suggests that through work and effort the worthy individual can achieve pride in his or herself, a sense of accomplishment, and also wealth ((Moorhouse, 1987). From there it is an easy step to the conclusion that wealth is a mark of worth (Nord et al., 1990). It is just a little step further to the notion that it is permissible to gain wealth by any means and that one is virtuous to do so.

This can be an excuse for many things. For example, it is OK to neglect one's family in order to provide for them. It is OK to be a little dishonest in order to gain money, and so forth.

The myth of the PWE also lends itself to work taking the place of God. For example, Weber asserted that labor was a means, or a sign, of salvation. Specifically he said:

*Good works... are indispensable as a sign of election. They are the technical means, not of purchasing salvation but of getting rid of the fear of damnation. . . Thus the Calvinist, as it is sometime put, himself creates his own salvation, or, as would be more correct, the conviction of it (1920:115).*

Many Christians would recoil from the notion that work creates salvation, but they act

unconsciously as if it does. They work as if God is pleased with them if they work long hours and is displeased if they do not. Busyness is epidemic in our society; illness has become our only culturally acceptable reason to take time off work (Muller, 1999). This seems to be particularly true if the work is full time vocational ministry. The overworked pastor is a cliché.

However, this notion is not scriptural. A friend told me a story. She was discussing work with other Christian professors and suddenly realized that they all were trying to top each other in how hard they worked – “I work six days a week,” “I work 6 ½ days a week.” “This is crazy,” she thought. “If God has given us everything we need for life and Godliness (II Pet.1:3), has He not given us time for rest and worship?”

Indeed He has. One of the blessings that God gave his people is Sabbath, a rest. The early church fathers referred to this as *Otium Santum* or holy leisure (Foster, 1978). By this they meant a sense of balance in the life, an ability to be at peace through the activities of the day, an ability to rest and take time to enjoy beauty and an ability to pace oneself (Diddams, Surdyk, & Daniels, n.d.). Overwork is not God's plan for His people.

Another disturbing result of the myth that hard work is good is that work has become an idol in the lives of many Christians, replacing God as a source of meaning and coherence (Wuthnow, 1996). If, as the PWE says, work is the core of moral life (Moorhouse, 1987) the Scripture is not. If work is our self worth (Cherrington, 1980) then God is not. If work is fundamental to social identity (Weber, 1958 [1920]) then God is not. It is easy in the middle of business and rush to make work our idol. But it is not Biblical to do so.

### **MYTH # 3: THE GOOD WORK SHOULD NOT MIX WITH ECONOMIC WORK**

The two myths discussed have created disturbing disconnects between the economic life of Christians and the commandments of Christ in Scripture. Christ's last commandment “Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations...” (Matthew 28:19) has also been greatly hindered by these myths.

Possibly because of the prejudices created

by the Two-World View, models of world evangelism in the contemporary church have been greatly restricted. For the past 150 years, the chief model for world evangelism has been voluntary financial support for a professional class of missionaries (Glover, 1960).

As a daughter of missionaries, I have seen God accomplish much through this means. However, financing professional missionaries through voluntary donations has disadvantages. It is not easy for a missionary to “raise support” and much time and energy is spent traveling and visiting scattered “partners” (Roth, 2000). The average total giving of the American Christian family to missions – or charity of any kind – is currently less than 3% of per capita income (Blomberg, 1999). Mission agencies, not to mention the individual missionary, must spend between 5-15% of their revenue to raise funds (Dahlgren, 2001). Some spend much more. This model might be a familiar one but the church should also search out other methods to spread the good news of the gospel.

A different model combines economic work with the good work of evangelism. The global economic system exists and the business person who is trained to create economic value in a community is welcome, even in countries where career missionaries are not. At the same time, except for sending people to teach English as a foreign language (EFL), the Western evangelical church is largely quiet about this model, neither understanding it well nor understanding how to support Christians within it (Rundle, 2000). Thus, an unusually potent opportunity for world evangelism is largely being overlooked by the Church.

There are individual Christians who have seized this opportunity. Christian professionals take jobs overseas with the intention of supporting themselves and witnessing to the nationals in their sphere of influence. Other Christians support micro-enterprises in order to help the poor or give economic support to the church in certain countries. There are also career missionaries who have started businesses in order to legally enter or stay in countries that are closed to the Gospel (Clarke, 1997). There are successes and failures within each model. But as a body, the Church has not stood behind these people with encourage-

ment and prayer.

Models that mix economic work and cross cultural evangelism have deep historic and Biblical roots; the apostle Paul paid his own way on his missionary journeys by making tents (Acts 18:3). In the history of the church, Christian groups have succeeded in bringing the Gospel to their generation using various economic models – businesses for God. Two such groups are the Moravians and the Basel Mission Society. We will explore each model in turn.

### **MODEL 1: BUSINESS FOR GOD AS A FORUM FOR EVANGELISM**

The Moravians were an 18th century community of Christians from Saxony who deliberately created businesses in order to fund their missionary efforts. The idea was that a Moravian would work in the group’s economic endeavors in Europe for a time and be a full-time missionary for a time. This model worked successfully for several hundred years.

The Moravians created homeland businesses to fund missionary efforts. They also used business to facilitate evangelism. A career missionary typically takes much time to earn the trust of his or her neighbors and social acquaintances. However a person working in a viable business is part of the daily life of the community from the beginning.

The Moravians used enterprise as a deliberate tactic to become part of the life of the community (Danker, 1971). They typically entered a new field by sending craftsmen who could support themselves and legitimately develop a business. For example, in 1754 they sent two skilled tailors to Surinam as missionaries. The tailor shop they established soon became known for its quality work, and the men had so many customers they hired local slaves to help. As the group sat together sewing, the slaves heard about Christ, became Christians, and were disciplined. A brother in Moravia sent some cloth to sell and eventually came out to help sell more. A department store developed. The store became a model of loving, honest service. This example helped train new believers in a Christian attitude to work and also provided a living for church members who

needed a second chance.

The Brethren found this business so beneficial to the growing church that in 1768 they formed a trading company, C. Kersten & Co. Christoph Kersten was one of the original missionaries (C. Kersten home page, 2001) but the full name of the company can be translated “Christ-bearer Christian and Company.” For generations, C. Kersten was the financial backbone of the Moravian missions in Surinam. Today it is the largest trading company in Surinam and provides jobs for over 1,000 people (C. Kersten home page, 2001). Every new employee is informed of the missionary purpose of the firm. C. Kersten has had employee profit-sharing since 1910 and provided old age pensions and medical insurance for its employees when such ideas were unheard of elsewhere. Today it runs a large department store, a taxi company, an agency for heavy tractors and earth moving equipment, an HMO and a number of other enterprises (C. Kersten home page, 2001). For over two hundred years it has had the reputation of supporting the mission not only by the profits it earns but by the manner in which it earns them (Danker, 1971).

## **MODEL 2: BUSINESS FOR GOD CAN HELP STRENGTHEN AND BUILD THE CHURCH.**

The Swiss based Basel Mission Society used trade as a tool to strengthen the church in India and Africa (Danker, 1971). In the 19th century, it created a weaving works and a tile factory in India as a way of providing work for Christians who had been thrown out of their caste for accepting Christ. This for-profit enterprise had a strong influence on the church as new Christians learned by practical demonstration that “godliness is profitable in all things, having promise not only for the life to come, but already for this present one” (Jahresbericht, [1853] 1971). The cloth and tiles produced were the best in the district. Fifty percent of the weavers were widows with no other method of support. The mission had a credit union and a health insurance plan for their employees, long before such things became common. They freely trained apprentices who were then able to set up their own small businesses

and prosper (Danker, 1971). Young Christians watched as the day-to-day activities of life were dealt with in a way that honored God, and the church became stronger because of it.

When the mission entered Africa, they created the Basel Trading Company with the stated intention of demonstrating that the power of the gospel transforms every part of life. In 1889, the company introduced cocoa into Ghana and soon the country was the leading cocoa producer in the world. The resulting economic boom helped develop a class of independent Christian farmers and for several generations the church was able to support its pastors with little help from the mission. This also provided an economic base for the region so that the gin and schnapps trade, so detrimental to other parts of Africa, was forced out (Danker, 1971). But the most far-reaching effect of the company was that of being a graphic example of the power of the Gospel to work in daily affairs. The members of the Trading Company demonstrated “faith active in love” in the marketplace and thus facilitated the work of evangelism and the growth of the church (Danker, 1971).

The Moravians and the Basel Mission Society demonstrate that when a Godly business is combined with evangelism, it can be a powerful forum for the gospel and can strengthen the resulting church. These economic models greatly advanced the cause of Christ in those generations. With the globalization of the world economy there is a great opportunity to use similar models in our generation. However, possibly because of the prejudice in the Western church that profit-based businesses are unspiritual, the opportunity to send Christian businesspeople to the world has not been utilized as it could be. Many skilled workers do not realize the opportunity is there and the church is not telling them. Career missionaries might understand the opportunity but don’t understand how business works or how to use it to advantage (Taylor, 1998).

Some agencies do exist to help the missionary entrepreneur. YWAM, for example, sends teams of skilled businesspeople to research an area for possible businesses for God (Roth, 2001). However, a more systematic and concerted effort on the part of the church to send out already

successful businesspeople could reap benefits for this generation and generations to come.

### BALANCING THE MYTHS

Ideas are powerful. Greek dualism, translated through the church fathers, led to compartmental thinking in the contemporary church – the idea that what Christians do at work is separate from their spiritual lives at church. Weber and others' idea that work was ennobling, personified by the PWE, led some Christians to think that wealth was a sign of God's favor or they could make money any way they pleased. Others felt they could please God by inordinate work or replace God entirely with work. Both myths led to error and to resistance on the part of the Church to evangelize using the global economy.

There are, however, other ideas that bring balance to these extremes. It is beyond the scope of this paper to develop an entire truth system of work. However, in the following section two balancing propositions will be presented. We invite our fellow searchers to build on and add to these.

### PROPOSITION 1: THE GLORY OF WORK IS THE GLORY OF GOD

It was Martin Luther who most influentially contradicted the compartmentalization of work and spiritual activities by arguing that Scripture shows God as a working God, interested in all aspects of human lives including work (Sherman & Hendricks, 1987). God's interest and pleasure creates eternal significance in the products of a Christian's mind and hand, regardless of what occupation the Christian is in (Wingren, 1957). Several key ideas are expressed in these statements.

First, God Himself works and He works in the physical world. God's revelation of Himself in Scripture declares that He works in both the physical and the spiritual realm. Scripturally, there is no value dichotomy between the realms. God created the physical universe of matter which He saw as excellent in every way (Genesis 1:31). God takes physical care of man and nature (Psalm 104), and establishes physical governments and authority (Daniel 5: 21; Romans 13). Christ's

work of salvation redeems the body as well as the spirit (I Corinthians 15). He sustains the seen (matter) and unseen (spirit) universe (Colossians 1:16-18). The Holy Spirit works as helper to the embodied saints (John 14:16) and gives spiritual gifts that are to be used in the physical world (I Corinthians 12). These actions of the Godhead unite body and the spirit under the blessing of God.

As shown above, Scripture also reveals God as a worker. In fact, when God was on earth, he was a small business owner, working with both his hands and his mind and undoubtedly making a profit. Many of His disciples, notably James, John, Andrew, Peter and Nathaniel were successful businesspeople.

The implication is that honest work, including business, has intrinsic value.

"It is a wonderful thing," said Hugh Latimer, "that the Savior of the world... was not ashamed to labor... Here he did sanctify all manner of occupations."<sup>3</sup> Industrial-Organizational psychologists argue that a valued job positively benefits an individual's mental health and boosts his or her self-esteem (Roberson, 1990). Luther argued that God's pleasure in work adds even more value to the value of a valued job and can create value in a job that is not valued.

Second, work can be a means of expressing love. Luther argued that both Christians and non-Christians have occupations that provide for their own and their family's economic needs as the Scriptures required. However, only a Christian could be additionally called by God to a vocation - a relationship with the people around him that reflects God's work in the earthly sphere (Sherman & Hendricks, 1987). A vocation could be either economic or social. For example, a God-called vocation as a son would be as a chaste, moderate, and wise young man that brought joy to his parents (Wingren, 1957).

In the economic sphere, vocation was a summons to serve one's neighbor – one's employer, employee, supplier, co-worker, or customer – in *Agape* love. As God moved in the human heart to overcome the ego-centered life, all honest occupations could become vocations (Sherman, 1984) thus fulfilling Christ's command to love each other. What set vocation apart from occupation

was relationship based in love.

Honest work, if used as vocation, could also be a means of expressing love to God, a means of worship reflecting God's glory. As William Law ([1728] 1955:31) explained:

*The profession of a clergyman is a holy profession because it is a ministration in holy things, but worldly business is to be made holy unto the Lord by being done as a service to Him and in conformity to His Divine will. For as all men, and all things in the world truly belong unto God, as any places, things, or persons, that are devoted to the Divine, so all things are to be used, and all persons are to act in their several states and employments, for the glory of God.*

This sanctifying of all employment allowed the blessing of God in every part of life. It followed that God's grace could be found in everything, even daily chores. Mundane tasks such as sweeping the house or washing diapers could be done as a service to God and a means of His blessing. Luther said:

*Our natural reason...takes a look at... life...and says "alas, must I rock the baby, wash its diapers...labor at my trade?" What then does the Christian faith say to this? It opens its eyes, looks upon all these insignificant, distasteful, and despised duties in the Spirit and is aware that they are all adorned with divine approval as with the costliest gold and jewels....When a father goes ahead and washes diapers...God, with all his angels and creatures is smiling – not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith.<sup>4</sup>*

## **PROPOSITION 2: DO ALL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD**

Our contemporary world is experiencing extensive economic and social change. During a previous time of upheaval another group of Christians, the Puritans, created a systematic the-

ology of work based on Scripture. Their insights might prove helpful to us.

Packer (1990) sets the age of English Puritanism between the years 1550 and 1700. This was also roughly the time of the English Industrial Revolution, one of the most radical upheavals in the history of commerce and one that transformed English society to its core (Tawney, 1926). During the Industrial Revolution, commerce changed from an agrarian community affair, participated in between neighbors, to an impersonal, complex, national and international trade system (V. Smith, 1997) driven by the invisible hand of the market (A. Smith, [1776] 1937). As in our present day, this change was triggered by technological advances – the spinning jenny, the steam engine, the application of science to agriculture – and was facilitated by the development of an effective central bank and credit system (Kreis, 2001).

The Puritans vigorously attempted to integrate their saving faith in Christ into every part of their life. Since in their day, as in ours, the pursuit of a living made up a significant part of life, they had a great deal to say about the ethics of work and business (Packer, 1990).

Faced with the practical need to pursue a living in a society that was rapidly moving away from the ideas of commercial activity based on moral conduct, the Puritans sought God's truth (V. Smith, 1997). Several precepts they developed are discussed below.

### THE APPROPRIATE MOTIVES FOR WORK

According to the Puritans, gaining wealth was not a proper motive for work, nor should the Christian use work as a means for gratifying selfish ambition. The purpose of work was not even to make a living for one's family. The appropriate rewards of work were spiritual and moral: work was to glorify God and benefit society. William Perkins expressed this clearly:

*Some men will say perchance: What, must we not labor in our callings to maintain our families? I answer: this must be done: but this is not the scope and end of our lives. The true end of our lives is to do service to God in serving of men.<sup>5</sup>*

If the Christian's job is stewardship to God then financial rewards may, or may not, follow. The choice is up to God. If God decides to bless work with prosperity it is His grace, not human merit, that produces the blessing (Packer, 1990). The important point here is not that economic benefits were unimportant to the Puritans, but rather that these had little to do with the reasons to work. Income or wealth were the by-product of work, not the goal. The goal was to show love and to create close integration between oneself, one's God, and one's neighbor. Self-interest had no place in the pursuit of the Christian's calling before God (Ryken, 1986).

Another implication of seeing love for God and neighbor as a motive for work was that love should guide one's choice of vocation. A man or woman should choose the employment that most honors God and benefits his or her neighbor. As Richard Baxter stated:

*Choose that employment or calling in which you may be most serviceable to God. Choose not that in which you may be most rich or honorable in the world; but that in which you may do most good, and best escape sinning.*<sup>6</sup>

The motive of the Christian worker was to attend to the glory of God and the good of society. Any other outcome was secondary.

#### MODERATION IN WORK

The Puritans scorned idleness and praised diligence and competence as honoring to God (Packer, 1990, Sayers, 1974) but they did not worship work. Rather, they strove to be moderate in all things, including time and attention spent on the job.

For the Puritan, a Christian was to work with zeal and be good at what he or she did, but not give his or her soul to work. For example, the Puritans had no sympathy for the Christian who took a second job to increase his income. That was covetousness (Ryken, 1986). Likewise, the Christian was not to set his heart on his vocation, even if he enjoyed it very much. That would make the job an idol. Rather, his heart was to be set on God. Finally, the Christian was to be careful not to allow his or her immoderate care about the job

surpass the limits of Godliness. Worry and fret about one's job showed a lack of trust in the Lord. Philip Stubbs, for example, said:

*So far from covetousness and from immoderate care would the Lord have us that we ought not this day to care for tomorrow, for (saith he) sufficient to the day is the travail of the same.*

The Puritan view of work was that it was necessary, God-given, and pleasant. Work was not toilsome labor because even the most mundane of tasks could be done to the glory of God. Furthermore, God gave each person a calling that allowed him or her to create value for others and serve his or her neighbor. This was the appropriate motive to work. However, even a God-given calling was not to become so important that it became an idol for the Christian. Moderation in work, as in all things, brought glory to God and honored Him.

#### CONCLUSION

The Christian church has abdicated its authority in discussing a significant portion of life and the result is that three damaging myths about work have become pervasive. Two of these myths amount to heresy in some ways and the third is limiting the ways Christians bring hope to the world.

Understanding that there is no difference in God's eyes between sacred and secular occupations allows a Christian to find meaning and value in every honest occupation. Whatever the form of work, a Christian can have joy in what he or she does. Further, he or she can have a vocation – can use the job to serve others in love. Rather than making work an idol, or the focus of worry, the Christian focuses on God. This balance in work and spirit permits a Christian to be genuine when he tells the people around him that God is relevant in every aspect of life. It opens up possibilities for cross-cultural evangelism that might not otherwise be considered, let alone utilized.

May God give His church insight into these things.

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