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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah states that what today’s worker needs is a “reappropriation of the idea of vocation or calling, a return in a new way to the idea of work as a contribution to the good of all and not merely as a means to one’s own advancement.”¹ Our word “vocation” comes from the Latin *vocatio*, which is derived from the verb *vocare*, meaning “to call.” The English equivalent of this word is the noun “call,” or more precisely, “calling.”² Arguably, these terms enjoy wider circulation today than ever before in history. This is in large part due to the production of a vast body of literature from previous centuries among various Christian traditions, aimed at developing a “doctrine” of vocation. However, certain expressions change over time according to the context and period in which they are employed, and there is a clear loss of theological meaning behind the terms “vocation” and “calling” today. Moreover, within the smaller field of theological approaches to the concept of vocation there remains a great deal of confusion about what constitutes a calling, and what ultimate significance can be attributed to one’s calling.

This work aims to establish the eschatological significance of all human vocations within the Kingdom of God. The plan of this thesis attempts to follow the logic of the inquiry by way of an interdisciplinary approach. In Chapter 2, I

² Throughout this work, the terms “calling” and “vocation” will be used synonymously. The precise meaning of these terms will be examined more thoroughly below.
present the biblical teaching on vocation by surveying Old and New testament usages of the term “vocation,” and by specifically studying 1 Corinthians 7, a chapter of particular importance for this work. In Chapter 3, I review and assess the development or evolution of the Christian concept of vocation throughout the centuries. This historical survey narrows the scope of inquiry by attempting to discern some development within the history of vocational theology that contributes specifically to the understanding of all callings as eternally significant. Finally in Chapter 4, I argue that an eschatological perspective is indispensable for a vocational theology that ascribes authentic value to all callings. To this end, I consider both the scope of Christ’s redemptive work, and the eschatological end of the created world, for in the broad scope of redemption and the essential continuity between the present and future creation there is reason to assert that work in this world, secular or sacred, has lasting value. I also reexamine the very terms “sacred” and “secular” in an effort to shed light on the essential nature of all vocations within the Kingdom of God; vocations that share a fundamental import, regardless of the sphere in which they are exercised.

It is important to note that this work does not seek to deal with every sense in which the terms “vocation” and “calling” can be applied, as the scriptural and popular usage speak variously of our calling as parents, spouses, and dutiful citizens. The main focus of this thesis is the doctrine of vocation or calling as it relates to human work – understood in the most general sense. This notion of work as human effort directed at producing or providing goods, services or both includes, but is by no means limited to more specific notions of “paid employment,” “career,” or “occupation.”

The literature I have under review consists largely of sermons, commentaries, tracts, and treatises, many of which were written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries during a time of piqued interest in formulating a
doctrine of vocation. This literature is so important and central to this work that it will be examined separately and thoroughly below. It is the literature of modern scholarship on the doctrine of vocation that is under survey at this point.

Shaping much modern scholarship on the Protestant doctrine of vocation has been the work of the German sociologist Max Weber, whose *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus (The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism)* of 1904 contained a thesis that proposed a causal relationship between a distinctly Protestant work ethic and the successful growth of capitalism.³ Weber argued that the specifically Calvinistic doctrine of calling, with its emphases on the legitimacy of secular work and the value of diligence created a fertile soil for capitalistic enterprise, and ultimately the triumph of a capitalist economy in the West. Weber’s thesis has been extremely influential in shaping the discussion of the Protestant doctrine of calling ever since. Ernst Troeltsch’s *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, appearing eight years later, accepted Weber’s conclusion regarding the relationship of Protestantism to capitalism, and focused on the role of Calvinism in the development of capitalism.⁴ R.H. Tawney’s famous *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* likewise accepted Weber’s thesis, with the qualification that Weber’s insistence on the unique role of Calvinism in cultivating capitalism was unfounded.⁵

Weber’s thesis has not been without its critics. Many scholars accused Weber of characterizing Calvinism by failing to truly understand Calvinistic theology, and by oversimplifying Calvinism as one wholly unified movement within Protestantism. Among this school of thought is H.M. Robertson, whose

Aspects of the Rise of Economic Individualism bears the subtitle, “A Criticism of Max Weber and His School.” Robertson proposed that the Weber thesis failed to capture the complexity of the Protestant doctrine of calling, primarily as a result of Weber’s lack of historical method. Albert Hyma charges Weber with creating a Calvinism that is so broad that it is unrecognizable, noting the fact that Weber cites both John Wesley and Benjamin Franklin as examples of Calvinist proponents of the doctrine of calling. Peter Ghosh has recently argued that Weber’s entire thesis was not constructed upon empirical evidence, but formulated by Weber according to his own concept of “ascetic Protestantism” – a new and modern concept popular in Weber’s own day. Examining Calvinism as a social force following the sixteenth century, Alister McGrath insists that not only Weber, but the scholarly community that affirms his thesis generally lacks the necessary theological equipment to justify their conclusions at a theoretical level.

There have been a number of modern attempts from theologically-oriented authors to study the doctrine of calling, without direct concern for the relationship between calling and capitalism. Some of these works conclude that the doctrine of calling is either impractical in today’s modern work world, or simply a theological construct of the Reformers, who essentially engaged in eisogesis. Jacques Ellul deals with the doctrine of calling, and concludes that work is simply part of the “order of necessity” and possesses no transcendent value whatsoever. Miroslav Volf, while rejecting Ellul’s pessimism regarding the significance of human work, has argued that the concept of calling is an insufficient doctrine.

worthy of continued consideration today. Gary D. Badcock submits that while the doctrine of calling has value for today, it is impossible to conclude that work has anything more than derivative religious significance.

Various other scholars have more or less accepted the basic elements of the historic Protestant view of calling, and have attempted to appropriate this view in evaluating modern work structures. Lee Hardy, in his work, *The Fabric of This World*, briefly examines the history and meaning of calling, and then proceeds to suggest various industrial and management structures for work; structures that Hardy argues would provide for more meaningful experiences in work that would enable workers to see the religious significance of their work more clearly. Also representative of this approach is Robert Michaelsen’s treatment of vocational theology in modern work structures entitled, “Work and Vocation in American Industrial Society,” and W.R. Forrester’s *Christian Vocation* – a work composed of a series of lectures given at New College, Edinburgh.

From the literature surveyed above, three conclusions may be reached. First, there is extensive interest across a broad spectrum of scholars (religious or otherwise) in the general concept of vocational theology. Second, there seems to be no consensus on the value of vocational theology. Third, among those who do ascribe value to formulating a theology of vocation, there has been little effort to frame the discussion in eschatological terms that seek to address the question of the value of human vocation beyond the temporal. This thesis represents an effort to present a vocational theology that is biblical and historically rooted, yet is also

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rooted in the New Testament’s eschatology, and thus a vocational theology that establishes the eschatological significance of human vocation. It is to the study of the concept of vocation in Scripture that this work now turns.
CHAPTER 2
VOCATION IN SCRIPTURE

Old and New Testament Regular Usage of Vocation

Summons and Choosing

The Hebrew verb qar’a, “to call” is one of the more frequently occurring words in the Old Testament, and is used numerous ways; yet it is safe to say that the Old Testament does not specifically speak of work as a vocation or calling. There are essentially two uses of the verb qar’a when it is used to refer to the action of God.

The first main use of “calling” in the Old Testament is that of a summons or invitation. God calls Israel to everything from feasts to times of repentance.\(^\text{15}\) At times the call can be quite narrow, such as the summons of an individual by name, as in the cases of Moses and Samuel.\(^\text{16}\) The second major use of the verb qar’a and its cognates in the Old Testament carries with it the sense of choosing, or election. The Old Testament people of God are referred to as a nation that God has chosen, by means of His calling them.\(^\text{17}\) Elsewhere the verb denotes God’s election of an individual to a particular office.\(^\text{18}\) This calling is oftentimes portrayed as a deliberate choosing by God for the purpose of salvation.

The New Testament terms for calling likewise carry this double meaning of summons and choosing. The Greek terms kaleō, klētos, and klēsis all speak at

\(^{15}\) 1 Sam. 16:3; Jer. 3:12; Zech. 7:13; Isa. 22:12; 50:12.
\(^{16}\) Ex. 3:4; 1 Sam. 3:4ff.
\(^{17}\) Deut. 28:10; 2 Chron. 7:14; Isa. 43:1; Jer. 14:9; Dan. 9:18; Hos. 11:1.
\(^{18}\) Ex. 31:2; Num. 1:16.
times of a general invitation, often in reference to the preaching and teaching of the gospel. This sense is evident in Jesus’ assertion that many are “called” (klētoi), and yet few are chosen.\(^{19}\) A similar use of “called” is employed in the parables of the great banquet, where nine times kaleō signifies a general invitation.\(^{20}\) The “called” in these passages are those who have been invited. They form a larger company than those who respond, the “chosen” (eklēktoi).

The central meaning of calling in these passages is oftentimes referred to as the external or general call of the gospel. This general call is the indiscriminate presentation of salvation in Christ to all, together with an earnest exhortation to accept Christ by faith.\(^{21}\)

It is in the Epistles and book of Revelation that the concept of calling as “choosing” or “election” receives its fullest expression. Here again the meaning of the verb “to call” and the noun “calling” go beyond simply invitation, to point to the act of God which secures a response to the invitation. This is oftentimes referred to as the effectual call of the Holy Spirit, who effectively evokes faith through the general call of the gospel.\(^{22}\) By means of this calling, the Holy Spirit “unites men to Christ according to God’s gracious purpose in election.”\(^{23}\)

So the “called” (klētoi) are those who have been chosen by God as the subjects of this work of the Holy Spirit.\(^{24}\) Paul uses kalēo twenty nine times, klēsis eight times, and klētos seven times, mostly in reference to the divine calling – the “process by which God calls those, whom he has already elected and appointed, out of their

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\(^{19}\) Mt. 20:16; 22:14.

\(^{20}\) Lk. 14:16-25.


\(^{22}\) See Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 1:9; Gal. 1:15; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 2:9.


\(^{24}\) See Rom. 1:6, 7; 8:28; 1 Cor. 1:24; Jude 1; Rev. 17:14.
bondage to this world, so that he may justify and sanctify them…and bring them into His service.”

Two features of this New Testament usage of “call” as choosing are noteworthy. First, the call is rooted entirely in God’s decision and initiative. God’s call is not influenced by human preconditions, nor is it dependent upon any work that man does. The participial constructions in Paul’s language emphasize this divine initiative by speaking singularly of the God who unilaterally calls, as the one “who calls” (*kalountos*), and “who called” (*kalesantos*, and elsewhere, *ton kalesanta*). Secondly, the call which is synonymous with choosing in Paul is thoroughly Christocentric. The call of God is a call that comes by way of the gospel of Christ, and the call is to Christ himself. This idea is expressed in numerous ways. At times Paul explicitly mentions Christ when speaking of the calling, such as the call to fellowship with Christ, to peace in Christ, and to sanctification and glory in Christ. Most times however, the context itself makes clear that the call is rooted in the person and work of Christ.

Communal Focus

Essential to grasping the scope of both the Old and New Testament terms for “call” and “calling” is recognition of the central focus on the corporate identity of the people of God. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew *qar’a* refers to the calling (as “summons” and “choosing”) of individuals, and corporate entities such as the nation of Israel. Yet even in the cases of individual calling, there seems always to be the larger, corporate community in view. Abraham receives

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26 Rom. 9:11, 16; 2 Tim. 1:9.
27 1 Thess. 2:12; Gal. 1:16 and 1 Pet 1:15. Coenen, 275.
28 1 Cor. 1:9
29 Col. 3:15
30 2 Thess. 2:13, 14; Phil. 3:14.
31 Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:18; 1 Thess. 2:12; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 1:9.
his calling from God for the purpose of establishing the people of God. 

God’s call to Moses is no doubt individualistic in one sense, but is from the outset connected to God’s purposes for His people as a corporate identity. Through Moses, God calls Bezalel and Aholiab as individual workmen to build the tabernacle, its contents, and the furnishings, all for the larger purpose of Israel’s worship. Samuel’s calling to the office of prophet is for the benefit of the nation of Israel, which needed to hear from the Lord through a spokesman. The same principle can in fact be seen in various epochs of redemptive history in which God calls individuals. This emphasis on the corporate identity is rooted in God’s covenant with Israel as His chosen people. Paul Minear, in his study of the concept of calling in the Old Testament emphasizes this fact:

This establishment of God’s covenant with Israel made the corporate vocation the primary basis for each person’s vocation. Wherever an individual was given a specific mission, he was in one way or another carrying forward the mission of the whole community.

The very origin of the covenant with Israel as a nation reveals the intrinsic link between the individual and the corporate whole. Abraham the individual is the representative and prototype of Israel as a nation in Genesis 15, where the covenant with God is established. It would indeed be impossible to understand the purpose of the offices of prophet, priest, or king, and the calling of the individual men who filled those offices apart from the corporate calling of Israel as a nation in covenant with Yahweh.

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32 Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-5. Although the Hebrew for “call” is not used in the Genesis accounts of Abraham’s call, Isa. 51:2 uses the Hebrew verb qar’a to describe God’s call to Abraham as making the “one” into “many.”
34 Ex. 36:2ff.
35 1 Sam. 3:1-9.
36 See Neh. 3-7; Amos 5-6; Isa. 53.
As might be expected, the New Testament continues the focus on the community when it speaks of calling. The call that brings individuals into fellowship with Christ at the same time brings them into fellowship with the members of Christ’s body, the church. The use of the verbal adjective klētos is most often used to refer to the collective identity of Christians. In Romans 1:6-7 and 1 Corinthians 1:2, Paul addresses the klētoi hagioi, those called as saints. Elsewhere the term is used to identify the church, and those “loved by God.” When Paul speaks of his particular calling as an apostle, he is consistently setting his calling within the larger community of believers.

When speaking of this corporate identity, the New Testament oftentimes uses the Greek term ekklēsia, which is translated variously “assembly,” “congregation,” and “church.” Literally, ekklēsia means “called out” (from ek-kaléo), and the use of ekklēsia as specifically referring to those who have been “called out” is evident in several New Testament passages. In the LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the term appears approximately one hundred times, and represents exclusively the Hebrew qāhāl (though qāhāl is not always rendered by ekklēsia), so many scholars have understood the primary meaning of ekklēsia to be “assembly of God.” The Hebrew qāhāl is probably related to qol, (voice), and means “to summons to an assembly.” Hence the concept of calling as it applies to the corporate identity of God’s people is evident

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38 1 Cor. 1:9. Cf. Eph. 1:1-4; Col. 3:15.
41 See especially Eph. 5:25ff.; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 12:23.
42 Both qāhāl and ekklēsia have broader application than the covenant community of Yahweh and Christ respectively, but most often refer to the people of God throughout the Old and New Testaments. See G.E. Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 107.
in the Greek of the New Testament, which is itself rooted in the Hebrew of the Old Testament.

**Calling In 1 Corinthians 7**

We have seen that the New Testament mirrors the Old Testament in its use of “call and “calling” as referring both to summons and invitation, and in its communal focus. There is however a unique, specifically Pauline usage of *klēsis* found in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24. Paul is dealing with the issue of human relationships in light of new life in Christ. In verses 10-16, Paul speaks to those who, since coming to faith in Christ, have been faced with the reality that their spouse is not a believer. Paul commands the believer to remain married to their unbelieving spouse, so long as the unbelieving spouse is willing. If the unbeliever in the marriage leaves, Paul says that it is better to let them go.\(^{43}\) The point Paul stresses in these verses is that the new life in Christ does not necessarily abolish previous standing human relationships and institutions, specifically the marriage relationship. Paul stresses that the believer who is married to an unbeliever should learn to live contentedly with that spouse, with the understanding that God will work in and through that situation according to his purpose.\(^{44}\)

**Pauline Usage of Calling as Life Station or Work**

Paul then turns his attention to the broader social setting in which the Corinthian believer is to learn to live contentedly in whatever state they find themselves.

But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of

\(^{43}\)1 Cor. 7:12, 14-16.

\(^{44}\)1 Cor. 7:14.
God is what matters. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he
was called.\textsuperscript{45}

There has historically been much debate over Paul’s meaning in these verses, and
the history of the interpretation of this passage will be examined more closely
below. Part of the difficulty of arriving at a consensus of interpretation is due to
the obscurity of the Greek. In verse 17, Paul seems to be emphasizing the fact
that God has placed each believer in a particular place, according to God’s
assignment, or distribution. The verb \textit{memeriken}, here translated “called,” carries
the idea of “dividing” or “distributing,” with reference to God as the one who is
acting.\textsuperscript{46} So in his commentary on this passage, Leon Morris states that in verse
17 Paul “points to our divine endowment; God has given some gift to each of
us.”\textsuperscript{47} Paul uses not only the verb \textit{mermeriken}, but also \textit{keklēkin} (the perfect
active indicative form of \textit{kalēo}), oftentimes translated “God has called,” thus
associating the notion of divine calling with that of assigning a particular station
in life.\textsuperscript{48} Calvin understood Paul to be speaking of two things principally in verse
17, the “calling” and a “measure of grace,” the latter understood as the object of
the distributing or assignment by God. Calvin argues, “Such is the literal
meaning….What, then, is to be done, unless that every one walk according to the
grace given to him, and according to his calling?”\textsuperscript{49}

The exact meaning of calling as it is referred to in verse 17 is unclear, and
yet it seems to be used in a similar manner in verse 20, where Paul says, “Let each

\begin{small}
\textsuperscript{45} 1 Cor. 7:17-20. Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are from the \textit{New King James
\textsuperscript{46} Sake Kubo, \textit{A Reader’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament} (Grand Rapids:
this verb “assigned.”}
\textsuperscript{47} Leon Morris, \textit{The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary}, 2d
\textsuperscript{49} Calvin, \textit{Commentary on The Epistles of Paul the Apostle To The Corinthians}, vol.1. Calvin’s
\end{small}
one remain in the same calling in which he was called.” 50 Here Paul seems to attribute two different meanings to the idea of calling. 51 The first mention of calling (klēsei) seems to refer to the situation of life a person finds oneself when they are called (eklēthē). Accordingly, C.K. Barrett holds that the calling in 1 Corinthians 7:20 refers to the “state in which [a man] is in when he is called by God to become a Christian.” 52 Others have understood Paul to be speaking more pointedly of the occupation an individual was engaged in at the time of conversion. 53 Whether Paul is speaking generally of the external station one is in when they receive Christ, or even more specifically of one’s socio-economic state or occupation, there seems little doubt that Paul is using calling in a distinct manner here. 54 Hence it is not surprising that the scholars of the New American Standard translation render klēsei “condition”, and the New International Version translates it “situation” in 7:20.

In using “calling” this way, Paul seems to be stressing the same point found in verses 10-16: the new life in Christ does not necessarily abolish previous standing human relationships and institutions. So in the same way that a believer can remain married to an unbeliever, so too can someone who is uncircumcised remain uncircumcised. Likewise, a slave, upon receiving the saving call of God, is not under any obligation to change his outward circumstances. 55 Naturally these verses have been central in the study of the biblical, and more specifically,

50 So L. Morris equates the essential meaning of calling in 7:17 with that of 7:20 (110).
51 This is possibly true of 1 Cor. 1:26 also, where Paul speaks of the Corinthians’ klēsin.
53 See William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, 1 Corinthians (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976). See also the discussion below regarding the view held by Luther, Calvin, and many Puritans that understands klēsei in 7:20 as “occupation” (though not exclusively).
54 So M.R.W. Farrar, while rejecting the notion of klēsis as “occupation,” nevertheless concludes that it refers to the “outward circumstances in which [the saving call of God] was received.” M.R.W. Farrar, “Call, Calling,” New Bible Dictionary (NBT), ed. J.D. Douglas and others. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1962), 160.
55 1 Cor. 7:21.
the Pauline view of slavery. A comprehensive treatment of Paul’s attitude toward slavery is outside the scope of this work, but a few points as they relate to Paul’s notion of calling should be observed.

Slavery as Vocation in Eschatological Perspective

We have already observed that the emphasis of Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:10-24 is on remaining in the “calling,” (variously understood as the situation, occupation, or condition) in which an individual resided before coming to faith in Christ, even after they have received the saving “call” in Christ. So when Paul shifts his focus from addressing those in morally neutral conditions of singleness and marriage, circumcision and uncircumcision, to those who are in slavery, a number of questions naturally arise. One wonders if Paul, by exhorting the Christian slave to remain in his “calling” thereby condoned slavery. Was Paul guilty of quietism on this issue which has been, in the modern world at least, of such historical significance? Any study of Paul’s doctrine of calling must wrestle with these questions, for any appropriation of the New Testament teaching regarding vocation requires an understanding of how Paul viewed certain forms of labor such as slavery, and to what degree Paul was willing to accept injustice and oppression within certain social institutions. Furthermore, a closer look at Paul’s view concerning slavery as a vocation reveals a significant component in Paul’s vocational theology – an eschatological framework, one in which all types of human vocation must be viewed.

Paul introduces his teaching to slaves with these words:

Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord’s freeman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ’s slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.
Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.\textsuperscript{56}

First, it is clear from these words that Paul’s central emphasis on the individual relationship with the Lord has not changed. Paul is speaking to those who are literally slaves, yet can say that even the one who is “free” is, by virtue of his relationship to the Lord, “Christ’s slave.” Paul frequently uses the Greek term \textit{doulos} (slave) in this metaphorical sense to refer to himself. Paul describes himself both as a slave of Christ,\textsuperscript{57} and the slave of others for Christ’s sake.\textsuperscript{58} Similarly, Paul identifies those who follow Christ as slaves.\textsuperscript{59} For Paul, slavery in Christ is as firm a reality as human slavery. In a very real sense, slavery to Christ is far more demanding than earthly slavery, as it belongs to an imperishable, eternal relationship. Human slavery on the other hand belongs to the perishing order of this world. This is why Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 7:26-31 to point out that “the form of this world is passing away.” In other words, the context of Paul’s discussion of slavery as a vocation is eschatological. Paul’s overarching concern in 1 Corinthians 7 is with relationships within the institution of slavery, and not with the institution itself.\textsuperscript{60} The slave is engaged in a vocation with eternal consequences as he is related to Christ through faith – a reality which quite transcends the temporal institution of human slavery itself.

Second, it is in light of the “present distress” (verse 26), and the shortness of time (verse 29), that Paul exhorts the slave to remain in his calling. It is difficult to determine from this passage whether Paul views the “present distress” as universal and apocalyptic, or is speaking in more temporary and local terms to those in Corinth. Whichever the case, Paul has a notion that the times are uncertain and that “the present order of things may soon come to its appointed

\textsuperscript{56} 1 Cor. 7:21-24.
\textsuperscript{57} Rom. 14:8; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1; Tit. 1:1.
\textsuperscript{58} 1 Cor. 9:19; 2 Cor. 4:5.
\textsuperscript{59} Col. 4:12; 2 Tim. 2:24; 1 Cor. 7:22.
\textsuperscript{60} See Peter Richardson, \textit{Paul’s Ethic of Freedom} (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 40-56.
It is significant then that Paul gives the counsel “if you can be made free, rather use it.”\textsuperscript{62} In light of the emphasis of the preceding verses on remaining in one’s condition, some have taken Paul to mean that the slave should make the most of their present circumstances instead of taking advantage of an opportunity for freedom if and when it arises. Leon Morris argues that this understanding is not compatible with Paul’s use of the aorist imperative, “which more naturally signifies the beginning of a new ‘use’ than the continuance of an old one.”\textsuperscript{63} The slave is free to take advantage of the opportunity for freedom.

This understanding of 1 Corinthians 7:21 does not contradict Paul’s central emphasis throughout the chapter, but rather reinforces it. Paul is concerned to hold out the Christian’s freedom within existing relationships and institutions; a freedom that does not depend on liberation from these relationships and institutions, but is rooted instead in the unbreakable union with Christ. It is fitting then that Paul does not command the slave to create the opportunity for freedom, but simply says that the slave is free to take advantage of the opportunity if it arises. Behind this statement in 7:21 is the same understanding of God’s providence that we see in the preceding verses. God, who has assigned different conditions or stations to men, also provides the opportunities to change conditions in certain circumstances.

It is safe to say that Paul does not directly condemn the institution of slavery in this passage, or for that matter in any other passage in which he addresses slaves or deals indirectly with slavery as an institution. Nevertheless, the overall consequence of Paul’s teaching results in the undermining of the institution. This is true for a number of reasons. First, Paul straightforwardly

\textsuperscript{61} J. Knox Chamblin, “Paul and Slavery: Some Observations”, \textit{Pauline Epistles} Class Notes, Reformed Theological Seminary, 194.
\textsuperscript{62} 1 Cor. 7:21.
commands, “Do not become slaves of men.” Secondly, we know that Paul viewed those involved in slave trading as violators of God’s law, and of the same lot as “murderers” and “fornicators.” Thirdly, throughout this and other letters Paul counsels “mutual respect between master and slave; teachings quite incompatible with a state of involuntary servitude.” In the first century context in which Paul writes, the slave is the least esteemed member of society, yet Paul elevates the slave’s status to that of equality with the freeman by appealing to their mutual relationship to Christ. Paul’s insistence on the equality of slave and master introduces “an enormous tension…into slavery as a social system,” according to Herman Ridderbos. Finally, by pointing out the transient nature of all human institutions, Paul highlights his main point that one’s outward condition has little bearing on the significance of their relationship to Christ. The slave in Christ was as free to remain a slave as he was to live as a freeman if the opportunity arose.

**Conclusions Regarding Vocation in Scripture**

Certain themes within the Old and New Testament’s concept of calling are evident at this point. The calling is rooted in divine providence, as God initiates the summons to salvation, but more so as he secures the very response that his summons requires. Additionally, there is a communal aspect to God’s call, as a call either to the community, or an individual in the presence of and for the benefit of a community. The individual who is called in Scripture is never called merely for his or her own earthly or eternal benefit. Their calling in some way

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64 1 Cor. 7:23.
65 1 Tim. 1:9, 10.
66 Chamblin, 195.
67 1 Cor. 7:22, 23; cf. Gal. 3:28.
69 See 1 Cor. 7:31.
fits in to God’s larger purposes for a community of people. In Paul, we see the expansion of the term “calling” as it is applied to the particular life situation or work of an individual believer. The value of such a calling is clearly connected to the imperishable order of which the individual believer is a part of as he or she is united to Christ through faith, hence even the work done in slavery has eternal significance. Exactly how such a vocation has significance is not entirely clear from 1 Corinthians 7 alone, but in light of other, more foundational doctrines, a picture of the eschatological significance of human vocation begins to emerge.

Throughout the church’s history, the doctrine of vocation in general has received a substantial amount of attention. In certain time periods, the church moved toward formulations of vocational theology that were increasingly world-affirming, and thus wrestled with the questions of eternal significance in human vocations, as shall be seen in what follows.
CHAPTER 3
HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF VOCATIONAL THEOLOGY

Early and Medieval Views of Vocation

The centuries immediately following the Apostolic age witnessed infrequent, and oftentimes widely divergent thought on the concept of vocation as it related to everyday life. It was no struggle for the early church to hold to a somewhat ascetic view of the world, due to the sharp distinction between the pagan culture and the community of believers who lived in that culture. The immorality of society, coupled with the fact that Christians were legally prohibited from many occupations and positions in society (such as holding political office or teaching in schools) most likely contributes to the paucity of writing on calling as a worldly condition or occupation. Tertullian translated the word klēsis in 1 Corinthians 7:20 as vocatio, but did not apply it to everyday life. A contemporary of Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria (c. 200) drew closer to the Pauline concept of vocation without actually using the word, when he urged all Christians to recognize the presence of God in their everyday work. The conversion of Constantine in the fourth century brought about the Christianization of the Roman Empire in which, by virtue of baptism, everyone was (if in name

only) a Christian. Understandably, many Christians sought a more distinct, committed Christianity during this time, hence monasticism began to flourish.

As Christians left the “ordinary world” to pursue the monastic way, they envisioned themselves pursuing a higher life of religious commitment. The taking of monastic vows was often called a “second baptism,” or “conversion.” This was understood in terms of a new empowerment by the Holy Spirit for the vocation of monasticism.\(^72\) As a result, a strong and pervasive dualism regarding Christians and the standards by which they lived began to emerge. The general obligations of the Christian (known as the *praecopta evangelica*) were to the morals of the Decalogue; identified with the morality of natural law, that morality which is written on the conscience. The religious orders, however, were to follow what was known as the *consilia evangelica*, the higher morality of the gospels. This was accomplished through the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. In order to fulfill these vows, it was necessary to withdraw from the world.\(^73\)

Many of the early monastics, such as Basil of Caesarea (c. 330-379) applied the word “calling” to the life of the monk, but not the monk alone. He argued that the ascetic life was a pattern for all Christians, and that the “Christian ought to think thoughts worthy of his heavenly vocation.”\(^74\) Likewise, Gregory the Great (540-604), who expanded the role of monasticism in church life, used the term “called” to refer both to becoming a Christian, and to becoming a cleric, or monk.\(^75\) Despite the dual usage detectable in early monasticism, the term

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\(^{72}\) D.G. Bloesch, “Conversion”, *EDT*, 184.  
\(^{73}\) The word “monk” comes from the Greek *monachos*, which literally means “solitary.” Early monasticism did not always embrace a total retreat from the world. Many, such as Anthony of Egypt (c. 250-356) advocated service and even evangelism within society. The Augustinian Orders provide another such example. The trend during this time however was toward continued withdrawal. For a fuller treatment of this subject see H. Chadwick, “The Ascetic Ideal in the Early Church” in *Monks, Hermits and the Ascetic Tradition*, ed. W.J. Sheils (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 1-23.  
\(^{75}\) Calhoun, 104.
“calling” would be increasingly identified with the religious orders during the medieval period.

It is during the medieval period that the monastic sense of superiority, implicit in previous centuries, becomes explicit. In a similar manner, attitudes toward manual labor change. Many early monastic orders accorded manual labor a legitimate role in the daily routine of life. The Rule of St. Benedict of Nursia (c. 529) stressed the importance of mental and physical health, and enjoined at least seven hours of manual labor each day except Sunday. The main benefit of manual labor was to be found in its ascetic value – fighting off idleness and further clearing the mind for learning, meditation, and prayer. But as the feudal society of the medieval world developed, establishing clear divisions of labor, so too did the view that “lower” forms of work were not fitting for the monk committed to a life of the mind. The most notable and influential proponent of this view is Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) who, following Aristotle, argued that the life of the mind is more excellent than the life of activity. Aristotle, in his Republic, set forth a hierarchy of social order in which manual labor was base, and mental labor of a higher order. Aquinas quoted Aristotle (and to a lesser extent the gospel writer Luke) to prove the superiority of the contemplative life – a life only possible for the monk. Using an apiarian analogy, Aquinas expressed the hierarchical and sharply divided medieval view of monasticism:

Indeed, not even among the bees do all have the same function; rather some gather honey, others build their homes out of wax, while the rulers are not occupied with these works. And the same should hold in the case of man.

Those who were called to theological reflection and the spiritual disciplines could not afford to spend time in lower forms of work, such as manual

77 Summa theologiae, 2.182.1.
78 Summa contra Gentiles, 3.134.2.
labor. It is not that manual labor was somehow unnecessary, but simply that it was of less ultimate importance in the hierarchy of corporate life.\textsuperscript{79}

Central to this hierarchical view of society and division of labor was the firm conviction that God had divinely ordered this hierarchy, and that “natural causes” resulted in different abilities for different occupations in each man.\textsuperscript{80}

This conviction rested upon the foundational belief that a qualitative difference existed between the “clergy” and the “laity”.\textsuperscript{81} The medieval view, itself rooted in some early Church Fathers such as Cyprian, was that the priest was a mediator between God and man, entrusted with the highest duties of preaching, spiritual guidance, and distribution of the sacraments, and as such possessed a greater spiritual status than that of the layman.\textsuperscript{82} Of the seven sacraments of the church during the Middle Ages, two were described as “not common to all,” one being marriage and the other, ordination. Ordination, according to Hugh of Saint-Victor (d. 1142), was “instituted for the sole purpose of somehow preparing and sanctifying the things that are necessary for the sanctification and institution of the other sacraments.”\textsuperscript{83} The qualitative superiority of the ordained was at this time beyond question – it was secured by virtue of the sacrament of ordination.

\textsuperscript{79} The medieval notion of spiritual labor’s supremacy over manual labor is evident in the Cistercian order. The Cistercian monks created a “second class” of monks known as the conversi, or lay-brethren, who followed a strict rule of life and lived by many of the same standards of dress and conduct as the monks, yet were illiterate and therefore not full members of the community. Furthermore, they were required to remain illiterate, and functioned to relieve their superiors of the physical chores of daily life. R.W. Southern, Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages (London: Penguin, 1970), 257-58.

\textsuperscript{80} This view is expressed in Summa contra Gentiles 3.134, and Summa theologiae 2.2.

\textsuperscript{81} “Laity” comes from laos, which is the Greek word for “people.” “Clergy” is derived from the word klēros, most often used in the New Testament of a method of selection (Acts 1:26; 8:21; Col. 1:12; etc.). In 1 Pet. 5:3 the word is used of a portion of God’s people, namely the congregation under the elders’ care. As early as the third century, the word came to be used more narrowly of office-bearers, specifically priests.

\textsuperscript{82} Cyprian (c.200-258) argued that bishops carried within them a spiritual status, and he viewed the bishopric as a spiritual gift. S.G. Hall Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 91-92.

There were, to be sure, exceptions to the medieval clergy’s generally
dualistic view of higher and lower work. The “Friends of God,” German mystics
of the latter Middle Ages believed that communion with God was possible
through religious contemplation, but also through daily, “secular” labor. John
Tauler, a Dominican associated with the “Friends” expresses this exceptional
view at that time in a sermon on 1 Corinthians 12:6:

One can spin, another can make shoes, and some have great aptness for all
sorts of outward arts….These are all gifts proceeding from the Spirit of
God. If I were not a priest, but were living as a layman, I should take it as
a great favor that I knew how to make shoes, and should try to make them
better than any one else, and would gladly earn my bread by the labour of
my hands….There is no work so small, no art so mean, but it all comes
from God and is a special gift of His. Thus, let each do that which another
cannot do so well, and for love, returning gift for gift.

Tauler is a significant exception to the rule that medieval clergy disdained
“lower” forms of labor, as illustrated by the fact that Martin Luther took note of
Tauler’s sermons and praised them for their recognition of the validity of secular
work. However, even in Tauler the rigid categories that distinguish clergy from
laity are clearly present, and the value of work is found largely in its ability to
foster a mystical experience with God (the main emphasis of the “Friends of
God”). Mysticism in the later Middle Ages stressed the need for discipline and
self-control of the body in preparation for a vision of God, and manual labor
served that purpose. Generally then, exceptions included, the medieval church
viewed work as having penitential or ascetic value. The monastic life was the

85 The History and Life of the Reverend Doctor John Tauler of Strasbourg: with Twenty-five of his
86 In a letter dated 1516, Luther commends to his friend Spalatin the writings of Tauler as “pure,
sound theology, like that of the earliest age,” and states that he has never read any theology “more
wholesome or more agreeable to the gospel.” Luther’s Correspondence and Other Contemporary
Letters, tr. P. Smith (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1913), 46-48. See also Luther’s
letter to Staupitz, dated 1518, in which he states that he has merely “followed the theology of
Tauler” in condemning monastic practices (78). Luther would supervise two editions of Tauler’s
Theologica Germanica; one in 1516, the other in 1518.
only one truly worthy of the term *vocation*, and thus the distinction between sacred *calling* and secular *work*.

**Reformation Views of Vocation**

**Martin Luther**

The closest the medieval view came to regarding one’s earthly situation as a calling was to exalt the occupation of the monk as a *vocation*. As one who had himself sensed a calling to the monastic life, Martin Luther would expand the application of the term in a way that was truly unique, applying it to secular work no less than sacred. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:20, in which Paul exhorts the Corinthians, “Let each one remain in the same calling (*klēsei*) in which he was called” Luther used the German word *Beruf* (German for “vocation”) to translate Paul’s *klēsei*. Though the term *klēsis* and its cognates occurs eleven times in Paul, Luther only used *Beruf* here in 1 Corinthians 7:20, and thus understood Paul to be referring to one’s external condition as a “calling.” 87 Elsewhere, Luther translated the Greek word *ponos* (toil) with *Beruf*, rendering Ecclesiasticus 11:20, “Trust in God and stay in your *calling*.” 88 Luther was wresting the term *calling* from its narrow application to monastic life, and attaching a religious significance to everyday, “secular” work. This effort can be understood only in light of the more fundamental aspects of Luther’s theology, namely his understanding of justification by faith alone and the “priesthood” of all believers.

When Luther began emphasizing the doctrine of justification by faith alone, it immediately brought into question the doctrine and practice of the church.

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88 Ibid. See also Karl Froelich, “Luther on Vocation,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 13 (Summer 1999): 195ff.
of which he was a doctor. Luther’s former understanding of justification as a continual process – a constant “seeking and striving to be made righteous, even to the hour of death” – was the church’s view. At some point in his life, most likely around 1518-1519, Luther began to understand justification not as a process, but as a gift of God to the sinner, received by faith in the work of Christ. Luther’s mature view of justification is evident in the Preface to his 1531 commentary on Galatians:

> But this most excellent righteousness, of faith I mean (which God through Christ, without works, imputeth unto us), is neither political nor ceremonial, nor the righteousness of God’s law, nor consisteth in our works, but is clean contrary: that is to say, a mere passive righteousness, as the other above are active. For in this we work nothing, we render nothing unto God, but only we receive and suffer another to work in us, that is to say, God. Therefore it seemeth good unto me to call this righteousness of faith or Christian righteousness, the passive righteousness.90

Righteousness was the free gift of God in Christ, taken hold of by faith alone. It could not be attained by works, even the works of a monk following his calling. If our only righteousness is the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, then it follows, Luther argued, that “we are priests as he is Priest, sons as he is Son, kings as he is King.” Medieval division between clergy and laity, as noted above, was hard and fast, and afforded a higher spiritual standing to the clergy. In his *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520), Luther attacks this notion:

> It is pure invention that pope, bishop, priests, and monks are called the spiritual state while princes, lords, artisans and farmers are called the temporal estate. This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy. Yet no one need be intimidated by it, and for this reason: all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office. Paul says in I Corinthians 12[:12-13] that we are all one body, yet every member has its own work by which it serves the others. This is because we are all have one baptism, one gospel, one faith, and are all

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90 *LW* 26:4-5.

91 *LW* 40:20. Elsewhere Luther says “we are all consecrated priests through baptism.” *LW* 44:127.
Christians alike; for baptism, gospel, and faith alone make us spiritual and a Christian people.\(^{92}\)

If good works were essential to earning a right standing before God, it seemed only logical that those works that were particularly “spiritual” were of greater value. Furthermore, if there was an essential, ontological difference between a clergyman and a layman, one could safely assume that the work produced by the truly spiritual ones would be of greater worth in the eyes of God. So it was that clergy alone possessed a *vocation*. But now in Luther, the doctrines of justification by faith alone and the priesthood of all believers undercut these theological props, and leveled all manner of men, and likewise all manner of work. Negatively stated, all works are equally worthless as a ground for justification. Positively stated, all works are equally valuable on the ground of justification by faith alone. Faith, argued Luther, frees an individual from fearing his works aren’t “religious” enough, and makes any work valuable in the sight of God. As those who are justified by faith alone, all believers stand on equal ground, whether it is before the altar or before the plow.

From this foundation, Luther would develop the term “calling” to include all forms human work:

> What you do in your house is worth as much as if you did it up in heaven for our Lord God. For what we do in our *calling* here on earth in accordance with his work and command he counts as if it were done in heaven for him….Therefore we should accustom ourselves to think of our position and work as sacred and well-pleasing to God, not on account of the position and the work, but on account of the word and the faith from which the obedience and the work flow.\(^{93}\)

If the heart is “full of faith,” people can rest assured that “even their seemingly secular works are a worship of God and an obedience well pleasing to God.”\(^{94}\)

Like the doctrine of “priesthood,” Luther’s aim was not to eliminate the

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\(^{92}\) *LW* 44:127.

\(^{93}\) *LW* 44:26 (Emphasis mine).

\(^{94}\) *LW* 2:348.
legitimacy of ministerial callings, but rather to elevate the significance of “secular” work by applying the term “calling.”

Many in Luther’s day feared that such an emphasis on faith alone would lead to an abandonment of good works altogether. On the contrary, argued Luther, good works flow necessarily out of true faith, and these works have a specific purpose: service to God and to one’s neighbor.

Why should I not therefore freely, joyfully, with all my heart, and with an eager will do all things which I know are pleasing and acceptable to such a Father who has overwhelmed me with his inestimable riches? I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me…since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ.

Luther held that the liberation resulting from justification by faith and the status of spiritual priesthood led inevitably to serving others, and stated that “a Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none; a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”

Luther believed there was “no greater service of God than Christian love, which helps and serves the needy.” This orientation in Luther’s vocational theology had an enormous impact on the community, touching all the social tensions of the time, including serious social problems. In his study of poverty relief in the sixteenth century, Carter Lindberg presents a strong counter-argument

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95 “Luther’s doctrine is good for the dying, but it is no good for the living,” was the charge of Duke George of Saxony, while Erasmus of Rotterdam opined, “Lutherans seek only two things – wealth and wives…to them the gospel means the right to live as they please,” quoted in Timothy George, Theology of the Reformers (Nashville: Broadman, 1988), 72.

96 LW 31:367. Karl Holl has pointed out that prior to Luther, notions of deification referred variably to “becoming immortal,” in the Catholic tradition, “conquering the passions and thus also nature”, in monasticism, and “becoming one with the infinite,” in mysticism. Holl rightly concludes that Luther’s stress on “becoming a benefactor to others surpasses all that came before,” and notes that elsewhere Luther says, “We are gods through love...” What Did Luther Understand By Religion? eds. James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 100-101 n.71.

97 LW 31:344. By defining vocation according to these criteria, Luther saw irony in the fact that the monk might now be identified as the only one without a calling, as he was without an avenue to serve his neighbor. Commenting on Gen. 2:15, Luther argues that “the idle sort of life, such as that of monks and nuns, deserves to be condemned.” LW 1:103.

98 LW 45:172.
to those who have accused Luther of failing to take seriously the social ills in society.\(^9\) Lindberg traces the impact of the Wittenberg relief regulations spurred on by Luther, and argues that Luther’s “doctrine of the neighbor” positively affected many cities.\(^1\) Luther preached sermons condemning usury and urging government assistance for the poor.\(^2\)

It is important to note that Luther’s high view of Christian service in the world was rooted in his belief in the essential goodness of creation, a goodness rooted in creation’s origins as the work of God, and in the fact that creation was the sphere of God’s ongoing activity. Since God was presently at work in the world, and sovereignly ordering all things, Luther reasoned that any desire to change one’s calling and vocation would be at best discontentment, and at worst usurpation.\(^3\) Luther rejected the view that “sacred” or ecclesiastical callings were higher callings, but also the view that any calling is higher than another. Therefore, reasoned Luther, why seek to change what God has established? Rather, remain in the calling God gives you, but with a new goal – service to neighbor.\(^4\) Commenting on 1 Corinthians 7, Luther states that Christ has purchased us with his blood, thus setting us free from the law. Luther continues:

But this purchase does not work itself out according to the way of the world and does not affect the relations men have with one another, such as that of a servant toward his master or that of a wife toward her husband.

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\(^9\) Carl Lindberg, *Beyond Charity: Reformation Initiatives for the Poor* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 161ff. Here Lindberg principally has in mind Ernst Troeltsch, who interprets Luther as narrowly focused on private morality in his *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, and Reinhold Niebuhr, who condemned Luther’s “quietistic tendencies” and “defeatism.”

\(^1\) Lindberg, 94.

\(^2\) See *LW* 7:337ff. and 45:281ff. for a few such sermons. Luther also condemned mendicancy, not as punishment for the poor, but for their protection. He feared that otherwise generous people might withhold their benefactions due to the begging of monks under vows of poverty who “snatch away blessing from those who are truly paupers.” *LW* 7:337.

\(^3\) “It is much to be lamented that no man in content and satisfied with that which God gives him in his vocation and calling. Other men’s conditions please us more than our own....To serve God is for everyone to remain in his vocation and calling, be it ever so mean.” *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, ed. William Hazlitt (London: George Bell and Sons, 1909), 363.

\(^4\) *LW* 45:41-43.
These relationships are all left intact, and God wants them to be maintained.\textsuperscript{104} The simple fact that a slave is a slave was sufficient proof for Luther that God desires for him to remain a slave. By remaining in his condition, the slave serves his master, who is also his neighbor. Luther believed that God pays no attention to your civil status as slave or free “on His own account,” but “He pays attention to them on account of your neighbor.”

Therefore notice this and differentiate between the freedom existing in your relation to God and the freedom existing in your relation to your neighbor. In the former this freedom is present, in the latter it is not, and for this reason: God gives you this freedom only in the things that are yours, not in what is your neighbor’s.\textsuperscript{105}

The difficulty or ignominy of certain callings in medieval society could not be denied, but neither should it be shunned argued Luther, for even the difficult callings work with the more pleasant ones to the same end – service to one another. Through every manner of calling, God was ultimately at work to provide for all the needs present in society. Human work was a \textit{larvae dei}, a “mask of God,” under which God himself was actively caring for all our needs.\textsuperscript{106} Just as faith makes all callings equal in value, so the fact that God is ultimately behind every human work, providing for society, gives meaning to every vocation.

This aspect of Luther’s doctrine of calling strikes as static, and perhaps too heavily influenced by the immobile feudal system of the sixteenth century. To be sure, Luther did at times seem to imply that a certain level of freedom in “determining” or choosing a calling might be exercised. Luther frequently distinguished between human freedom in “things below,” distinct from the lack of

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{LW} 28:45. Luther uses “relationships” interchangeably with “callings.” See \textit{The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther}, ed. John Lenker (Minneapolis: Lutherans in All Lands Co., 1905), 10:242, where Luther says, “How is it possible that you are not called? You have always been in some state or station; you have always been a husband or a wife, or boy or girl, or servant.”

\textsuperscript{105} \textit{LW} 28:46

\textsuperscript{106} “What else is all our work to God...but just such a child’s performance, by which he wants to give his gifts in the fields, at home, and everywhere else? These are the masks of God, behind which he wants to remain concealed and do all things.” \textit{LW} 14:114-115.
freedom (free will) in “things above,” meaning salvation. On the whole however, Luther believed that one’s calling was a fixed condition given by God, through which God was providing for society, and man was given opportunity to serve his neighbor. The gospel had freed men to do the ordinary, knowing that it was of great value in the sight of God because it was being done in faith. Any eternal significance of one’s vocation was found primarily in the fact that God was “watching,” and secondarily in the fact that it benefited others.

John Calvin

Most of Calvin’s writings on vocation deal with the notion of the divine summons and choosing of individuals to salvation, and not with human work as vocation. Nevertheless, when he does speak to the issue, Calvin both expands on Luther’s doctrine of calling and lays the groundwork for later Puritan treatments, which sought to attach more significance to human work as vocation.

Calvin, like Luther, judged the sharp medieval division of sacred callings from secular work to be erroneous, and dangerous to the central message of the gospel. No works could ever earn the favor of God, and the spiritual works that the medieval clergy relied on as grounds for justification were totally insufficient. Calvin condemned those, like Aquinas, who claimed the monastic life was the highest calling, and the best way of all to attain a state of perfection. Calvin asks:

And who can bear such a great honor being given to an institution nowhere approved by even one syllable; and that all other callings of God are regarded as unworthy by comparison, though they have not only been commanded by his own sacred lips, but adorned with noble titles? And how great an injury, I beg of you, is done to God when some such forgery

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107 So in his commentary on Genesis 13, speaking of various callings in society, Luther says that “freedom pertains to things about which God has given no command, as for example, outward actions…In such matters man has a choice, and it is certain that even these optional works become a worship of God and please God if you walk in the faith and abide by the commands of God or have a good conscience.” LW 2:350. See also Table Talk, 180.
108 See Summa theologica, 2.2ae.184.3.
is preferred to all the kinds of life ordained by him and praised by his own testimony.\textsuperscript{109}

For Calvin, it was the monks who, far from heeding God’s call, “invent any mode of life they please without regard for God’s call, and without his approval.”\textsuperscript{110}

Calvin’s contribution to the doctrine of vocation is seen most clearly in the freedom which he grants an individual in the choice of their calling. In his initial statements concerning calling in the \textit{Institutes}, Calvin contends that God appoints men to a particular way of life for their own good, “for he knows with what great restlessness human nature flames, with what fickleness it is borne hither and thither, how its ambition longs to embrace various things at once:”

Therefore, lest through our stupidity and rashness everything be turned topsy-turvy, he has appointed duties for every man in his particular way of life. And that no one may thoughtlessly transgress his limits, he has named these various kinds of living “callings”. Therefore each individual has his own kind of living assigned to him by the Lord as a sort of sentry post so that he may not heedlessly wander about throughout life.\textsuperscript{111}

Yet, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 7, Calvin goes beyond defining God’s calling as a way of life divinely imposed upon man and argues for a certain human liberty in choosing an occupation.

Handling the same text that Luther had earlier derived his more static view from, Calvin argues that while Paul is teaching that “every one should be contented with his \textit{calling}, and pursue it, instead of seeking to betake himself to anything else,” he is by no means altogether forbidding an individual to alter or amend their current vocation when necessary or desirable.

But here it is asked, whether Paul means to establish any obligation, for it might seem as though the words conveyed this idea, that every one is bound to his \textit{calling}, so that he must not abandon it. Now it were a very hard thing if a tailor were not at liberty to learn another trade, or if a

\textsuperscript{109} Calvin, \textit{Institutes of the Christian Religion}, ed. J.T. McNeill, tr. F.L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 4.13.11. (Hereafter cited as \textit{Institutes}). Calvin is careful to note the difference between ancient monastic life, like that of Augustine, and the monasticism of his own day. Yet despite the fact that many of the ancient monastic communities were vigorous in their physical labor and discipline, Calvin nevertheless declares that even they failed to attend to the higher goal of “serving God in a definite calling.”

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Institutes}, 4.13.17.

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Institutes}, 3.10.6.
merchant were not at liberty to betake himself to farming. I answer, that this is not what the Apostle intends, for he has it simply in view to correct that inconsiderate eagerness, which prompts some to change their condition w/out any proper reason, whether they do it from superstition, or from any other motive.\footnote{112} By this reading of Paul, man chooses a calling, if only by means of changing his calling. Calvin elaborates by stating that Paul “does not, therefore, impose upon any one the necessity of continuing in the kind of life which he has once taken up, but rather condemns that restlessness, which prevents an individual from remaining in his condition with a peaceable mind…”\footnote{113} For those who feel it necessary to change their way of life or occupation now that they are Christians, Calvin follows Paul in assuring them that such change is not necessary. If however, a man desires a particular calling, Calvin claims that Paul sees no problem with that man freely choosing such a course of action. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 7:24, Calvin summarizes:

\begin{quote}
I have already noticed above, that men are not here bound by a perpetual necessity, so as never to have it in their power to change their condition, if at any time there should be a fit occasion for it….
\end{quote}

Calvin supplements the concept of divine appointment to a calling with an emphasis on human freedom in choosing a calling. Yet to argue, as Ernst Troeltsch does, that because of Calvin, “the ideal was now no longer one of surrender to a static vocational system, directed by Providence, but the free use of vocational work” is to overstate Calvin’s position in the direction of human freedom.\footnote{114} Calvin did not overturn the central emphasis present in Luther on God’s providence in calling, but rather expanded the whole concept to present the idea of an exchange between God and man. Under Luther, the individual could take heart that his work, however toilsome or seemingly insignificant, meant something, for it was performed in faith for the good of others. Under Calvin, the

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{112}Ibid.
\item \footnote{113}Ibid.
\item \footnote{114}Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, 610.
\end{itemize}
individual was free to alter his way of life, unshackled from the fear of transgressing the fixed purpose of God for his life.

Building on the Protestant Reformers, yet making original contributions of their own, the English Puritans would formulate increasingly world-affirming expressions of vocational theology, manifested by the greater stress they laid both upon man’s role in choosing a calling, and the right use of the fruits or wealth that resulted from laboring in a calling. Through innumerable sermons, treatises, and other writings, the Puritans brought their concept of vocation into the forefront of theological discussion in ways that would prove relevant to an increasingly mobile society that was quickly moving from a feudal to a capitalistic structure.

**Puritan Treatments**

As heirs of the theology and social change of the Reformation, the English Protestants continued the Reformer’s emphasis on the notion of calling as a rejection of medieval monasticism and affirmation of activity in the world – a world which men like Luther and Calvin had identified as essentially good as the product of God’s divine creativity. English Reformers, men like Tyndale and Latimer, had themselves addressed many of the ideas latent within this new concept of calling. In *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (1527), William Tyndale had himself stated that “there is difference betwixt washing of dishes and preaching of the word of God; but as touching to please God, none at all.”

Bishop Hugh Latimer preached numerous sermons, some before King Edward VI, in which he exhorted Christians to follow Christ’s example, who was himself faithful to his calling:

> Our Saviour Christ...was a carpenter and gat his living with great labor. Therefore let no man disdain or think scorn to follow Him in a mean living, a mean vocation, or a common calling and occupation. For as He

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blessed our nature with taking upon Him the shape of a man, so in His
doing He blessed all occupations and arts.  

Elsewhere, Latimer recognized the value in callings that are not so lowly, arguing,
“if God call thee to honour, if our vocation requireth us to do so, then follow thy
vocation with all humbleness and gentleness.”

The English Reformers were stressing the same principle as Luther and Calvin: regardless of the honor, wealth and duties attached to an occupation or way of life, it is a calling of great value in God’s sight. The English Protestants of the seventeenth century expanded upon these ideas, and the terms “calling” and “vocation” would eventually make a transition from being specifically religious concepts to terms that were oftentimes used as synonyms for work or occupation. The English divines produced so much literature on the doctrine of calling that they seemed to be “obsessed with the urge to penetrate to the marrow” of this doctrine. It is specifically the Puritans who might provoke such a charge, for it is in the writings of men like Perkins, Cotton, Sibbes, and later, Mather where the doctrine of calling appears most frequently. This is not to suggest that Anglican ministers did not incorporate the notion of calling into their own writings and sermons. Anglican minister and poet George Herbert wrote extensively on issues surrounding the doctrine of calling, and more specifically his own vocation as a minister. In his famous poem, “The Elixir,” Herbert writes of God’s blessing on every type of work, and the worker ("servant") who understands this truth:

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgerie divine:
Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,

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116 “Sixth Sermon Before King Edward VI, April 12, 1549” in Selected Sermons of Hugh Latimer (Charlottesville, VA: UP of Virginia, 1968), 112.
Makes that and th’ action fine.\textsuperscript{119}

Other Anglicans, such as Richard Sanderson wrote of our calling as “that wherewith God enableth us, and directeth us, and putteth us on to a special course and condition of life, wherein to employ ourselves.”\textsuperscript{120} Nevertheless, for reasons that shall be examined in more detail below, the Puritans’ concept of calling is distinct in a number of ways and would prove to be the most influential, both theologically and socially.

The fact that anyone in the seventeenth century could even consider secular work a topic worth examining in such detail reveals the impact of Luther, Calvin and other Reformers. They had rejected the way of monasticism as a calling on the grounds that it was an effort at works-righteousness, and a rejection of the goodness of creation in its world-denying orientation. Puritans no longer needed to spill ink undermining the institution of monasticism, yet their theology of vocation would nonetheless begin on the similar convictions concerning justification by faith alone and the goodness of creation. Yet in their treatment of vocation the Puritans would go beyond the sense of “allowing” Christians to labor with a free conscience in earthly callings, for they were convinced that the Christian was \textit{required} to pursue their calling in this world – and this had the effect of fostering an unprecedented affirmation of worldly work.

Calvin had used the terms “general call” and “special call” to refer to the general invitation of the gospel through the preaching of the word, and the effectual work of regeneration in the hearts of “believers alone” respectively.\textsuperscript{121} The Puritans often used the phrase “general call” to speak of what Calvin referred to as the “particular call” – that is, a life of faith in Jesus Christ. So the “particular calling” in Puritan literature would come to mean the sphere of life in which a

\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Institutes}, 3.24.8.
Christian was required to labor. Only in the context of what the Puritans were referring to as a general calling could a man or woman rightly fulfill their particular calling. Establishing this connection between faith and life, the early Cambridge Puritan William Perkins insists:

Every particular calling must be practiced in and with the general calling of a Christian…thus must every man behave himself in his particular calling, because the particular calling and practice of the duties thereof, severed from the foresaid general calling, is nothing but a practice of injustice and profanity.\(^{122}\)

John Cotton argues the same point as Perkins by citing Leviticus 11:3, in which animals with undivided hooves are called identified as “unclean”: “It showes you then, that it is onely a cleane person, that walkes with a divided hoofe, that sets one foote in his generall, and the other in his particular calling.”\(^{123}\) The “general calling” here is the life of an individual justified by faith alone. To possess a general calling was necessary, not only as it enabled the proper practice of the particular calling, but for the more fundamental reason established in the previous century – sinful man was not in right standing with a holy God. On the ground of the atonement, and through the instrument of faith, a person was justified, and thus in right standing with God. Now that same individual must carry out every aspect of life in faith, including their particular calling. “A true beleeving Christian, a justified person,” submits Cotton, “lives in his vocation by his faith.”\(^{124}\)

\(^{122}\) “A Treatise on the Vocations or Callings of Men,” in *The Work of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward (Berkshire, England: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1970), 456. Perkins was one of the earliest Puritans to write on the doctrine of calling (“A Treatise on Vocations” was written approximately at the turn of the century), and one of the most influential. Louis B. Wright notes that Perkins’ writings were “among the most popular of contemporary works of divinity.” Wright continues: “In such esteem were they held that they made up a part of the equipment which the early colonists to Virginia and New England deemed necessary to their success.” *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 170.


\(^{124}\) *Ibid*, 437.
As noted above, Puritan vocational theology rested not only on the foundation of justification by faith alone, but also on the conviction that the world God had created was essentially good, and that God was continually at work in this world. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, medieval theology and social structures were quickly giving way to the theology and political thought of the Reformation. More specifically, Calvinism was ushering in what political theorist Quentin Skinner has called an “ideology of transition,” from the static medieval order to a modern one, “founded upon change.” The Puritans of the seventeenth century were living in, and contributing to this time of social change and mobility, and they were required in some sense to develop an increasingly world-affirming theology that would address their concern to know exactly how God would have them live in this type of society.

To be sure, the Scripture could be read as a world-condemning text, and the Puritans were well aware of this. The key, according to William Perkins, was to distinguish the two distinct meanings of the term “world” used throughout Scripture. Recognizing that it is “the corruptions and sinnes in the world” that the biblical writers are condemning frees an individual to embrace the world in the second sense. Here the “world” represents “temporall blessings, as mony, lands, wealth, sustenance, and such like outward things, as concerne the necessarie or convenient maintenance of this naturall life.” With this distinction in mind, Perkins concludes:

And in this sense, the world is not to be condemned, for, in themselves, these earthly things are the good gifts of God, which no man can simply condemne, without injurie to God’s disposing hand and providence, who hath ordained them for naturall life.

Work was a blessing bestowed upon Adam at the beginning of history. God had blessed the first man not only with life, but the privilege to work, and his “Treatise on Vocations,” Perkins represents the early Puritan view of secular work.

And the action of a shepherd in keeping sheep...is as good a work before God as is the action of a judge in giving sentence, or of a magistrate in ruling, or a minister in preaching. 127

Elsewhere, in what perhaps was intended as a direct quote of Tyndale, Perkins said that “if we compare worke to worke, there is a difference betwixt washing of dishes, and preaching the word of God: but as touching to please God, none at all.” 128

So strong was this blessing of earthly vocations that some Puritans would not permit the Christian to neglect his calling in favor of “spiritual” exercises. So Thomas Gataker writes:

A man must not imagine..., when he is called to be a Christian, that he must presently cast off all worldly employments...and apply himself wholly...to prayer and contemplation, but he must retain the calling still as well as the other, following the one still with the other. 129

Arthur Hildersam issued a similar rebuke: “It is indeed a great sinne in any professor to neglect his calling, upon pretence of following sermons and serving God.” 130 To “nourish worldly thoughts” during set times of worship and prayer was considered a sin by anyone calling themselves a Christian, but the Puritan Thomas Shepard argued that it is “as great a sin to suffer yourself to be distracted by spiritual thoughts when God sets you on work in civil...employments.” 131

Such bold pronouncements by the Puritans of the seventeenth century not only allowed for the marriage of religious devotion to earthly labors, they demanded of

128 Works, 1:758, quoted in George, 139.
130 Hildersam, CVIII Lectures Upon the Fourth of John (1632), 240, quoted in George, 129.
the Christian a wholehearted involvement in their earthly vocation, free from even “spiritual” distractions.

There are, it seems, a number of derivative conclusions the Puritans reached based on this “earthly” focus. First, the Puritans granted greater freedom of choice to the individual trying to discern their calling in the world. Second, the Puritans developed a comprehensive literature on the relationship between vocation and wealth and concluded that wealth, though attendant with certain dangers, was to be viewed as part of creation itself – a blessing from God.

Choosing a Vocation

While Calvin had interpreted Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 7 as leaving room for a change in calling “if at any time there should be a fit occasion for it,” he did not provide a methodology for choosing a calling, or even a set of criteria by which one might determine what constituted a “fit occasion” for change. It is only in the writings of the Puritans that a systematic approach to choosing a calling emerges. Perkins opens his section on the “good choice of a calling” by proposing three particular rules. First, a man must be sure to choose a lawful calling, one that is not in opposition to divine or civil law, and second, he must inspect both his affections and gifts.

For his affection, he must search what mind he hath to any calling, and in what calling he desireth most of all to glorify God. For his gifts, he must examine for and to what calling they are fittest. Having thus tried both his affections and gifts, finding also the calling to which they tend with one consent, he may say that is his calling, because he liketh it best and is every way the fittest to it.\textsuperscript{132}

Similar advice is given by John Cotton, who contends that a “warrantable calling” requires that “God gives a man gifts for it.” “When God hath called me to a place, he hath given me some gifts fit for that place, especially, if the place be

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
suitable and fitted to me and my best gifts.”  

William Ames advises those who are seeking their calling to look to their “inward endowments and inclinations” for assistance. By way of his third “rule” for choosing a calling, Perkins addresses the possibility that a man may be fit for more than one particular calling. If this be the case, the best possible calling must be chosen.

This focus on human choice, evident among even the earliest Puritans is of a significantly greater degree than that of any of the Reformers. On this basis some have concluded that this aspect of Puritan vocational theology was influenced more by Christian humanism than any of the Protestant Reformers. What is clear is the fact that Puritans stressed the providence of God in the very human process of choosing a calling. John Cotton advises those who are choosing a calling to ensure that they are able to “see Gods providence leading him to it,” for a man of faith “would see the providence and ordinance of God leading him unto it….” Divine providence, argued Stephen Charnock, was responsible for the gifts and passions that contributed to a person’s choice of one calling over another. Perkins can provide detailed guidance on the choosing of a calling, and at the same insist that “we must labour to see a particular providence of God, and to have experience hereof, in all things that come to pass.” It was God who providentially ordered society, distributed different gifts to each person, and imparted the appropriate desires within each person to follow their calling with passion. Moreover, any material gain that resulted from

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steady labor within a calling was to be credited to God’s providential care for his children.

The Good Use of Vocation’s Fruits: Temporal Wealth

Remaining consistent with their embrace of creation and work within it, Puritans held that money was a blessing to be received, enjoyed, and put to good use. Because “riches are in themselves God’s blessings,” reasoned John Robinson, “so are we to desire them for the comfortable course of our natural and civil states.”139 Richard Sibbes similarly believed that “worldly things are good in themselves, and given to sweeten our passage to heaven.”140

The Puritan view of wealth has been the focus of seemingly endless scholarly debate, in which many have argued that the world-affirming view of Calvinism led many Puritans to esteem labor for labor’s sake, as a virtue in and of itself. Foundational to this view is Max Weber’s The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Weber identified the Calvinist doctrine of calling as a key component of a “capitalistic spirit,” which he argues valued labor for labor’s sake, and viewed money making as a moral obligation. Following Weber, scholars such as Ernst Troeltsch, R.H. Tawney, and Christopher Hill have argued, with varying emphases, that modern bourgeois values of work are either traceable directly to, or found their main support in Protestantism – specifically the Calvinistic, and later Puritan doctrine of calling.141 Weber proposed that the Puritan doctrine of calling led to a “worldly asceticism” that spurred Puritans to work in the world, yet restrained them from indulging in the fruits of their labors.

140 Sibbes, The Saints Cordials (London, 1637), 188.
Fearful that they might not be among the elect, the Puritans strove with all their might to assure themselves of their salvation, and good works in worldly endeavors became the means “of getting rid of the fear of damnation.”\textsuperscript{142} Weber submits that what resulted, in addition to the rapid growth of capitalism, was ultimately a “disillusioned and pessimistically inclined individualism” within Puritanism.\textsuperscript{143}

The history of debate surrounding what is commonly referred to as the “Weber Thesis” is long, complicated, and well beyond the scope of this work. However, it is worth noting that insofar as the debate surrounding the Weber thesis has taken place among sociologists and economists, and to a lesser degree, historians, the discussion on the whole has demonstrated a failure to penetrate the essence of the Puritan theology of calling, though it is invariably mentioned by each contributor to the debate.\textsuperscript{144} This methodological problem is observed by Alister McGrath:

If there is any serious criticism which may be directed against the vast body of literature dealing with the relation of Calvinism and capitalism, it is that it is generally the work of writers who lack the necessary theological equipment to appreciate the implications of certain religious doctrines and attitudes. Weber himself exemplifies this difficulty: throughout his writings, he tends to slip haphazardly, in discussion, from the “capitalist mentality” to the Calvinist doctrine of “calling”. The link between the two is frequently asserted, rarely clarified, and never justified at a theoretical level.\textsuperscript{145}

Concerning the charge of “individualism” leveled against the Puritan doctrine of calling, no accusation appears more unfounded. The Puritans, far from being turned in upon themselves, or concerned solely about their own

\textsuperscript{142} Weber, 115.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid, 105ff.
\textsuperscript{144} One of the more influential attempts at refuting Weber’s thesis was H.M. Robertson’s \textit{Aspects of the Rise of Economic Individualism: A Criticism of Max Weber and His School} (New York: Kelley and Millman, Inc., 1959). In refuting Weber’s thesis however, scholars such as Robertson likewise reveal a general unfamiliarity with the theology of Calvin, or the Puritanism that followed. See also Robert Mitchell, \textit{Calvin’s and the Puritan’s View of the Protestant Ethic} (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, Inc.), 1979.
\textsuperscript{145} Alister McGrath, \textit{A Life of John Calvin} (Oxford/Cambrige, Mass: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 238.
welfare held that the very *purpose* of their calling was the welfare of their neighbor; thus their view of wealth as a byproduct of their labors was conditioned by a Christian ethic of service, and a deep appreciation of providence. The first sign that we possess a “warrantable calling” according to Cotton is when “we may not onely aime at our own, but at the publike good….And [faith] will not think it hath a comfortable calling, unlesse it will not onely serve his owne turne, but the turn of other men.”  

““We must not bring forth fruit to our selves,” said Richard Sibbes, for “Honour, Riches, and the like are but secondary things…but to have an active heart fruitfull from this ground, that God hath planted us for this purpose, that we may doe good to mankind, this is an excellent consideration not to profane our calling.”  

At the very outset of his work on vocation, Perkins states that “the main end of our lives is to serve God in the serving of men in the works of our callings.”  

It follows then that if the goal of one’s calling was to serve others, the wealth and resources accumulated by working in a calling would serve the larger society, and not simply the individual. In general, this social focus did characterize the Puritan economic ethic, and it is reflected not only in their attitudes toward charity and the poor, but in the more fundamental assessment of money as something to be used for others. Rooted in the belief that money is “that which God hath lent thee,” Puritans viewed themselves as stewards of the providential gifts of God; and as good stewards they were compelled to give away what they themselves did not need.  

For Perkins this meant that “we must in this life resolve ourselves to seek no more but things that be necessary and

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sufficient for us and ours.”150 God was ultimately responsible for any measure of wealth or success; hence there was no need either to hoard wealth for fear of want, or to take undeserved credit for success in a calling. According to John Preston, the reason people fail to give away that which they do not need is because “they think they must be careful to provide for their own estate.”151 Belief in God’s providential care as it related to callings was not difficult for Puritans, who believed, as Swinnock said, that “the whole course of nature turneth onely as it is moved by the hand of God.”152

Providence was likewise responsible for success in business, for by earning more wealth as good men of business, Puritans believed that they were being divinely equipped to do more good, especially toward those who most needed aid. Richard Greenham believed that “the use of riches is to be communicated: else God might have made all rich.”153 John Robinson concurred, contending that God has “chosen to make some rich, and some poor, that one might stand in need of another, and help another.”154 Far from engendering apathy toward the poor, this conviction spurred Puritans to give away their wealth in poverty relief among other things. Hence, Timothy Breen, though attempting to argue that no significant difference existed between Puritan and Anglican views of work, nevertheless concedes that “Anglican attitudes toward poverty…contrasted noticeably with those of the Puritans.” Breen presents the

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150 The Work of William Perkins, 466. Elsewhere Perkins stated that any wealth obtained beyond what was needed should go directly to “the good of others,” defined as “the releefe of the poore…the maintenance of the Church…the maintenance of the Commonwealth.” Workes, 2:127-28, quoted in Kitch, 108.
152 Swinnock, The Christian Man’s Calling, 484. Richard Schlatter views the Puritan’s insistence on “providence, and not the rational order of the universe” as the distinguishing feature between Puritan and Anglican views of calling. “The Puritan instructed Christians to serve God by being good men of business; the Anglican instructed business men to serve themselves by being godly.” The Social Ideas of Religious Leaders 1600-1668 (London: Oxford UP, 1940), 200, 203.
154 Robinson, 73.
thought of prominent Anglicans on poverty and the poor, and by way of contrast states:

Puritan writers generally instructed their readers to give the deserving poor as much as they could. It was thought wise for the heaven-bound Christian to part with all money and worldly goods which were not immediately necessary to the welfare of his family.”

In his exhaustive study of poverty and philanthropy in England from 1480 to 1660, W.K. Jordan draws similar conclusions, noting that “a very large proportion [of donors] were Puritans.”

For all of their optimism concerning the benefits of wealth, the Puritans remained aware of the dangers that increased wealth presented to one’s soul and to one’s calling. The love of riches, usually fanned into flame as more wealth is acquired, caused man to “terminate his happiness in externals,” according to Thomas Watson. More to the point, the love of money threatened to distract a man from his calling. “Where the world hath got possession in the heart,” said Sibbes, “it makes us false to God, and false to man, it makes us unfaithful in our callings, and false to Religion it selfe.” Perkins warned that when men seek to change their callings for the sole purpose of making more money, they “set bars on heaven’s gates.”

The view that money poses a threat to one’s faith was not unique to Puritanism, for it was (in part at least) the fear of wealth’s destructive power that led to medieval vows of poverty. Yet the Puritan embraced wealth as a gift from God and at the same time endeavored to hold this gift with a loose grip in order to remain guarded against its influence. This *via media* between vows of

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poverty on the one hand and worship of Mammon on the other is explained by Cotton:

There is [a] combination of vertues strangely mixed in every lively holy Christian, And that is Diligence in worldly businesses, and yet deadnesse to the world; such a mystery as none can read, but they that know it….The very same souls that are most ful of the worlds businesses, the more diligent they be in their callings, yet the same persons are directed to be dead with Christ….And therefore to this world are we dead.160

The Puritan was convinced that God would have him settle in a particular calling, for the purpose of serving his neighbor with the resultant wealth, thus bringing glory to God. In fact, one is left with the impression that it would be impossible to glorify God apart from laboring in a vocation. John Dod insisted that it is a “note of true repentance, and of an honest and sincere heart, to discharge the duties that belong unto us in our places and callings.”161 Drawing a fanciful analogy to the prodigal son, who, immediately upon returning home says to his father, “Make me one of thy hired servants,” John Cotton states that “as soone as ever a man begins to looke towards God, and the wayes of his grace, he will not rest, till he find out some warrantable Calling and imployment.” Cotton presses his point, insisting that “a Christian would no sooner have his sinne pardoned, then his estate to be setled in some good calling.”162

This mindset has the effect of merging the religious duty with the worldly duty; of vitally connecting faith to practice, and represents a genuine development in the doctrine of calling. Whereas Luther stressed the need to serve the neighbor in one’s calling, the Puritans seem to place the emphasis on serving the neighbor through one’s calling, and the wealth that results from that calling. Kemper Fullerton has defined the difference as a shift from obedience within a vocation

160 Cotton, Christ the Fountaine of Life (London, 1651), 119.
161 Dod, Ten Sermons...of the Lords Supper (1609, 1661), 121, 126.
Conclusions from the Historical Development of Vocation

In the generations that followed, Puritanism proved unable to maintain their unique, world-embracing vocational theology due to more fundamental shifts in theology. Later Puritanism continued the generally Christian, not specifically Puritan denunciations of greed, theft, and covetousness, but lost the supporting doctrinal framework for their vocational theology, seen most clearly in the decline of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. This had the effect of reducing the terms “calling” and “vocation” to little more than synonyms for work, with little or no theological significance. Originally sanctified as the expression of genuine faith, the particular calling was now ironically in need of being religiously justified. The conviction that earthly work was in itself

\[\text{(in vocatione)}\), to serving others primarily by one’s vocation (per vocationem).^{163}\]

Work becomes worship, and the Puritan can affirm the ancient maxim, labore est orare.

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164 Later Puritanism increasingly attached a salvific quality to one’s calling, which was the result of the more fundamental emphasis on works as part of one’s salvation. Cotton Mather’s insistence that “good works are part of the great salvation which is purchased for you by Jesus Christ” and his view that “much of our salvation consists in doing good works” was foreign to earlier Puritan soteriology, and derivatively, vocational theology. (Mather, *Essays to do Good*, [Boston, 1701], 21). For treatments of the shift within Puritanism away from the doctrine of justification by faith alone, see J. I. Packer, “Doctrine of Justification in Development and Decline Among the Puritans,” *Westminster Conference Report 1969* (London, 1970): 18-30, and C.F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism: The Proclamation of the Gospel From Hooker to Baxter* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse, 1966). See Robert Michaelson, “Changes in the Puritan Concept of Calling or Vocation,” in *New England Quarterly*, vol. 26 (Sep. 1953), 331-356, for a study of the impact this later Puritan view of justification had upon the doctrine of vocation specifically.

165 Richard Schlatter notes that by the end of the seventeenth century, the concept of calling was so widespread and diluted that men spoke of “infamous” and “sinful” callings, which were never even graced with the title “calling” by earlier Puritans (189).
significant and meaningful seems to be absent from later Puritan vocational theology.\textsuperscript{166}

Enlightenment rationalism and the shifting worldview in Europe and America would subsequently create an environment in which people no longer viewed as radical the idea that the merchant was equal to the minister. For those who would even be concerned to view their earthly labor as a “vocation,” the methodology was usually akin to that of later Puritanism – justify the job as a “calling” by somehow relating it specifically to the sphere of redemption. However, the notion of a lost “golden age” of vocational theology seems unjustified, for while the history of vocational doctrine could be seen as one of radical transformation followed by subtle decline, there is even within the earlier and stronger treatments of calling something noticeably absent.

From Luther onward, the goodness of creation was foundational to a broadly applicable doctrine of vocation – specifically the divine origin of creation and the ongoing divine activity in creation (providence) proved to be the central components of this optimistic view. What has received far less attention is the issue of God’s future involvement or activity in and with creation, which is an eschatological concern. The ultimate end of creation, and God’s plan for the work which has been performed in creation has considerable implications for a doctrine of vocation that would attach lasting meaning to work done in this world.

At the heart of the Christian message is the eschatological hope in the return of Christ, and the consummation of his Kingdom. In light of this essential

\textsuperscript{166} The Puritan literature of the latter-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reveals a general insecurity about the significance of work without a specifically religious component or service. In an effort to spiritualize and thus grant significance to worldly work, analogies were drawn to heavenly work; thus titles such as \textit{Navigation Spiritualized}, in which John Flavell encourages fishermen to meditate upon the similarity of their work to that of fishing for souls, and encourages them to confess their sins so that their catch might increase. (Flavell, \textit{Navigation Spiritualized} [1682], 126). See also Bartholomew Ashwood, \textit{The Heavenly Trade, or the Best Merchandizing} (1679) and Richard Steele, \textit{The Tradesman’s Calling} (1684) for similar treatments of calling that were well known at the time.
component of the gospel message, Christians from the first century forward have had little difficulty attaching value to the traditionally “spiritual” callings of minister or evangelist, largely because many find it easy to envision the eternal consequences of a minister’s calling, conceived perhaps most simply in terms of the eternal salvation of individuals. Yet for those whose work does not put them in touch with matters easily understood to be eternal, the question of eternal or eschatological value still remains. The Reformers and Puritans partially address this question by pointing to the value of the earthly calling carried out in faith coram Deo. Yet as valuable and revolutionary as such an emphasis has been and continues to be today, one must ask if this fully addresses the question of an earthly vocation’s lasting effects and value throughout eternity. It is this question, and related concerns that this work now seeks to address.
CHAPTER 4
THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR VOCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Idea and Value of Eschatology for Vocational Theology

The Christian worldview defines the significance of almost everything in eschatological terms. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments contain numerous exhortations to maintain and foster an eternal perspective on life, with the attendant teaching that that which endures to the end is considered valuable and worthy of attention and effort here and now. Rooted in the eternal nature of God himself, the Scriptures hold out that which is eternal as that which is most valuable. Historically, the application of this value system to human vocation resulted in the conclusion that only the callings which touched the eternal part of man – usually understood as merely the soul, in contrast to the body – were eternally significant. At the heart of this view is the denial of the goodness of creation, typically characteristic of the treatments on vocation up to the time of the Reformation.

Despite a more optimistic view of creation the Reformers and Puritans, while exalting the value of secular vocations, seem to avoid applying any eschatological value to these callings in particular. For both the medieval and modern Christian have almost always assumed a certain eternal significance attends the calling of a minister or evangelist – vocations specifically concerned
with the sphere of redemption. While the tensions Christians experienced in previous centuries over the significance of their daily non-religious work are largely absent in today’s secularized society, there remain those who sense the need to justify secular vocations by relating them to the sphere of redemption. Oftentimes this effort is spoken of in terms of “redeeming the culture” – an attempt to pour the content of the gospel or biblical ethics into the mediums of culture such as the arts, sciences, literature, or politics. The assumption, based on the biblical principle that the eternal is most valuable, is that any labors not directly related to the work of spreading the gospel or its ethics are of little ultimate significance. Uncritical acceptance of secular work as valuable, and efforts to link secular callings to redemptive purposes both suffer from the same underlying lack of a cogent biblical and theological conviction of the eschatological significance of human vocation.

What remains to be seen is the nature of the relationship between earthly work and eternity. What has historically been lacking in formulations of vocational theology is the notion that work done in secular pursuits, in the sphere of creation, also has eternal or eschatological significance. Establishing the eschatological significance of human vocations requires a reexamination of the idea of “secular” and “sacred” callings. These terms have been used with general consensus as to their intended meaning, but further clarification from a biblical perspective would do much to reveal that all human vocations touch eternal matters as part of the Kingdom of God, and thus possess lasting value.

Such an examination however, is only possible in light of a more fundamental assessment of two relevant aspects of theology: the scope of Christ’s

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167 The concept of two spheres, one of “redemption” and the other “creation,” has been widely recognized as noted above in the discussion concerning the history of vocational theology. The exact relationship of the two is what has been debated, and is of concern in what follows.
redemptive work and the ultimate destiny of the created world. That Christ has come to justify and reconcile sinners to God has been widely accepted, regardless of differences in the particular understanding of the application of the benefits of reconciliation. Significantly less attention has been given to the Scriptural testimony that Christ is in the process of reconciling all things, in heaven and on earth. Yet it is in moving beyond individual redemption to an appreciation of the cosmic scope of Christ’s saving work that the eternal value of all human vocations, secular as well as sacred, may be affirmed. Equally necessary is a careful assessment of the biblical teaching concerning the telos of the created order. If this present earth is destined for annihilation then it stands to reason that all work done within the sphere of creation is temporal in value and significance. However, if the biblical teaching regarding the final destiny of this world is one of transformation, not annihilation, then there exists the possibility that work in the present world has everlasting value.

**Foundations for Eschatological Significance in Vocation**

**The Cosmic Scope of Redemption**

Woven throughout the Old and New Testament is the notion that the created world is essentially good. In the creation account, God’s evaluation of his workmanship results in the statement “it was good.” This phrase is repeated six times, the last of which is amplified by the Hebrew word meōd, thus giving us “very good.”168 In what theologians traditionally refer to as the “dominion mandate” or “creation mandate,” God blessed Adam and Eve, then charged them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the

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168 Gen. 1:31. The word translated “good” throughout Genesis 1 is the Hebrew word tôb, which includes the notion of aesthetic value, or beauty.
Starting in the Garden, man was to rule over all the earth, and in doing so reflect the image of God in his sovereignty and his creativity. Following the fall, God cursed mankind with physical and spiritual death, and he likewise cursed the creation. God also promised final deliverance and restoration from the effects of sin, and the destruction of the serpent, Satan. This restoration would involve the removal of all the curses God had pronounced immediately following the fall. The curse of death would be removed, but also the curse upon the earth, issued as a result of man’s sin. As early as Genesis 3:15 we are made aware of the future restoration of a creation unaffected by sin, resulting in a new earth.

The importance of the promised new earth only increases as time progresses. In Genesis 17, God promises Abraham and his descendents a land. The promise reads: “I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession.” The fact that Abraham never enters Canaan in his lifetime might appear to reflect poorly on Yahweh’s faithfulness, since he had promised the land not only to Abraham’s descendents but to Abraham himself. However, the author of Hebrews exegetes Abraham’s own understanding of God’s promise:

By faith [Abraham] dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

The city of Abraham’s hope is the holy city, or Jerusalem, which is found on the new earth. This is the commendation of all the Old Testament saints, who “desire

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170 Gen. 3:16-19.
171 Gen. 3:15. This promise is often referred to as the protoeuangelion, as it is the first pronouncement of the promised Messiah, who is the seed of the woman (Gal. 3:16, 19). Satan is identified as the “ancient serpent” in Rev. 20:2. Cf. Rev. 12:9.
172 Gen. 17:8.
173 Heb. 11:9-10.
a better, that is, a heavenly country.” In summary, the Old Testament promises of a land for the people of God pointed forward in a much fuller way to the new earth, and the author of Hebrews argues that the Old Testament recipients of these promises understood this well. In his notable study on typology, Patrick Fairbairn has summarized the biblical teaching on the promise of an earthly Canaan to Abraham and his seed:

The occupation of the earthly Canaan by the natural seed of Abraham, in its grand and ultimate design, was a type of the occupation by a redeemed church of her destined inheritance of glory.

The hope of a new earth is inseparable from the promise of redemption and restoration found in the Old Testament.

Approaching the New Testament, there is heightened expectation of a new earth, free from sin. The New Testament speaks variously of the restoration, reconciliation and renewal of the earth at a point in time to come. Jesus himself spoke of the renewal of all things, “when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory.” The apostle’s earliest preaching about the return of Christ emphasized “the restoration of all things.” Paul insists that in Christ, God is pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Consistent throughout the New Testament passages dealing with the new earth is the assertion that the final renewal or restoration will not take place until the return of Christ. The Kingdom of God is represented as a present reality – inaugurated at the incarnation and amplified at the resurrection – that will find

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174 Heb. 11:13-16. Space does not permit a fuller development of the covenantal fulfillment of the land promises to Abraham and his “seed,” who are not merely the physical descendants of Abraham, but all of those who through faith in the promised Seed, Christ, are called Abraham’s descendants (Gal. 3:14, 29; Cf. Rom. 16:20).


176 Mt. 19:28.

177 Ac. 3:20-21.

178 Eph. 1:10. See also Eph. 1:22 and 2 Cor. 5:19, where Paul asserts cosmic redemption.
future fulfillment or consummation. Therefore the restoration of creation has begun with Christ’s inauguration of the kingdom, continues through the ministry of the Spirit, and will find consummation at the physical return of Christ. Jesus clearly taught that he was ushering in the kingdom of God as a present reality, not merely a future anticipation. The presence of the kingdom, evidenced in the ministry of Jesus, impacted both the spiritual and material realm, hence the supernatural miracles and the bodily resurrection.179 “The rebirth of humans,” noted Herman Bavinck, “is completed in the rebirth of creation. The kingdom of God is fully realized only when it is visibly extended over the earth as well.”180 The plan of salvation is from beginning to end revealed as a salvation concerned with human beings and the world they inhabit.

The Transformation of the Earth

The question that is often raised regarding the redemption of creation is whether this new earth will be an entirely separate creation, or a renewal of the present earth. There are a number of passages that have historically been interpreted as teaching that the present earth will be annihilated and replaced by an entirely new world. Several Old Testament passages likewise refer to the “wearing out” of the earth like an old garment, ultimately to be discarded.181 The New Testament books of Revelation and 2 Peter speak directly about the passing away of the old earth and heavens, followed by a “new heaven and new earth”.182 Peter’s language is particularly cataclysmic, referring to the destruction of this universe by “fire” and “heat.” However, none of these passages imply the total annihilation of the present earth. The Greek word “new” (kainos), applied to

180 Herman Bavinck, The Last Things: Hope For This World and the Next (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 158.
181 Ps. 102:26; Isa. 34:4.
heaven and earth in 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1, means new in nature or quality, not in origin. The idea expressed in speaking of a “new heaven and earth” is that of a renewed, better cosmos, not an entirely separate, original creation *ex nihilo*. Furthermore, we know from other passages that an essential continuity between the present universe and the new cosmos exists. In Romans 8:20-21 Paul, speaking of the final state of glory, declares that “the creation was subjected to futility…in hope that the creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption and brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” The creation is not pictured as something that will be utterly destroyed, but rather something good that suffers as a woman in the “pains of childbirth,” waiting to deliver, or more precisely, be delivered from the effects of the fall.

F.F. Bruce, commenting on these verses, writes:

> These words of Paul point not to the annihilation of the present material universe on the day of revelation, to be replaced by a universe completely new, but the transformation of the present universe so that it will fulfill the purpose for which God created it.¹⁸⁴

> It is with good reason that Paul likens the redemption of creation to the final deliverance of the children of God, and refers specifically to the “redemption of our body.”¹⁸⁵

The belief in the bodily resurrection and glorification at the end of time demands an equally certain belief in the redemption of nature, for our bodies are part of the order of nature. This relationship is established in the creation account, where man (*hāʿādām*) is formed from the ground, or earth (*hāʿādāmā*).¹⁸⁶

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¹⁸³ J. Behm, “*kainos*,” *TDNT*, 388. See also Heb. 1:12 and Eph. 3:21 for a similar usage.
¹⁸⁵ Rom. 8:19-23.
¹⁸⁶ Gen. 2:7.
heaven and the new earth will one day emerge from the fire-purged elements of this world, radiant in enduring glory and forever set free from the bondage of decay.\footnote{Bavinck, 160. See the Belgic Confession, Article 37.1, which declares that Christ will return, “burning this old world with fire and flame to cleanse it.”} Both the human body and the earth itself will be developed to perfection from the existing creation.\footnote{See also Job 19:25-27; Phil. 3:20ff; 1 Jn. 3:2.}

Finally, the transformation of the world over against annihilation must be affirmed on logical grounds, for it would make little sense to proclaim the essential goodness of creation while at the same time insisting that it is beyond recovery. By teaching the divine transformation of the world, the biblical writers remained consistent with their belief that the fall did not utterly corrupt God’s creation.

### Aspects of Eschatological Significance in Vocation

#### Human Work and the New Earth

The direct, ultimate significance of human vocation is far more certain in light of the coming redemption and transformation of the world. While the extent of continuity between this earth and the new earth is nowhere clearly defined in Scripture, there is nevertheless some significant degree of continuity; one that resembles the continuity between the present body and the future, glorified one. This being the case, the cumulative effects of human work in the sphere of creation must be retained to some degree. The image of the new earth is that of the old earth purged or sanctified, cleansed from all the effects of sin and death. This purification will certainly do away with a good deal of human works, but not \textit{all} the effects of human work. To conclude that in the final analysis the work of humans in the image of God is categorically worthless and beyond renewal is
analogous to drawing the same conclusions about the creation itself. In the image of God man works, and as that work in the sphere of creation interacts with and affects the creation itself, the results become part of what Hendrikus Berkhof calls the “building materials” which, following purification, the “glorified world” will include.\textsuperscript{189} Commenting on 2 Peter 3:5-10, F. Nigel Lee argues that the apostle, speaking of the new earth, is drawing direct comparison to the pre-deluge world which, though inundated and “destroyed” in some sense, nevertheless retained much of the works performed by mankind prior to the flood.\textsuperscript{190} Again, it is unclear to what degree the result of human work (or more broadly, human culture) will endure the purifying and renewing judgment of God, but the ultimate, direct significance of present human work for the future new earth is both biblical and logical.

The Bible speaks often of the eternal effects of human work. Jesus’ parable of the talents (at the very least) implies that the stewardship of talents exercised in one’s calling here on earth has lasting effects throughout eternity.\textsuperscript{191} Paul, focusing on the calling of a minister argues that work done on this earth will be judged by God; literally, “tested by fire.” Such testing will not utterly destroy all work, but certain work will stand up under the judgment of God and will remain or abide, and will lead to reward for the worker.\textsuperscript{192} Describing the glory of the new earth in Revelation 21, the apostle John says that “the kings of the earth bring the glory and the honor [of the nations] into [the new Jerusalem]...and

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\textsuperscript{189} H. Berkhof, \textit{Christ the Meaning of History} (Richmond: John Knox, 1966), 190.
\textsuperscript{190} Lee submits that the preferred reading of \textit{heuretheesetai} in 2 Pet. 3:10 is “will be discovered” or “recovered,” referring to the works done on earth following the purging with fire. This would be consistent with Peter’s teaching in 2:5 that whatever was useful from the time before the Flood was preserved beyond it and further developed by Noah and his children on the post-deluge earth thereafter. \textit{John’s Revelation Unveiled} (Lynnwoodrif, South Africa: Ligstryders, 2001), 317. See also 1 Pet. 3:20.
\textsuperscript{191} Mt. 25:14-30.
\textsuperscript{192} 1 Cor. 3:11-15.
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they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.”¹⁹³ John has already established that the deeds done on earth that glorified God will “follow” those who performed them into the next life, and that same thought now appears here in more specific reference to the tangible treasures of those deeds held by those in positions of power and influence.¹⁹⁴ Anthony Hoekema rightly asks, “Is it too much to say that, according to these verses, the unique contributions of each nation to the life of the present earth will enrich the life of the new earth?”¹⁹⁵

Further supporting the notion of human work as eternally abiding is the biblical imagery of cooperation between God and man in the renewal of creation. The Scriptures repeatedly speak of God’s choice to involve man in the carrying out of his salvation of mankind on this earth, with results that last eternally. In like fashion God condescends to involve man in the process of redeeming the creation, so that man is currently involved in creatio continua, maintaining and caring for this present earth, with varying degrees of faithfulness to be sure. While the final consummation of redemption, both for the individual and the creation is solely God’s doing, it nevertheless involves man and his labors.¹⁹⁶ The kingdom is a present reality and humans working, albeit imperfectly, in the sphere of creation are “co-workers in God’s kingdom, which completes creation and renews heaven and earth.”¹⁹⁷ Miroslav Volf aptly summarizes the harmony between the work of God and the work of humans in redeeming creation:

¹⁹³ Rev. 21:24-26.
¹⁹⁴ Rev. 14:13. See also 2 Cor. 5:10. Note that Rev. 21:4 reads in the present tense “bring” (pherousin), while 21:6 employs the future tense “they shall bring” (oïsousin). The picture is one of presently bringing human works into the kingdom, with continuation hereafter in the future.
¹⁹⁵ Hoekema, 286.
¹⁹⁶ This cooperative relationship is evident in the simplest tasks of creation, such as agricultural endeavors, which demand human endeavor yet depend in the final analysis upon providence for success.
The consummation is a work of God alone. But since this solitary divine work does not obliterate but transforms the historical anticipations of the new creation human beings have participated in, one can say, without being involved in a contradiction, that human work is an aspect of active anticipation of the exclusively divine *transformatio mundi*.\(^{198}\)

Keeping in mind God’s original design for man to cultivate and keep the earth, it is conceivable that the results of fulfilling this mandate will play some part in the formation of the new earth. To the degree that man carries out the command to rule over and replenish the creation he contributes to the renewal of the creation, which will be consummated by God alone at the end of history. Returning to Paul’s personification of creation as a woman in labor, we might then imagine those who labor by faith in this world as the “midwives” of creation, carrying along God’s plan of redemption for individuals and the cosmos.\(^{199}\) Without them, the creation cannot “give birth.”

Another way in which earthly work will have eternal significance is through its effects on the individual personality of the worker. We see this principle at work in the person of Jesus Christ, first and foremost in the nature of his incarnation. Jesus Christ is *forever* both God and man “inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion.”\(^{200}\) Christ’s work and experiences in this life bear eternally on his person. During his earthly career, Christ “learned obedience,” and thus is able to “sympathize” with his children in their time of temptation, for he remembers his own temptations.\(^{201}\) Christ even bears the physical marks of his earthly experiences in his glorified body.\(^{202}\) Paul Helm submits that “as Christ bears the character and the marks of

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\(^{199}\) I am indebted to T.M. Moore for this metaphor, from his lecture, “Toward a Reformed Asceticism: Jonathan Edwards and Life in the Kingdom,” presented at the annual conference of the Jonathan Edwards Institute, 2 July, 2003, Annapolis.

\(^{200}\) *WCF*, 8.2. Question 21 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism holds that Jesus Christ was the eternal Son of God, “who became man and so was and continues to be God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever.”

\(^{201}\) Heb. 5:8 and 4:15, 16.

\(^{202}\) Jn. 20:27.
his calling, so will all of His people bear the character and marks of their calling and of the grace of God experienced in them.”203 This view is in harmony with the biblical concept of sanctification as the renewal or remaking of the whole man. The believer’s spiritual union with Christ “is not a matter of the soul alone, but of the body also, so that we are flesh of his flesh.”204 The trials and blessings experienced in the context of daily work contribute to our sanctification, and thus to our personality. So in the preservation of the results of human work, and the permanent effects of that work upon the human personality there is a tangible carryover of human work from this world to the next.

Sacred and Secular: The Nature of All Vocations in the Kingdom

The conclusion from all that has been argued above is that labor performed in faith within the sphere of creation is not only legitimate, but that it is eternally significant; for it impacts this world, which will be renewed, not annihilated, and it leaves lasting impressions upon the individual for all eternity.205 Recalling the importance of human response to divine summons central to the concept of calling, we have a firm theological foundation upon which to assert that believers working within the sphere of creation can be said to possess a calling. As God both summons believers to work with the created order and expresses his intentions to redeem the creation, man, in following God’s summons, pursues a calling that is no less important than the calling of the minister.

203 Paul Helm, The Callings (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 138. In no way can we equate the saving work of Christ with human work; but the pattern of the bodily resurrection and the continuing effects of Christ’s work on earth are nevertheless instructive.
204 Calvin, Commentaries, 20:217.
205 It is important to remember that not all work will indiscriminately be deemed eternally significant. All human works will be subject to judgment, and that the result of that judgment will be the abolishment of certain works that were not done in accordance with God’s purposes for individuals and creation (1 Cor. 3:12-15; Rev. 21:27).
At this point the traditional categories of “sacred” and “secular” as adjectives describing different types of work are worth reexamination. At first glance, the Reformation and Puritan writings on calling seem to move toward the elimination of these categories, particularly because of their insistence on the sacred nature of all callings done in faith. These same writers did however continue to distinguish between sacred and secular callings, or more precisely, between “ministry” and other callings. While the goal of these writers was to drive home the equal value of all work done in faith, it is difficult to find a consistent effort on the part of these writers to eradicate the distinction between ministry and other forms of callings. It is often assumed that Luther, in proclaiming the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was attempting to downplay the role of official clergy. This is not the case at all, as evidenced by Luther’s own words in *Address to the Christian Nobility*, in which he draws practical conclusions from the doctrine of priesthood:

> It follows from this argument that there is no true, basic difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, between religious and secular, except for the sake of office and work, but not for the sake of status. They are all of the spiritual estate, all are truly priests, bishops, and popes. But they do not all have the same work to do….206

In a similar fashion, Luther states in his *Treatise on Christian Liberty* that “although we are all equally priests, we cannot all publicly minister and teach.”207

Far from seeking to eliminate the priesthood or ministry, Luther sought to eliminate the laity as a lower, unspiritual class of Christian. By distinguishing between the person and the office, Luther could insist on the spiritual priesthood of all believers and yet maintain the necessity and divine purpose of the ministerial office.

\[206\] *LW* 44:129.
\[207\] *LW* 31:356.
Calvin was no different in this regard, nor the Puritans. Speaking of the office of minister, Calvin rebukes anyone who seeks to “abolish this order…or discounts it as unnecessary” because they are “striving for the undoing or rather the ruin and destruction of the church.”

For neither the light and heat of the sun, nor food and drink, are so necessary to nourish and sustain the present life as the apostolic and pastoral office is necessary to preserve the church on earth.  

The Puritans likewise distinguished the calling of the minister from other callings, and not only so, but gave to the calling of minister a seemingly higher status than other callings. William Perkins represents the majority of Puritan writers when he states that the “holy ministry is such a high and excellent calling,” and that “such is its honour and excellency that…only men of the most outstanding gifts are here invited to dedicate themselves to this most excellent vocation.” While the Puritans followed the Reformers in their repudiation of the spiritual and ontological superiority that Roman Catholicism attributed to priests, and generally tended to avoid the use of the term “priest,” they were nevertheless convinced that the minister possessed a unique calling. As a preacher of God’s word, the minister, argued Sibbes, is “Christ's mouth….Christ is either received or rejected in his Ministers.” The very debate within the English Protestantism of the sixteenth and seventeenth century over the qualifications and morality of ministers reveals the tremendous value Puritans placed upon the ministerial calling.

With the exceptional duties of the ministry, understood primarily as the administration of the Word and sacraments, came exceptional authority. While this was not the authority of the Roman priest, which rested primarily upon his

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208 *Institutes*, 4.3.2. See also 4.1.5, and 4.3.1, where Calvin calls the ministry the “most excellent of all things.”
sacerdotal capacities, it was nonetheless a unique, God-ordained authority. Checking the authority of the minister was the essentially service-oriented nature of the calling. The minister represents the person of Christ as he serves others. The preaching and administration of the sacraments were part of that service, but so too was the general pastoral function of the minister.\(^\text{211}\)

While at times historically acceptable, (perhaps partly in an effort to esteem the ministers) application of the term “sacred” to refer exclusively to the ministerial vocation, and “secular” as a description of every other vocation, seems to introduce confusion at several levels. First, the use of such terms \textit{as defined above} tends to limit the scope of what may now be considered “sacred,” and second, it continues the notion of a “hierarchy” of callings much like that of the medieval period. Many have denounced any efforts to retain the “sacred” and “secular” categories as dangerously akin to the medieval errors of Roman Catholicism, but one must wonder if such a reaction to the hard dualism of the Middle Ages is actually an overreaction. The doctrine of vocation is better served not by rejecting, but reevaluating the “sacred” and “secular” categories in light of the cosmic scope of redemption and the Kingdom of God.

The term “secular” comes from the Latin root \textit{saeculum}, referring to “a generation or an age,” thus \textit{secular} came to mean “belonging to this age, worldly.”\(^\text{212}\) Today the term is used to distinguish that which is civil rather than ecclesiastical, and functions primarily as an antonym of “sacred,” designating that which is not-religious. Having established that Christ’s saving work has application not only to individual souls, but to the entire cosmos, we must affirm that the world (the \textit{saeculum}), is a valuable sphere of labor not only because of its

\(^{211}\) See John Owen, \textit{Works}, 13:32ff. for the “duty of pastors distinguished from his people” for one Puritan treatment of pastoral functions.

origins, but also its destiny. Add to this concept the biblical teaching that the Kingdom of God is a present reality, and the distinct but equal nature of all callings becomes more evident. This Kingdom has been ushered in at the first coming of Christ, (specifically the resurrection), and will find its ultimate fulfillment at the parousia. Thus the Kingdom of God is already present, but not yet consummated. The picture is that of the future age having broken in upon the present age, such that the Kingdom of God is a present reality, but not yet co-extensive (or identical) with the whole earth. This “already-not yet” tension characterizes the biblical notion of the Kingdom of God.²¹³ One result of the inauguration of the Kingdom is that now the biblical distinction between the sacred and secular is less pronounced than it previously was in the past.

The concept of “sacred” in the Old Testament reveals the contradistinction of the New Testament understanding. Israel as a nation was sacred, in contrast with the other nations of the world. Within the nation itself certain places and things were considered “more” sacred than others, so that the city of Jerusalem was deemed more sacred than the nation as a whole. Within Jerusalem, the Temple was more sacred than the city, and within the Temple itself, the Most Holy place was the most sacred locale that only the high priest could enter. The image is one of concentric circles, with an intensification of sacredness as one moved inward toward the Holy of holies within the Temple. For this reason, those who worked within the Temple were engaged in sacred work, and naturally the high priest, who alone entered into the Most Holy place, possessed the most sacred calling.

The coming of Christ ushered in a distinctly new period in redemptive history. As Jesus ushered in the Kingdom of God the new age or world to come became a present reality.\textsuperscript{214} The New Testament ceased to identify the nation, the city, or even the Temple as sacred, but rather identified the church as sacred by virtue of the fact that it is the temple (literally “sanctuary”) of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{215} So while it does not eliminate the distinction between sacred and secular, the New Testament recognizes that the inauguration of the Kingdom of God makes it difficult to identify any particular place as sacred, and therefore it is equally difficult to identify any particular work as sacred. Stated alternatively, it has become far more difficult to identify any particular place or work as purely secular. The Kingdom of God as a present reality carries on into the next world, and this makes it very difficult to limit anything done within the present Kingdom as merely “belonging to this age” – the true meaning of the term “secular.” This includes work that is done in the sphere of creation, and not only work directly related to the preaching or teaching of the gospel, normally conceived of as “spiritual work.” This is because the Kingdom of God is not restricted to a spiritual or inward reality in this present age.

The kingdom must not be understood as merely the salvation of certain individuals or even as the reign of God in the hearts of his people; it means nothing less than the reign of God over his entire created universe.\textsuperscript{216} The “already” aspect of the Kingdom means that God is currently reigning over his created universe, and the “not yet” aspect means that He will continue to reign over the new heavens and new earth in perfection. The present age of the Kingdom in this world has been described as a time of tension between the

\textsuperscript{215} 1 Cor. 3:16. Individual believers, as part of the church, are also identified as the temple of the Holy Spirit in 1 Cor. 6:19.
\textsuperscript{216} Hoekema, 45.
“already” and the “not yet,” and I would argue that the relationship between the sacred and the secular is one of tension also. Part of what makes this tension between the sacred and secular so acute is the fact that clearly distinguishing the two is so difficult.

I submit that the nature of the Kingdom of God, and the doctrine of the new earth should lead us to conclude that there are no purely sacred callings, and that there are no purely secular callings. I qualify this conclusion with the word “purely” in recognition that while a “marbelization” of the secular and sacred has taken place with the coming of the Kingdom, this does render any distinction along these lines altogether arbitrary.217 Again, it was the presence of God that gave a place, thing, or job its sacral character in the nation of ancient Israel; the closer in proximity to the presence of God something was, the more sacred it was said to be. While the coming of Christ and later, the Holy Spirit did away with the identification of definitive locales and objects as sacred, the New Testament maintains that the Spirit still takes up residence in a “temple,” the church, which refers to both individual believers and more frequently, the collective body of believers.218 This being the case, it is not hard to understand why the call to ministry has historically been considered a sacred calling, even among Protestants. The minister, more than anyone else, works in and among the New Testament “temple,” the church. Furthermore, in his administration of the sacraments and preaching of the Word, the minister is understood by many to be the steward of the means of grace.219

219 Despite the differences in their understanding of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, both the Lutheran and Reformed views recognize the unique nature of this sacrament as more than mere ceremony.
To be sure then, the minister in his interaction with these “places” of God’s dwelling or tabernacling, is engaged in sacred work. Yet much of the work of the ministry deals with what I have been referring to as the sphere of creation. This is necessary work, and work that the Scripture commands pastors and overseers to perform, such as the duties of administration, organization, and even physical labor. Therefore, it is impossible to define the work of ministry as a purely sacred calling. At best it could be said that the minister possesses a relatively “more sacred” calling. This does not do justice however, to the notion that individual believers who work in the sphere of creation are oftentimes engaged in Kingdom work, having understood the Kingdom as the present and future reign of God over his entire created universe. The effort to assign different levels or degrees of either sacredness or secularity to different callings cannot accomplish much in the way of definitive conclusions. I submit that we must view each calling as both sacred and secular, and accept this relationship of “tension” as part of the larger tension that characterizes the Kingdom of God in the present age. The consummation of the Kingdom of God in the future will relieve this tension, as all things are reconciled to God through Christ.

There are two major advantages to viewing all callings within the larger framework of the Kingdom of God. First, the “marbelized” nature of all callings as both sacred and secular invalidates any attempt to establish a hierarchy of callings, but at the same time, leaves room for faithfulness to the New Testament teaching that the ministerial calling is unique. The call to ministry is a calling that requires the departure from the more common, but equally valuable callings of everyday Christian discipleship. The Kingdom ethic, which emphasizes service over power, when applied to the doctrine of vocation concludes that the calling to
ministry is actually a calling to greater service to other Christians in their callings.\textsuperscript{220}

Second, viewing every calling as both sacred and secular provides a basis for recognizing the painfully real problems that are associated with working in the present world. I have argued that work within the sphere of creation is valuable, sacred in some measure, and even eternally significant, but have said little up to this point about the reality that not every calling within the sphere of creation is equally creative and satisfying. Much of the work in this world is alienating, toilsome, and mundane. This is part of the original curse following the fall, and will only be removed when the renewal process of all things is consummated.\textsuperscript{221}

To assert in an unqualified manner that every calling is sacred is to sidestep the harsh realities of working by the sweat of one’s brow. Until the “not yet” of the Kingdom of God is fulfilled, the various callings within the Kingdom will be subjected to this mixture, frustrating at times, of meaningful and fulfilling work on the one hand, and meaningless and worthless work on the other. Not all work is of ultimate value and lasting significance, and by recognizing the presence of a secular element in all work, it becomes clear why this is the case.\textsuperscript{222} Yet the hope is that the final consummation of God’s Kingdom will bring an end to this secular element, and inaugurate the day when every aspect of human work will be absolutely significant.

\textsuperscript{220} See 2 Cor. 4:5.
\textsuperscript{221} See Rev. 14:13, which speaks of the rest from this aspect of work as \textit{kopos} (labor) – wearisome toil, or effort – for the saints whose works nonetheless follow them into the new earth.
\textsuperscript{222} The concept of the “secular” as an element in our callings is the idea of “belonging to this age.” In addition then to the judgment of God, the secular nature of certain work within our calling means that some of the work we perform in our calling will not have eternal significance. This is as true for the individual with a ministerial calling as it is for anyone else.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

At the very beginning of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* there is the promise of *Paradise Regained*: “Of Man’s first disobedience, and the fruit of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste brought death into the World, and all our woe, with loss of Eden, till one greater Man restore us, and regain the blissful Seat.”223 The restoration of all things to Christ is underway according to the New Testament, and thus the future age – which will witness the consummation of this restoration process – has broken into the present. I have argued this eschatological picture has acute implications for a doctrine of vocation. There is not only hope of a paradise regained for the one who works with faith in a vocation, but of paradise perfected, in a way that affirms and validates the present endeavors of those who would inherit the new earth. Several conclusions can be drawn from all that has been argued.

First, a doctrine of vocation affirming the eternal significance of all callings provides a balance, or *via media* between two extreme approaches to culture: cultural contempt and conversely, cultural “redeeming.” An eschatology that understands Christ’s purpose to renew the world as part of his final reconciling work affirms the present earth with its tremendous variety of culture, learning, art, and beauty, thus liberating the worker in a unique way to draw out what has been divinely put into this world. In that activity, the worker is not

merely engaging in busy work until either death or the return of Christ provides “escape” from this world. On the contrary, the Christian worker engages the world in a meaningful way; partly because he is free to do so in light of creation’s divine origins, but additionally because he is all the more encouraged to do so in view of creation’s place in the redemptive drama, and its central role in the consummated Kingdom. The “creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”224 True appreciation for the shared destiny of creation and creature eliminates any contempt of culture and nature as worthless areas of labor destined for ultimate destruction. The “all things” that are inherited in the new earth by the “saints” include the resources and assets of the present world, whether in nature, culture or learning.225 The labor of the faithful is “not in vain,” and the Christian has every incentive necessary to exercise creativity and industry that more faithfully reflects the *imago Dei* in humanity in all its diverse expressions.226

The opposite extreme of cultural contempt – “redeeming” the culture – is likewise rejected as invalid in light of this doctrine of vocation. The perceived need to relate the specific religious content and ethics of Christianity to every area of life in the sphere of creation is at its heart an effort to infuse meaning into meaninglessness; however, since the sphere of creation is itself inherently meaningful such ransoming is not necessary. This is not to say that a theology that ascribes eschatological significance to all vocations is unconcerned about the specific task of evangelization, or the important task of influencing social structures and culture in general with biblical ethics. However, such a theology does not view creation as standing in need of validation from a specifically

224 Rom. 8:21.
226 1 Cor. 15:58.
religious infusion of meaning, and therefore neither does it look at vocations within creation as requiring justification by way of a synthetic title of “Christian.” For example, is there such a thing as “Christian” economics? No consensus among Christianity, or even various communions within Christianity is possible concerning what economic philosophy warrants the title “Christian.” Aside from this fact however, and more to the point, economics, or any cultural endeavor, is inherently valuable as part of the order of creation.

Viewing human vocations as vehicles to “redeem” the sphere of creation likewise carries with it the danger of fostering a hierarchical view of callings, not unlike that of the medieval church. This view of vocation is accurately characterized by Jacques Ellul:

Thus the physician brings healing and helps to save life. The advocate defends widows and orphans. The teacher contributes to the development of personality. The psychologist and social worker might also be mentioned. Hence, it is argued, Christians ought to gravitate towards this type of work.227

Louis Almen has observed that the theological emphasis in recent vocational literature “seems to equate Christian vocation with resolving ‘big issues,’” the result being that many Christians “do not think they have the opportunity to exercise great influence, and thus tend to think that Christian vocation is primarily for the Christians who sit in the seats of power.”228 It should be added that even conceiving of the “seats of power” as essentially religious, and therefore powerful in the sense that they afford an opportunity to “impact the culture for Christ” does not minimize, but merely baptizes the elitism inherent in such a view.

The second conclusion we are led to concerns the freedom that derives from a doctrine of calling that holds forth to the worker all creation as not only permissible, but eternally valuable. The freedom that came from seeing creation

227 Ellul, The Ethics of Freedom, 504.
as permissible and spiritually valuable is the hallmark of Reformed and Puritan treatments of vocation. That freedom, once introduced, brought with it the need for a vocational ethic, and that ethic was service. Paul Ramsey summarized this contribution:

The Reformation doctrine of vocation recognizes a large area of relativity in ethics…on the other hand, the Reformation doctrine of vocation requires that Christian love penetrate everything a man does, absolutely everything without the slightest exception.\(^229\)

Such freedom is expanded further once the concept of creation as eschatologically valuable is adopted, and therefore the need for a vocational ethic of love or service is greater in direct proportion. There is in fact no distinction between what Ramsey identifies as the ethic of “Christian love” and what elsewhere is called service. At the heart of the New Testament concept of the verb “to serve” (diakonéō) and the noun “service” (diakoneín) is the concept of the love of God and the love of neighbor.\(^230\) It is precisely at this point of vocational pursuit that the need for the historical teaching on service in vocation is needed; perhaps more so than when it was first delivered.

In conclusion, the central thesis of this work has established that the work done in response to the divine vocation has eschatological value. The thesis is nowhere to be found in a particular locus, and yet it has never been the case that vocational theology, or any aspect thereof has been so arranged. Yet through biblical and theological reflection the church has produced authentically Christian doctrine on vocation, and the introduction of the eschatological perspective seems only to contribute, however insignificantly, to that process.


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