Theology of Work: An Online Course Outline for City Vision College

Offered in six week-long sessions as study notes for the course.

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Session Four

- Theology of Work
- Theologically Guided Strategies of Work as Empowerment
Topics for this Session

- The “Systems” of the City
- Systemic Evil and Understanding Resistance: The Powers
- Models of Equipping for the Gathered Life
- Models of Equipping for the Dispersed Life
The “City” is not just a demographical concentration of people. It is also . . .

1. A population center that spawns alternate value systems.
2. A new “way of life” or “rhythm of life” that is distinct from rural or small town lifestyles.
3. A place that attracts, manipulates and dispenses “power”—political, economic and cultural.
Understanding the “Systems” of the City

4. It is the “hub” of innovation and change, both good and bad.
5. It is generally a place of cultural and economic diversity, resulting often in cultural clash and economic disparity.
6. It provides opportunities for social mobility and anonymity.
7. It concentrates collections of subcultures in critical masses that become self-sustaining, both healthy and pathological.
8. It survives by the healthy interplay of its various infra-structural “systems”.

9. The City is not just an “organization, but it is an “organism” with its life unto itself that is in constant dynamism.

In some sense, it is similar to, or parallel to, the description of the human body in I Cor 12.
The Human Body as “System”

The human body at the physiological level is a complex interplay between various “systems”. These include:

1. the Neurologic System
2. the Musculoskeletal System
3. the Cardiovascular System
4. the Immune System
5. the Ear, Nose and Throat System
6. the Psychiatric System
7. the Endocrine System
8. the Ophthalmologic System
9. the Pulmonary System
10. the Hematological System
11. the Dermatological System
12. the Urinary System
13. the Gynecological System
14. the Gastrointestinal System
What do these Systems teach us?

1. That all are necessary for the adequate functioning of the body.
2. That when one system is diseased or injured, that there are backup or redundant systems that seek to repair the damage.
3. That one diseased system can traumatize or destroy other systems until death sets in.
I Corinthians 12:1, 25–26: “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. . . . there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”

Here we see the body as an organism, with each part inter-related and mutually dependent.
In similar fashion, the City or any Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is an organism with a variety of “systems” that interplay with each other. Here are some of them:

1. The Transportation System: Determines how people get around.
2. The Welfare/Social Service System: Determines how people in crisis or chronic conditions economically survive.
3. The Communications/Information System: Determines how people are informed.

4. The Political System: Determines how people are governed.

5. The Legal System: Determines how people in conflict resolve disputes, or protect themselves.

6. The Economic System: Determines how people are employed or exchange services.

The City as “System”
The “City” as System

7. The Public Works System: Determines how communities handle basic infrastructural services.

8. The Health Care System: Determines how sick people are cared for or cured.

9. The Recreational/Entertainment System: Determines how people handle their “alternate realities”, their “sabbath” rest.

10. The Educational System: Determines how people are skilled or enculturated.

11. Defense/Emergency System: Determines how the culture is defends itself or response to collective crisis.
The Various Religious Systems: Determines how people find transcendent meaning.

The Social System: Determines how people engage community and extend networks of support or common interest.

The Technological System: Determines how people transcend material limitations.

The Land Management System: Determines how people deal with their ecological context and their natural resources.
The City as the Interplay of Systems

So when one system is sick and diseased, like the physical body, the whole community is affected. A healthy body rushes its resources to the diseased system, to bring health to it. However, if the disease, or the pathology is too great, then the whole body is profoundly affected, and it can become a “malaise” unto death.

Cities do die---Indeed, we are seeing cities like Detroit, that are increasingly in a process of dying.
What are the options?

1. To live in our ghetto-ized communities, well protected from, and/or oblivious to the disease around us. We can do this by . . .

- disengagement from “real life”
- “caccooning” in protective secure communities
- taking “potshots” are the ungodly world around without doing anything
- creating a neat division between the “real world” and the Christian Church
City as Systems

Or . . .

Infiltrating the various systems of the City to utilize one’s skills, job, vocation, to leverage Christian influence “on the job”, to transform one’s context as a “change agent” so that it every facet of life becomes accountable before God.

Hence, Christian ministry is not just what happens in and through Churches, but that the Church engages the world, and its members become transformative agents right where they work.
Transforming the Systems of the City

The mission then is two-fold:

1. To be an agent of transformation within the company, the business, the institution, so that it acts more “Christianly” because you have been there.

2. To move the company, the business, the institution to influence positively the clients, the service providers, the community where it is found, or what it serves.
A Case Study of Systems in Downtown Los Angeles

It is helpful to see the City as an “urban jungle”, where people find their ecological niches that relate to those both “below” and “above”. In this there is interdependency and influence.

Listen carefully to Dr Tink’s explanation of this.
What are the neglected “Niches” in Christian Influences?

1. Government officials
2. Taxi cab drivers
3. Security Personnel
4. Restaurant personnel
5. Airplane employees
6. Department store workers
7. Sports enthusiasts
8. Custodian and janitors
9. Entertainment personnel
10. CEOs and Corporate Business People
11. Blue collar workers in general
12. And many more
Think through a list of your own extended family. Where are they engaged in the “systems” of the City? Which “Systems” do they represent? Write out a list of occupations, jobs they represent. Do they see any Christian “mission” in their specific “system”? 
Influencing the “Systems”

Once can influence the system by these legitimate but rather conventional ways . . .

1. Showing competency on the job
2. Expressing integrity on the job
3. Being a true friend to other employees
4. Organizing Bible studies and prayer groups
5. Inviting fellow workers to Church
6. Expressing gestures of assistance or compassion when others are in need
7. Showing balance and fairness in both responsibilities and relationships
Quotations on Work

- All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence. 
  Martin Luther King, Jr.

- Whatever your life's work is, do it well. A man should do his job so well that the living, the dead, and the unborn could do it no better. 
  Martin Luther King, Jr.
“If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.”

Martin Luther King
Influencing the “Systems”

However, it may require a little more imaginative responses:

1. Measuring the values of the institution against Biblical values
2. Influencing the assumptions and values of the organizational body to better mirror Christian values
3. Recommending alternative ways of dealing with service, product or relationships, to better mirror the Kingdom.
4. “Blowing the whistle” when injustice or unfairness, or dishonesty is taking place.

5. Empowering those around you, even if it means limiting or deferring your own power.

6. Seeking to defuse unnecessary conflict.

7. Seeking to move the organization beyond just the “profit motive”.

8. Leveraging the organization to “make a qualitative difference” in its world.
Obstacles to Transforming the Systems

1. Inappropriate Work Setting—Are there jobs that cannot glorify God? If so, name some of them.

2. Internal Corruption of the Organization—Can a business be so corrupt that all employees become corrupted by it? For instance?

3. Programmed Limitations due to confined roles, lack of interpersonal contact, administrative rules, curbed influence. Can you think of other situations that confine the Christian witness in the organization?
Corrupt and Evil Systems

Sometimes we are called to confront the “Powers” that corrupt the systems and their manifest institutions:

1. Elijah confronts the gods of Baal (1 Kgs 18)

2. Amos confronts the corrupt legal system (Amos 5:10–13)

3. Jesus confronts the corrupt economic-religious system (Mk 11:15–17)
The Two Facets of the Ministry of the Church

There are two facets of the ministry of the Church. Too often we have focused on the first facet:

1. “The Church Gathered”: or The Centripetal mission of the Church---to pull people into the confines of a church building or church institution and concentrate all ministry in that environment. The Church “gathered” should be a public witness of the “Communion of the Saints”, for rest and for restoration, for accountability, for training, for community, for joint celebration, and for resourcing the mission of the “Church Scattered”.
Therefore, the optimal activity of the Church should be, as it is engaged in mission in the world, within the systems, to bring them, and those, under the aegis or sovereignty of Christ, not just by individual conversions, but wherein the institutions themselves become “converted.”

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Ephesians 6:12.

“Then God gave Christ the highest place and honored his name above all others, so at the name of Jesus everyone will bow down, those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, And to the glory of the God the Father everyone will openly agree, ‘Jesus Christ is Lord.’” Philippians 2:10–11.
The City as Work of Art

Clinton Stockwell’s little essay given in your materials section, reminds us that just like a painter painting a canvas, the City itself is a collage of the creative collective imagination of its residents, through many generations.

If there is blight and ugliness, this is because that imagination has been sullied by sin, selfishness, and shabbiness so that the “art” of the City, is damaged, destroyed or devalued.

The Christian seeks to “turn it around”, through the instruments that his or her vocation provides, be they remedial, creative or confrontative.
“The scope of redemption in Christ is the same as the scope of Creation.”

Paul Marshall
The Sabbath had many meanings:

1. It was a law---Ex 20:8–11, fulfilled by Jesus in Mk 2:28

2. It was a gift---the celebration of creation and redemption, “a blessing”: Gen 2:3, Ex 10:8–11; Dt 5:12–15

3. It was a vocation/calling---God himself rests, Gen 2:2

4. It was a sacrament of time---a sign, Ex 31:12–13, 17
The Meanings of the Sabbath

5. It was a metaphor of Salvation: Heb 4:9, Matt 11:28
6. It was a prophecy of hope, in the new Heaven and new Earth, Rev. 21–22. It is a chance to “play heaven”.

In this sense, it involved:

- Play
- Peace-making
- Prayer
The Sabbath was not intended as the cessation of activity, but the culmination of it, in its purest, more worshipful, most creative form. The six days flow into the Sabbath and the Sabbath stirs the ground and replenishes the soil for the growth of the next six days.
Anna is described as a six year “theologian, mathematician, philosopher, poet and gardener.” Her life and death are told charmingly in this book by Fynn. Her insights dovetail with the understanding of the Sabbath presented here.
Anna’s Understanding of the Sabbath

Key phrases:

Anna: “What was God’s greatest creative act?” . . . It was the seventh day---course it was---the seventh day. . . No, he made rest. . . Yes, that’s the biggest miracle. Rest is. . . When he was finished making all the things. Mister God had undone all the muddle. Then you can rest, so that’s why rest is the very, very biggest miracle of all. Don’t you see? . . . You have to have a muddle in your head before you really know what rest is.” pp. 131–132
A Conclusion

Perhaps, as Anna suggests, we need to engage the “muddle” of the six days of the week to really know what the “rest” of Sabbath is.

Or another way of expressing it, we really need to follow Jesus into the “muddle” of the world as it, allowing our “feet” to be bruised and bloodied in transit, for him to offer the foot-washing that he gives in John 13. To sing, “He Touched Me”, in the antiseptic setting of a Church worship experience is less authentic that to feel the massage of Jesus’ hands on your feet, when you have been with him out in the world.
Models that Integrate the Gathered and the Scattered Life of the People of God

Three Models:

1. John and His Tool and Die Business
2. Christians in Government in Los Angeles
3. Examples from the Lausanne Document
Suggestions for the Scattered Life of the People of God

These are taken from Lausanne Publication, Marketplace Ministry, Occasional Paper No. 40 (not in the materials section):

Marketplace Christians can . . .

1. Expand their understanding of spiritual disciplines to include activities more often associated with the everyday.

2. Reclaim aspects of their work as spiritually significant when they see what they do as a reflection of God.

3. Find support and fellowship in naming and responding to the presence of God in their work by linking up with other Christians in similar professions or fields of work.
Suggestions for the Gathered Life of the People of God

The gathered people of God can reclaim the marketplace as a nexus for God’s presence in the following ways:

1. **By bringing everyday life experiences into the Sunday worship experience.**
2. **By celebrating the skills and gifts of the marketplace.**
3. **By providing places and relationships of accountability.**
4. **By providing preaching and teaching relevant to life in the marketplace.**
5. **By providing pastoral support in the workplace.**
6. **By taking “church” to the workplace.**
Mahandas Gandhi states so well the systemic evil from the “Fall” in his short description of the roots of violence:

“Wealth without Work
   Pleasure without Conscience
   Knowledge without Character
   Commerce without Morality
   Science without Humanity
   Worship without Sacrifice
   Politics without Principle”.

Christians ought to be the ones who are the antidote, the peace-makers, in the world of the corrupted systems of this world.
This concludes Session Four