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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Theology of Work

Integrating It all: Keeping Balance
Relating Church and the Workplace

So what is the role of the Church?

Between Christ’s resurrection and His return, the Church is a separate institution of God’s presence. It is the “body of Christ”. As such, it is...

1. The special interest group commissioned for the redemption of the world through Christ
2. The “tithe” of creative and redemptive activity intended to seek and become holy.
3. Is where Christians get equipped to serve God’s Kingdom in the world at large
Yet the reality is that the Church fails to engage.

The Workplace and the Church are like ships that pass in the night.
The Problem of the Church towards the Workplace consists of these following failures:

1. It tends to regards only its own work as ministry.
2. It tends to see economic value creation as either a neutral or a negative activity with no intrinsic or eternal value.
3. It spiritualizes the Bible so that it appears not to take place in the ordinary world.
The Problem of the Workplace towards the Church

The Workplace disassociated from the Church fails to engage the Church because of the following reasons:

1. It sees itself as morally “neutral”.
2. It sees the Church as consuming too much time.
3. It creates products and demand for things that are considered inferior or irrelevant to God.
4. It feels guilt over never getting around to solving the unfair distribution problem of the marketplace.
5. It often doesn’t highlight or respect relationships, but rather “bottom line” profits.
The New Testament takes seriously the workplace world as it was, with most of the illustrations in the parables identifying activities that we might call “secular” and loaded them with Christian lessons and meaning.

In other words, the workplace helped form our concepts of theology, of life in the Kingdom, rather than the other way around.
The Calling of the Disciples

One model of the relationship between Church and Workplace is seen in the selection of Jesus’ disciples. For the evidence given, four, perhaps five (Thomas) of the disciples were “small businessmen” (fishermen), two were politicians–terrorists (Judas and Simon, the Zealot), one was a contracted taxman.

In other words, at least two-thirds of them were deeply entrenched in activities considered “secular”. This is where Jesus went to find leadership for his nascent mission, and later the Church.
A Narrative about the Fishermen as Small Business Entrepreneurs

They were skilled in many ways:

1. They knew their fish
   a. 78 types of fish along the Mediterranean Coast
   b. 24 types of fish in the Sea of Galilee
   c. 11 types of fish in the River Jordan
   d. Some of these were worth fishing, others not

2. They knew their context—-the contours and depths of the waterways, the weather hazards and conditions.

3. They knew their resources: the boats, the nets, the personnel needed.

4. They knew their options: fishing with dragnets, surface nets, traps, spears, hands and hooks.

5. They knew their process: when to fish, how to clean the fish, to how preserve and market them, to repair the nets, etc.
The Point is that these men were not passive, leisurely occasional fishermen, but highly skilled and resourceful people, whom Jesus chose because they understood teamwork, hard work, marketing, and human nature. These became the “transferable skills” utilized in the building up of the nascent Church after Pentecost. We might also assume that they had “banked” some resources, to allow the freedom to travel with Christ and engage in His mission.
Here Jesus saw the leadership potential in these businessmen and motivated and mobilized them with their developed skills into the activities and organization of extending the Kingdom of God in credible fashion.

For more information on the world of New Testament fishermen, see Wilhelm H Wuellner’s *The Meaning of “Fishers of Men”*. 
A Second Example: Paul, the Tentmaker

Paul was very uncomfortable with receiving payment from the Church for his services. 1 Corinthians 9:6 “Are we (Paul and Barnabas) the only ones who have to support ourselves by working at another job?”

As a tentmaker, Paul could access his services to two social classes:

1. To the tanners who skinned and treated the animals that were used for the tent fabric. By definition, they were “unclean” and so were from the lower classes.

2. To the Bedouin herdsmen who moved flocks around the Middle East, usually quite wealthy. They were the ones to purchase the tents.
As such, Paul leveraged his vocation to access the Gospel to contrasting social groups. One result of this was his close relationship with Priscilla and Aquila, also tentmakers. “There he (Paul) met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. (Acts 18: 2–3).

But also, he was well trained as a philosopher and thinker, and used these skills in the secular world of the Agora (the marketplace) in Athens, a world that he was familiar with as both philosopher and entrepreneur, taking the Church into the intellectual and economic center of the City.
A Recent Case Study: Saying “Thank You” to the City

A student expressed her faith to the poorest and the mightiest in the City of Joliet, IL.
The Reluctance of the Church to Engage the World

This is seen anecdotally in that . . .

1. Often the Church doesn’t care to learn the facts of its members and friends in their world outside the Church.

2. It is evidenced in the way we pray in Church as we pray for the success of the Church programs without ever mentioning the role of the lay people in their worlds and witness outside the Church.
This is seen statistically in one study:

When the business community was queried about what ought to be the work of the Christian community, they presented the following statistics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Church Scattered</th>
<th>Church Gathered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creative Activity</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redemptive Activity</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Reluctance of the Church to Engage the World

When the Christian community was queried about what ought to be its work, they presented the following statistics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Church Scattered</th>
<th>Church Gathered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creative Activity</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redemptive Activity</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In other words, the business community sees far more, the importance of “creative activity”, and also sees the importance of the role of the Church scattered, than does the Christian community in general.
Again we go to the Lausanne documents Occasional Paper #59 to find their suggested solutions to the obstacles and concerns concerning this tension between Church and the Workplace: Here, the language has been amended for this course.

1. Just as we pray for regular missionaries, we should pray collectively for a successful business as mission efforts.
2. We need to build bridge between churches and businesses.
3. We need to examine the areas where both groups can help each other.
4. Business as mission business people have to disciple other “business as mission” business people.
5. The Church ought to validate that business can use its profits for good works in the community.
6. Seminaries and mission-training agencies ought to integrate successful business people and practices into their curriculum.

7. We need to recognize that Church and the Workplace are two distinct cultures and that cross-cultural missiological methods ought to be applied to bridge the gap.

8. Lay people engaged successfully in the workplace ought to teach side by side with church instructors.

9. Understand that the Western model of church leadership of full time pastor does not necessarily model the Biblical leader, i.e. Eph 4:12.
Finally,

10. Integration, accountability and the need for transparency that provides for team building where business people and mission people work together for the integration between the two.
Leadership as a Spiritual Discipline

To enter into the workday world outside the Church, will often thrust one into a leadership role of “stewarding” those around.

- God designs every human being with a unique giftedness. We see this in Ex 31:1–6; 35:30–36:7. As such, we have the responsibility to
  - Help others to identify their gifts and abilities
  - Place those in jobs where their gifts are best used
  - Equip people to function optimally and trust them to make decisions in their sphere of influence
Leadership as a Spiritual Discipline

Additionally, we are all gifted with the ability to make decisions. We see this emphasis in the Bakke presentation.

- The stewardship of people is stewardship of giftedness
- People long to do something meaningful with their lives, to feel that they have contributed something unique and beneficial to the whole.
- In order to reclaim work as a source of joy, we need to...
  - recognize God’s gifts in ourselves and in others.
  - trust others to make decisions in accordance with the way God designed them.
The Challenge of Being a Servant-Leader

Sometimes it is easier to do a task ourselves.

A spirit of humility is required on the part of the Servant-Leader.

We have the example of Jesus who entrusted leadership to His disciples, just as God entrusted the nurture and guidance of Mary on the infant and child Jesus.
To think about

How do you feel about deferring decisions to others, i.e.

Your children?

Those who work alongside or under you in church?

Those who are co-laborers with you on the job

Do you trust them? Are you willing to “own” their failures, even as Christ “owns” yours?
Leading in Organizational Culture

To be a steward of others in organizational culture, a leader retains responsibility but yield power.

Success is measured on our faithfulness to our calling, more than on the results.

Part of that faithfulness is empowering others by yielding up our own power to decide.

Our Master treats us with grace (a combination of tenderheartedness and tough-mindedness). In similar fashion we treat others with grace, “be just and fair” (Col 4:1)
Power is the ability to exert one’s will in order to create a result desired.

A servant-leader is a steward of power, a conduit, both in acquiring it and giving it away.

However, a servant-leader uses it for God’s purposes, not his or her own, nor hoarding it.

God is the ultimate power source, we are merely transmitters of it.

The purpose of power is not to benefit the steward, but to accomplish the will of the power source. Jesus did this in surrendering his power.

How one uses power displays one’s character.

The ultimate power comes from giving it up. Phil 2:5–11
Our world does not lack for problems to be solved. Who then is responsible?

1. Christians have a role to steward their communities.
2. Bakke believes that the business sector is primarily called to help meet the needs of the world, i.e. providing electricity.
3. We preach both an individual and a “public Christianity”, see 1 Thess 4:1, 4:9–10.
4. Genuine spiritual leadership is needed to produce social systems that are fair and just.
The Old Testament Relationship between Workplace and Social Responsibility

This relationship is seen in the following examples:

1. The role of the Sabbath (Ex 20:8–11)
2. The Sabbatical Year (Ex 23:10–12)
3. The practice of gleaning (Lev 19:9–10; 23:22)
4. The Year of Jubilee (Lew 25:10–17)
5. God’s concern for the long-term welfare of His creation (Eccl 1:3–11)
6. God’s ownership of all resources (Lev 25:23, Deut 8:18)
7. God’s care for the powerless (Lev 15:17, 1 John 4:16–18; James 5:1–6)
8. God stubborn provisions even when they don’t make sense (Lev 25:20).
Stewarding Values: Truth and Beauty

Organizations that are intentional about developing a strong healthy corporate culture have...

1. clearly stated values, known at all levels
2. operating principle, that translate values into policies
3. evaluation and correction, that is, reward for behavior that contributes to the values
What are “Values”?

Values are the “rules of our work”, the moral and ethical commitments an organization make. It is how the organization plays the game of business.

Values are like the air we breathe. They are vital to the functional of the organization, but are largely unnoticed and often undefined.

A successful organization is one that both lives out certain carefully selected values and sustains itself with adequate profit.
“Loving-kindness” expressed by God means that God has permanently committed Himself to the welfare of human beings. God still cares for the same things after the Fall that He did before. That includes: People, the Creation, Righteousness and Integrity. So God continues to care for “People”, and so should we, in how we treat them in our economic and social dealings.
Furthermore, “beauty”, as seen in the Bible and throughout creation, is not just a visual aesthetic. Beauty in both a person’s life and in the organization of which this person is a part, come from the consistency in what is true and wholesome, and what the images are. At the core of that consistency is Lovingkindness Compassion Truth Love Integrity Beauty Justice Stewardship

True Worship is defined in Micah 6:6–8 as: “To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with the Lord.”
We are called to “holistic” stewardship of all creation in all five sectors of our lives:

1. Family: to have children, to meet the need for intimate relationships, to be a community that displays the love, authority and relationships mirrored from the Trinity.

2. Church: to provide a focal point for the worship of God, for the practice of the Sacraments, for the teaching of the Faith from the Word, for the formation of true disciples
3. Government: to oversee justice by creating legal systems, laws, courts, and policies; to oversee economic and social order; to ensure that infrastructure is built and maintained; to create and maintain currency for trade; to defend national borders.

4. Commerce: to provide goods and services; to provide stakeholders a fair return on their investment; to build taxable value that provides resources for government to do its role.

5. Nonprofit or Non-governmental organizations (NGOs): to provide charitable goods and services; to meet unmet societal need.
In this course, we have learned that:

1. We are made by God to work
2. We are to find or “recoup” joy in our work
3. Christians have the “first fruits of the Spirit”, that is, they have the unique ability to envision what work was intended to be in its original state.
4. The “Garden” vision, energized by our stewardship responsibility, compels us to work with joy and build workplaces of joy.
Yet, the reality is that there are obstacles to Joy:

- Selfish managers
- Shallow purposes
- Pointing fingers of blame
- Inadequate information
- Condescending attitudes
- Impure motives
- Governmental constrictures
- Uninvested boards
- Social Class barriers
Further Internal Obstacles to Joy

Not only are workplace situations freighted with obstacles to joy, but our own characters are challenged in three main areas:

- **Power:** Accumulating power for personal status or privilege
- **Money:** Accumulating money for materialistic advantage
- **Sex:** Manipulating one’s self and others for hedonistic pleasures
We usually avoid talking about these areas of stewardship, because we are afraid of our own responses and exercise poor self-control, let alone the attitudes of others, in these areas. Yet these three areas are very important aspects of our conscious and subconscious lives. To deny our role as stewards forces them to the underground in our own lives, in the life of our Church, leaving us lonely in a vacuum unfulfilled. Christians are the only ones who can ultimately steward these areas as intended by God (Rom 8:12–30).
Human Rewards of Work

From the world’s perspective, the rewards are:

- Financial success
- Brand dominance
- Fulfilling of production quotas
- Percentage of market share

Money, power and success do not necessarily bring the sense of peace and purpose hoped for.

Indeed, Bakke suggests that a business could conceivably lose money short-term, yet still be considered a success by having accomplished a broader and more transcendental goal that reflects God’s values.

Christ’s death/resurrection on the cross was a success, even though the evidences at the time did not suggest this in terms of Christian adherence, the banishment of slavery, etc.
The Reward of the Master’s Joy

According to the Parable of the Talents in Matt 25:14–30, good stewardship discerns what the Owner wants then does it.

We work according to the gifts God has given each of us (Rom 12)

Joy comes from:
• Faithfully doing what we were created and called to do
• From hearing the words uttered to the good steward: “well done, good and faithful steward . . Come and join in your Master’s happiness.”
The Reward of the Master’s Joy

God does not judge us on “success” as the world measures it, but on our faithfulness to our calling.

When Mother Teresa was asked if she felt like she failed when she was unable to rescue all the children on the streets of Calcutta, she said:

“No, I have been called to be faithful. This is all I have been called to do.”
Please read the carefully transcript of the 1989 Time Magazine interview with Mother Teresa.

1. Did she understand her vocation?
2. Did she see her work as tedious?
3. Did she experience joy?
It is so easy to start ambitiously, idealistically about how one will enter into the world to transform it.

The danger is that over time, we allow the institutional pressures to finally conform us to their culture.

We need to remind ourselves of Rom 12:1–2 (NIV): “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

“Work” in the systems of the world needs to be anchored in a theology that engages body, mind and practice in humble service to God, fulfilling His purposes, “growing wherever we are planted.”
The danger is that one enter into the workaday world with great enthusiasm to be a transformative agent, a representative of Jesus Christ but, over time, become compressed by the cultural or institutional habits and values, until no lasting legacy is left. Yes, the Christian may have played one or a variety of four parts:

- That of a “mole”: seeking to identify all of the sins of the institution.
- That of a “witness”: seeking to compel people to accept Christ
- That of a “persuader”: seeking to get people into Church
- That of a “tentmaker”: seeking to earn enough to do Churchwork
But the business, or the institution, itself is not impacted or transformed or changed. Nor has there been a significant change in the “systems” that it represents.

God’s calling for all Christians is more than these noble and good tasks. We persist until the end to be transformative agents to “grow wherever we are planted” and the embellish the world that God has called us to serve.
A fitting conclusion to this course is given in the film clip from “Chariots of Fire”, an Oscar-award true story about the Scottish track-star and Olympic gold-medal winner of 1924.

Though called to be a missionary to China (where he died in 1944), he recognized his extraordinary gifting in running sprints. Despite peer jealousy, physical ailments, family pressures, and ethical challenges, he persisted to utilize his speed to witness to the nation and the world, his single-minded commitment to Christ.
What is not generally known, is that Eric’s final days showed the same incredible integrity, transformative spirit, and love of God and others, that impacted a secular journalist confined with him in a Japanese concentration camp at the end of World War II.
In a book entitled, *Shantung Compound*, journalist Langdon Gilkey, recalling the intricacies of desperate life in the camp where teenagers ran amok because of boredom and uncertainty, he writes of fellow prisoner Eric Liddell (he calls him by the code name of “Ridley”):

“The man who more than anyone brought about the solution of the teen-age problem was Eric Ridley. It is rare indeed when a person has the good fortune to meet a saint, but he came as close to it as anyone I have ever known.
“Often in an evening of that last year I (headed for some pleasant rendezvous with my girl friend) would pass the game room and peer in to see what the missionaries had cooking for the teen-agers. As often as not Eric Ridley would be bent over a chessboard or a model boat, or directing some sort of square dance—absorbed, warm, and interested, pouring all of himself into this effort to capture the minds and imaginations of those penned-up youths.
“If anyone could have done it, he could. A track man, he had won the 440 in the Olympics for England in the twenties, and then had come to China as a missionary. In camp he was in his middle forties, lithe and spring of step and, above all, overflowing with good humor and love of life. He was aided by others, to be sure. But it was Eric’s enthusiasm and charm that carried the day with the whole effort.
“Shortly before the camp ended, he was stricken suddenly with a brain tumor and died the same day. The entire camp, especially its youth, was stunned for days, so great was the vacuum that Eric’s death had left.”

A question: When you die, what vacuum will you leave in the places where hopelessness and distress, competition and abuse reign? Will anything be transformed?
Gilkey, in a later reflection, on Eric’s influence, says this:

“I was continually reminded of Reinhold Niebuhr’s remark that religion is not the place where the problem of man’s egotism is automatically solved. Rather, it is there that the ultimate battle between human pride and God’s grace takes place. Insofar as human pride may win that battle, religion can and does become one of the instruments of human sin.”
“But insofar as there the self does meet God and so can surrender to something beyond its own self-interest, religion may provide the one possibility for a much needed and very rare release from our common self-concern.”

It is in the world beyond, that Christianity finds its truest expression when it can “surrender to something beyond its own self-interest”, and seek to become a transformative influence in the world beyond the four walls of the Church.
This concludes the Powerpoint Lecture Session of the course. We hope that it has been instructive and useful, not just for the upcoming final exam but also for your own vocational purposes.

We wish you an alert mind for the Final. It will consist of 100 objective questions, 25 of which will be repeated from the last exam. 25 of the question will be multiple choice, 25 will be True/False, 25 will call for words to be inserted in the phrases (a collection of words will be given) and 25 will require filling in of the blanks, no words given.

There is no time limitation on the exam. However the exam must be proctored.