

## **Section Three**

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# **BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL VIEWS OF WORK**

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## **3.a GOD AS WORKER**

### **GOD THE FATHER AND HIS WORK OF CREATION**

#### 3.a.1.

God is the great worker. All creation is his work, planned and executed according to his will and by the power of his word. This fundamental truth, confessed in our Christian creeds, has its witness in the whole of Scripture and not only in the first chapters of Genesis.

#### 3.a.2

The Bible describes God's creative activity in a variety of ways. All creation is his handiwork (Ps 8:3,6; 19:1; 102:25; Isa 40:28; 48:13). It is brought into being out of nothing (Hebrew 'barah' = create, is only used of God's activity), by and through his word (Ps 33:6; 148:5; John 1:1-3), his power and wisdom (Jer 10:12). Thus 'wisdom' is portrayed as the master worker in the creative processes of God (Prov 8:30; Ps 104:24). God himself is the builder who 'set the earth on its foundations' (Ps 104:5); he is the maker of heaven and earth who 'neither slumbers nor sleeps' (Ps 121:2-4). The daily chorus praising God for the act of creation (Gen 1:4,10,12,18,21,25,31; Ps 19:1-6) is reflected in the heavenly praise of the 'Lord God the Almighty' for his 'great and amazing deeds' (Rev 15:3).

### **GOD THE FATHER CONTINUES TO WORK**

#### 3.a.3

Our creator God is never idle. He never slumbers nor sleeps (Ps 121:2-4). Even though he rested from the work of creation (Gen 2:2,3), he is ever active (John 5:17-19). The story of the peoples and nations of the Old Testament is first and foremost the story of this activity. The realm of his involvement includes world affairs (Isa 45:1-11). His work is variously described as justice, righteousness, holiness, salvation, faithfulness — all of which are expressions and vehicles of his covenant love (Hebrew: chesed) for his people (Ps 33:4,5; 99:1-5; Isa 9:7; Jer 9:24).

#### 3.a.4

As Luther's explanation of the first article of the Creed reminds us, God the Father still works to preserve this world for us, his creatures. His rains fall on the just and unjust alike, providing seed for the sower and bread for the eater — satisfying the needs of all (Ps 145:16; Isa 55:10; Matt 5:45).

## **THE WORK OF GOD THE SON**

### **3.a.5**

Jesus, as son of Mary and Joseph, was involved in the world of work and employment: 'Is not this the carpenter . . . ?' The word used here in Mark 6:3 (Gk: tekton) could also be translated as 'artisan' or 'builder'. Human work was not below the dignity of God's Son, and his labour gives worth and value to all human work.

### **3.a.6**

But sent by his Father, Jesus was active primarily as Saviour (Matt 1:21). He understood his life's purpose (mission) in terms of 'being about my Father's business' (Luke 2:49 RSV margin), of doing God's work (John 9:3,4; 10:32). On the cross, he announced the completion of this redemptive work: 'It is finished!' (John 19:30). In this he was doing his Father's will: 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work' (John 4:34; cf 5:17; 6:28,29).

### **3.a.7**

His life's work meant taking the form of a servant (Phil 2:7; Gk. doulos = slave), and this word summarises Jesus' self-understanding: 'I am among you as one who serves' (Luke 22:27). As the divine servant (Isaiah 49, Luke 4:18,19), 'obedient to the point of death' (Phil 2:8), the Christ fulfilled the whole law and will of God for us, transforming the ordinance to work into the means of human salvation (Eph 2:15,16; Col 2:14). His redemption renews the whole creation (Rom 8:18-23). 'See, I am making all things new' (Rev 21:5).

## **THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT**

### **3.a.8**

The Spirit, too, plays an integral role in the work of creation (Gen 1:2), redemption (Matt 3:16; 4:1), and is the agent of faith and sanctification (John 14:26; Gal 5:25). As well as his comforting work (Greek: parakletos = counsellor/advocate) in the lives of Christians, the Spirit is the power of God so that, as the church sings: 'When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground' (Ps 104:30; see also Rom 8:21-23).

## **THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION: WORK BELONGS TO THE FIRST ARTICLE OF THE CREED**

### **3.a.9**

With the Church universal we confess: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

Human work is a part of this original created order, and is an essential element in God's continued care and sustenance of his world, and the people who inhabit it. Despite our lack of awareness of his care and irrespective of

our motives, an important part of God's continuing work is achieved through human labour. He can use injustice, greed, and selfishness to his own good purposes: all things are under his control. In Christ, creation and its ordinances are not removed or destroyed; rather, they are fulfilled, renewed and restored.

### ***For Further Study***

A full exposition of the 'creation texts' in Genesis is given in Dr J T E Renner's commentary in the Chi Rho series (LPH, 1984).

Other useful books:

Westermann, C, *Creation and Fall*, (SPCK, 1974).

Bonhoeffer, D, (SCM, 1959).

*Luther's Works*, Vol 1, American ed, Concordia Publishing House, 1959.

Use of a biblical concordance, dictionary, or 'word book' is a simple way to gain understanding of key concepts such as 'creation' and 'work'.

## **3.b GOD'S PEOPLE AND WORK**

### **CREATION OF PEOPLE AND WORK BEFORE THE FALL**

#### 3.b.1

'So God created humankind in his image . . . male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion ..." ' (Gen 1:27,28). As God's representatives ("in his image"), humans exercise his sovereignty over creation. Accountable to God, the human creature remains a steward of creation, not its lord; use, not misuse or abuse, is sanctioned by these primal commands to take charge of the world.

#### 3.b.2

Genesis 2:15 speaks of Adam placed 'in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it'. The one word ('till') implies service; the other ('keep'), guardianship. People are entrusted with the task of being obedient and careful custodians of all that God has made. In this work they reflect and continue the Creator's own action.

#### 3.b.3

The Roman Catholic papal encyclical *Laborem Exercens* ('On Human Work' — John Paul II, 1981) explains the teaching in Genesis 1 and 2 in this way:

*Work understood as 'transitive' activity, that is to say an activity beginning in the human subject and directed towards an external object, presupposes a specific dominion by man over 'the earth', and in its turn it confirms and develops this dominion.*

*. . . The expression 'subdue the earth' has an immense range. It means all the resources that the earth (and indirectly the visible world)*

*contains and which, through the conscious activity of man, can be discovered and used for his ends. And so these words, placed at the beginning of the Bible, never cease to be relevant. They embrace equally the past ages of civilisation and economy, and also the whole of modern reality and future phases of development. (Laborem Exercens: 21)*

#### 3.b.4

Just what the true nature and condition of this work was prior to the Fall can only be surmised as we attempt to read back our experience into that time. While it would seem that work — by definition — must include some element of effort, the expenditure of energy, the absence of negative features (painful toil, frustration, failure) is suggested. God's garden freely produced and supplied all that his creatures needed to enjoy life, under his blessing: 'It was very good' (Gen 1:31).

### **WORK AFTER THE FALL**

#### 3.b.5

However, with the fall into sin, all relationships and godly intentions have been disrupted. In attempting to usurp God's position (Gen 3:5), the proto-parents caused catastrophic and cosmic results which are felt also in the arena of work. The gift of work remained, but was now connected with hardships, heartbreak, futility and failure (Gen. 3:17-19; Eccl 2:18-23). That which was intended as the arena for cooperation in creativity and good has become, because of human sin and ambition, the scene of self-seeking and rivalry (see also Gen 11:1-9, the 'Babel' story). God's purposes have been frustrated; people too must face work that involves frustration and the burdens of toil, necessity, and duty. As God wills, all continue to enjoy the blessing of daily bread, but all must also endure the curse of 'thorns and thistles'.

#### 3.b.6

*Toil is something that is universally known, for it is universally experienced. It is familiar to those doing physical work under sometimes exceptionally laborious conditions. It is familiar not only to agricultural workers, who spend long days working the land, which sometimes 'bears thorns and thistles', but also to those who work in mines and quarries, to steel workers at their blast furnaces, to those who work in builders' yards and in construction work, often in danger of injury or death. It is likewise familiar to those at an intellectual workbench; to scientists; to those who bear the burden of grave responsibility for decisions that will have a vast impact on society. It is familiar to doctors and nurses, who spend days and nights at their patients' bedside. It is familiar to women, who, sometimes without proper recognition on the part of society and even of their own families, bear the daily burden and responsibility for their homes and the upbringing of their children. It is familiar to all workers and, since work is a universal calling, it is familiar to everyone. (Laborem Exercens: 38,39)*

### 3.b.7

Now instead of serving God, fallen humanity becomes a slave of the soil from which it was taken (Gen. 3:19). A tension is experienced in human labour between work which is natural to life — a gift from, and service of, the Lord God — and work which is destructive of life and an expression of rebellion against the Creator. Work can be performed in co-operation with God's providential care, or else done solely for livelihood and selfish gain. The paradox of 'providence and pain' affects the world of work, as it does all of human existence.

## LUTHER ON THE AMBIGUITY OF LABOUR

### 3.b.8

*Thus when we look at the thorns and thistles, at the sweat of the face, etc, we see here, too, what a great evil original sin is. For just as through sin man fell in his spirit, so also in his body he fell into punishment which, in the state of innocence, would have been joy and play. Even now, in this wretched state of nature, we observe that for someone who has a delightful garden sowing, digging and planting is not a hardship but is done with zeal and a certain pleasure. How much more perfect this would have been in that garden in the state of innocence! But it is appropriate here also to point out that man was created not for leisure but for work, even in the state of innocence. (Luther on Genesis 2:15, Luther's Works Vol. 1)*

### 3.b.9

The Old Testament therefore presents a consistent view of work: outside of Eden, all work, while natural and necessary, is toil. Work is as natural as the rising and setting of the sun (Ps 104:19-23), and idleness is condemned (many references in Proverbs, eg 6:6). God blesses honest work (Ps 128:2; 65), but anxious self-centred labour and ill-gotten gain is condemned (Jer 22:13-17).

## SOCIAL JUSTICE

### 3.b.10

Israel was urged never to forget her origins in God's rescue from slavery, oppression and genocide in Egypt (Exod 1:11-14; Deut 6:20-25; 26:1-11). For those called to be a holy people, a large area of social responsibility involved the just treatment of the disadvantaged — widows, orphans, servants, aliens and the poor (Exod 22:21-31). Propounded in the law, this theme is reiterated in worship (Ps 10:14-18; 82;), wisdom (Prov 14:31), and especially the prophetic literature (Isa 10:1-4; Mal 3:5). By such a lifestyle, the nation was to reflect the special character of the Lord himself who 'upholds the cause of the oppressed' (Ps 146:7). Israel's failure to live and work this way is highlighted by the promise of One whose work would be 'to preach good news to the poor' (Isa 61:1,2; Luke 4:18).

## REST

### 3.b.11

Just as God rested after his work of creation, so he provided rest for those who toil. Rest is not merely freedom from the pressures of work, or time to be idle. Rather, rest is to be seen as creative refreshment, time for renewal of the spirit. In fact, God now works through our rest as a time to re-create us, in and through his word (cf Ps 51:10-12). The Sabbath punctuates the natural pattern of work and rest ('six days you shall labour' is descriptive, not here a command [Exod 20:9]), imitating the rhythms of divine activity, and ensuring that all — masters and servants alike — are able to participate in the work and holiness of God (Exod 20:8-11). In work and rest, God sustains the whole creation, and draws it to himself.

## Theological Reflection

### THE SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE MEANING OF WORK

#### 3.b.12

*Man has to subdue the earth and dominate it, because as the 'image of God' he is a person, that is to say, a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself, and with a tendency to self-realisation. As a person, man is therefore the subject of work. As a person he works, he performs various actions belonging to the work process; independently of their objective content, these actions must all serve to realise his humanity, to fulfil the calling to be a person that is his by reason of his very humanity. (Laborem Exercens: 26)*

#### 3.b.13

*The basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person. The sources of the dignity of work are to be sought primarily in the subjective dimension, not in the objective one . . . In the first place work is 'for man' and not man 'for work'. . . It is always man who is the purpose of the work, whatever work it is that is done by man — even if the common scale of values rates it as the merest 'service', as the most monotonous, even the most alienating work. (Laborem Exercens: 28,29)*

#### 3.b.14

*Onesidedly materialistic civilisation, which gives prime importance to the objective dimension of work . . . is a confusion or even a reversal of the order laid down from the beginning by the words of the book of Genesis: man is treated as an instrument of production, whereas he — he alone, independently of the work he does — ought to be treated as the effective subject of work and its true maker and creator. (Laborem Exercens: 31)*

## **3.c WORK IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

### **JESUS' TEACHING IN THE GOSPELS**

#### 3.c.1

The New Testament accepts and develops the Old Testament understanding of human work. In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord contrasts anxiety over food and clothing with seeking God's will and kingdom (Matt 5:25-34). He calls for faith in God's providential care, while not rejecting the need for work and toil to meet one's daily needs. Relying on what — ultimately — only the Father can give, the faithful pray: 'Give us this day our daily bread' (Luke 11:3). They continue to work for a living and for sustenance, but 'bread alone' can never be the final focus of one's life (Matt 4:2-4). No-one can serve two masters (Luke 16:13, cf 1 Tim 6:10).

#### 3.c.2

In his parables Jesus treats daily work and occupations as a natural part of everyday life: shepherds, farmers, doctors, householders, servants, stewards, fishermen, merchants, labourers, judges and many others are used to illustrate the presentation of his message. He shared the common life of the people, mixing freely with different groups and classes without favour or discrimination. Only those who held themselves above ordinary society — the rich and the religious — and who despised or exploited those less powerful than themselves were rejected and condemned by Jesus (see, eg Matt 23).

#### 3.c.3

Thus Jesus' ministry (his service, or work!) sought to meet human needs on all levels, the material as well as the spiritual, and was expressed in terms that promised restoration to those burdened by hardship and toil: 'Come to me, all you who are weary (= from hard labour) and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest' (Matt 11:28). In him, both creation and Sabbath were fulfilled, in the gift of abundant life (John 10:10) to be enjoyed in the kingdom of God (Matt 10:7).

#### 3.c.4

Until that kingdom fully comes, this world is ordered so that work continues to be necessary for everyday life — a situation which Jesus in no way seeks to abrogate or change, even though he is able (eg) to feed and heal the hungry and the sick directly. He does so as special signs of God's loving care, pointing to a restoration of all creation. The disciples of Jesus live between the times, 'working while it is day, before the night comes when no one can work' (John 9:4). As the final book of the Bible suggests, work of an entirely different kind awaits us in heaven! (Rev 22:1-5).

### **PAUL: TEACHING BY EXAMPLE**

#### 3.c.5

In Acts 20:33-36, Paul offers himself as a role model in his attitude to self-support and work. His involvement in manual work has a dual, or even threefold, purpose. It is a way of supporting himself and of assisting the

community; it promotes the gospel and also avoids the exploitation of those lacking material resources. He does not want to be considered a burden to others, or be open to any accusation of preaching for financial gain. He states: 'In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" ' (Acts 20:35, NRSV).

### 3.c.6

In 1 Corinthians 9:1-27, Paul defends his apostolic ministry. Working for a living is not incompatible with the service of God. In certain circumstances (for the sake of the weak: 9:12,22) the minister of the gospel may be obliged to undertake other work. In this way God may be more fully served, and the minister avoids becoming a burden to others. Even though he has a right to wages — Paul claims the support of Scripture and 'natural justice' for this — he lays this right aside in his own case so that wider purposes may be served. For Paul his legitimate work in this case involves both his apostolic commission to preach the gospel and his regular trade as a tentmaker. So doing, Paul willingly makes himself a 'slave' (9:18,19). In other passages Paul recounts the hardship ('toil') he has suffered on account of his struggle for the gospel (1 Cor 4:12; 2 Cor 6:5; 11:23,27).

### 3.c.7

This approach is not confined to apostles only; Paul urges all members of Christ's body 'to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called' (Eph 4:1). This new life includes an appropriate attitude to work and possessions: 'Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy' (Eph 4:28). Behaviour doubly negative — harmful to self and others — is transformed by 'the likeness (image!) of God' (Eph 4:24) into a twofold blessing, as one's own and others' needs are met in self-sacrificing labour. Work is a fundamental way in which the command to 'love your neighbour as yourself' can begin to be fulfilled (Mark 12:31).

## **'ANYONE UNWILLING TO WORK SHOULD NOT EAT'**

### 3.c.8

Within the congregation at Thessalonica it appears that some held that, in view of the imminent return of Christ, working for a living was no longer necessary. In 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 (see also 5:12-14), Paul opposes these ideas by stating that work with one's hands is not to be abandoned because of Christian life and service. Rather he argues from his own experience that it can be against God's will not to work, because not to do so burdens others and may even weaken the witness to the gospel.

### 3.c.9

In 2 Thessalonians this receives more specific attention. Paul emphasises that work is God-given, a part of the natural order in this age until the return of Christ (2 Thess 3:6-15). All people are to work for their living 'with toil and labour'. This is God's will (3:6); therefore not to work is to break a commandment given 'in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ', and is against the

apostolic tradition which Paul had handed on. Paul's own example is that all the faithful (including leaders) are to live by their own work; expressed negatively: 'Anyone unwilling to work, should not eat' (3:10).

#### 3.c.10

The context makes it clear that it is wholly inappropriate to use this text (3:10) as a fixed principle when dealing with the unemployed today. Paul is dealing with a specific theological/social problem where certain people were justifying idleness (or even full-time paid church work!) on the basis of the expected return of Jesus. The situation of the young and other long-term unemployed people in our day bears little — if any — relation to that described here by Paul.

### **MEETING SPECIAL NEEDS**

#### 3.c.11

It should be no surprise — given the prophetic tradition in Judaism (see 3.b.10 above) and Jesus' own ministry and teaching (see Matt 25:31-46; Luke 10:25-37) — that ministry to the needs of the poor and other disadvantaged persons received a high priority in the early church, standing alongside the preaching of the gospel (Acts 6:1-7; 2 Cor 8 & 9).

#### 3.c.12

Within the church, following Old Testament tradition and law (Deut 14:28,29; 24:19-22), widows were of special concern, receiving support from the believers (Acts 6:1; 9:39-41), and enrolled in a special category of service in the church. In 1 Timothy 5:3-16 Paul deals with the abuse of this charity by widows who had families to support them, as did some young widows who were in a position to remarry. His principle is this: 'Let not the church be burdened, so that it can assist those who are real widows' (5:16).

#### 3.c.13

Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 6:3-21 ('the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil', 6:10) is often (mis)quoted. His point is that while working for money (even for 'riches') is not wrong, the life in Christ places three specific cautions in our path: great care is needed lest wealth rather than God himself becomes the focus of our lives; we are to beware of pride; and 'do good . . . be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share'.

### **LUTHER ON 'CREATIVE SERVICE'**

#### 3.c.14

*Daily we experience how everybody tries to rise above his own level and strives for honour, power, wealth, art, comfortable living and everything which is big and lofty. Wherever one finds these people, there everybody clings to them, follows them, serves them eagerly. Everybody likes to be there to share in their high standing. On the other hand, nobody likes to look down where poverty, shame, need, misery and fear dwell. Everybody averts the eyes from them. Wherever you*

*find such people, everybody runs away, flees, shies away from them, leaves them. Nobody thinks of helping them and standing by them, to help them become somebody. . . There is no creator among men who would make something out of nothing, although St Paul, in Romans 12, teaches and says: 'Dear brethren, regard not the lofty things, but give yourselves to the lowly'. (Luther, 'The Magnificat' - Luther's Works, Vol. 21)*

## **THE HOUSEHOLD TABLES**

### **3.c.15**

The apostolic 'household tables' — lists of duties owed to one another by (eg) parents and children, masters and slaves — show clearly the biblical principles which should undergird attitudes and relationships within a working environment. These are found in Ephesians 6:1-9; Col 3:18-4:1; 1 Tim 6:1,2; Titus 2:1-10 and 1 Pet 2:13-21. What is immediately apparent (and perhaps shocking) is the toleration of a rigidly structured society, in which slavery and subordination were accepted as the norms. Obviously, the organisation of (western) society today is fundamentally different to that experienced by Peter, Paul and the other apostles.

### **3.c.16**

However, certain principles remain valid, for Christians at least: the reciprocal nature of the duties of those in authority and those who are 'subservient' can be stressed. 'Masters' are to care for and be fair with those working under them; workers are to cultivate attitudes of respect, honour and obedience to those who lead and guide them.

### **3.c.17**

Work at whatever level can be done as 'unto the Lord' (Col 3:23). This means that the ultimate purpose of our work is not personal glory or gain, but the glory of God in working faithfully with the gifts he has given us for the service of his world. It is out of this perspective that a view of work as 'vocation' (calling) grows (see below 3.d).

### **3.c.18**

In addition, it should be noted that — whatever working relationships exist (the 'objective view' — see 3.b.12,13) — there is to be no discrimination on the basis of work in the Christian community (Jas 2:1-13; Gal 3:28). Class consciousness cannot exist within the church, not on the basis of wealth or social status, and not according to occupation or profession, or the lack of any of these human measures of worth!

## **SUMMARY: THE NEW TESTAMENT WITNESS ON WORK**

### 3.c.19

Outwardly, work serves as a means through which God's good gifts are to be received and shared in order to:

- a) provide for one's own living,
- b) assist the economically weak,
- c) avoid placing unnecessary burdens on others,
- d) avoid idleness or other sins against the 7th Commandment
  - inwardly, the secret heart of work is its place as the proving-ground for everyday Christian living, in faith and hope and love;
  - those whose work is the gospel need not live in poverty, but neither should they compromise their witness by undue dependence on the generosity of others, or by appearing to avoid their own responsibilities;
  - all those who follow Jesus are called to share in his sufferings, and, 'baptised into his death', experience hardship and toil (in whatever work), which at the same time contains the promise of glory.

Thus all drudgery and toil will one day cease. Christians are aware of the 'rest in Christ' who has fulfilled the Sabbath by his 'rest' in the grave. Those in Christ await the sabbath rest for the people of God (Heb 4:1-13). Christians have already, by their union with Christ, entered into that rest. However, it is not yet in its fulfilment. They experience the tension of the 'new heaven and new earth' which has come — in Christ — and which is yet to be fully revealed. While they already possess the life which is eternal, they carry out their work under the cross.

## **3.d WORK IN LUTHERAN THEOLOGY**

### **THE CONCEPT OF VOCATION**

#### 3.d.1

The idea of vocation (Gk. *klesis*: 'calling') has a long history in Christian theology. In basic, biblical terms, all Christians are called to follow Christ and live in him (Rom 1:6). Thus the call focuses on the gospel — both for those who preach ('called to be an apostle', 1 Cor. 1:1), and for those who hear and believe ('called to be free', Gal 5:13). The Christian life, therefore, can be described as living 'a life worthy of the calling you have received' (Eph 4:1) — and thus embraces a call to work in the manner described above (3.c.18), and implies a life which shuns selfish individualism and seeks community, fellowship, and the common good.

#### 3.d.2

By the time of the Reformation, however, the term vocation was tied exclusively to the religious orders, and described — in effect — a call to escape from the world (including the world of work) to a higher calling

inherently more pleasing to God. Luther's rediscovery of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith, apart from the works of the law (Rom 3:21-26), demanded a complete rethinking of the nature of the Christian life, including the meaning of work and vocation.

### 3.d.3

On the basis of 1 Corinthians 7:20 ('Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called'), Luther developed his teaching on the Christian's calling in the world, removing 'vocation' from the monastery to the marketplace. A Christian works in the world to the best of his or her ability; housewife, mother, cobbler, tailor, teacher — all of these can be 'high callings' in which faith and trust in God's providential care grows, and the neighbour is served by love and good works. Right here — in this world: in our homes, schools and workplaces — is where we are to 'take up our cross' and live the lives of forgiven, forgiving sinners who have been 'called by the gospel'.

## LUTHER ON PARENTING

### 3.d.4

*When (our natural self) takes a look at married life, (it) turns up its nose and says: 'Alas, must I rock the baby, wash its nappies, make its bed, smell its stench, stay up nights with it, take care of it when it cries, heal its rashes and sores, and on top of that care for my wife, provide for her, labour at my trade (and endure) whatever else of bitterness and drudgery married life involves? O you poor, wretched fellow, have you taken a wife? . . . It is better to remain free and lead a peaceful, carefree life . . .'*

*What then does Christian faith say to this? It opens its eyes, looks upon all these insignificant, distasteful, and despised duties in the Spirit, and is aware that they are all adorned with divine approval as with the costliest gold and jewels . . . Now you tell me, when a father goes ahead and washes nappies or performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool — though that father is acting in the spirit just described and in Christian faith — my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling — not because the father is washing nappies, but because he is doing so in Christian faith. ("The Estate of Marriage", Luther's Works, Vol 45, pp 39,40)*

## THE NATURAL ORDERS — STATION AND OFFICE

### 3.d.5

Viewing work as belonging primarily to the first article of the Creed (see 3.a.9), Lutheran theology has found it helpful to speak of the 'natural orders' established by God in creation. Through these, God continues to govern and provide for his world, despite human sinfulness. The natural orders give stability and protection particularly to the weak within a community, and give meaning and purpose to work. Even though our view of the world today is

more dynamic and flexible than the static worldview of earlier centuries, the need for social order and structure is still acknowledged.

#### 3.d.6

Luther envisaged all people as occupying these orders, placed into particular 'stations' (or 'estates') in which to live in keeping with their specific vocation. The three primary estates were those of family, government, and church — and, as can be quickly seen, a person may occupy more than one of these estates at one time, move from one to another, and at different times occupy different offices within them.

#### 3.d.7

But — whatever your role in society — all live and work under God: 'Reflect on your condition in the light of the Ten Commandments: whether you are a father or mother, a son or a daughter, a master or servant; whether you have been disobedient, unfaithful, lazy, ill-tempered, or quarrelsome, whether you have harmed anyone by word or deed; and whether you have stolen, neglected, or wasted anything, or done other evil.' (Confession, Luther's *Small Catechism*)

#### 3.d.8

'Station' is where a person has been placed by God; 'vocation' is the content of one's activity in that place: 'So vocation belongs to this world, not to heaven; it is directed towards one's neighbour, not towards God. This is an important preliminary characteristic. In his vocation one is not reaching up to God, but rather bends oneself down to the world. When one does that, God's creative work is carried on.' (*Luther on Vocation*, G Wingren, p.17)

### **THE PROTESTANT (CALVINIST) WORK ETHIC**

#### 3.d.9

Like Luther, the reformer John Calvin saw work as the place and the opportunity for Christians to live out their faith, and grow in its fruits. However, his view of work tended towards an emphasis on success and profit as the proof of God's blessing. In this, a major concern (as in Calvin's theology generally) was that work was being performed to God's glory — in accord with his commandments — and that this would therefore be manifest in material gain, achieved by thrift and hard work.

#### 3.d.10

Later (eg among the Puritans who colonised America) this developed into a direct correlation between success and salvation ('election' in Calvinist theology), and between personal wealth and righteousness. If profit and wealth are to be seen as proofs of God's eternal blessing, then the accumulation of large amounts of capital becomes — as far as life on this earth is concerned — a desirable end in itself. The growth of modern capitalism, beginning with the Industrial Revolution — with all of its accompanying evils and benefits — is considered by many writers to be the development of this work ethic (see eg Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, C Scribner's, 1958).

### 3.d.11

However, a fuller study of Scripture reminds us that work may well be fruitless and futile, that success and failure are not necessarily infallible marks of God's blessing or ill-favour (cf Job), and that it is the 'poor' who are blessed with the promise of God's kingdom (Luke 6:20). Luther's theology urges us, on the basis of the Cross, to cling to Christ alone in evil times as well as good, and to allow our faith to be tested and strengthened through perseverance in grace and forgiveness. While the theological excesses of the work ethic may now only be present in America's evangelists of prosperity, growth and guaranteed healing, the legacy of the 'yuppy' and 'workaholic' status culture of the 1980s is still painfully with us in our societies today.

## **GOVERNMENTAL ROLE**

### 3.d.12

In placing human activity, theologically speaking, in the area of the first article of the Creed (see 3.a.9), we can say that God's rule in this world is expressed through human authorities and governments, the state. Such authority exists, under God, to promote the welfare of citizens (Rom 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13,14; Matt 22:15-22; but see also Acts 5:17-42, especially 5:29). This includes the area of work, in which the state has the right, authority and power to legislate so that society can function peacefully, citizens be protected and the common good of all promoted. The state is legitimately concerned for the rights and responsibilities of workers, management, and those who own and control the means of production, as well as for the provision of social services in its own right. The interdependence of its citizens is to be a primary concern for any state, as the building of a healthy community depends on recognising that all citizens are (or can be) indispensable components of human society (cf 1 Cor 12:12-26).

### 3.d.13

Because the state is, ultimately, God's servant, the church — as God's prophetic voice in this world — has the obligation and responsibility to challenge those in positions of power and authority to uphold the rights of all citizens (especially the unemployed and disadvantaged) to life and sustenance. The state may be urged to:

- act to uphold the obligation of all adult subjects to work so that they provide for themselves to the best of their abilities;
- be concerned that all workers receive wages adequate to their needs, sufficient to maintain their families;
- ensure that employers act responsibly for their employees in the maintenance of just and fair conditions of work;
- safeguard against exploitation by setting minimum wages;
- be concerned for the workers' environment, by legislating in the area of occupational health and safety;

- provide social benefits such as unemployment cover, health care and accident insurance, and ensure that proper provisions are made for holidays, training, and pensions;
- outlaw discrimination on the grounds of disability, age, gender, religious affiliation or national origin;
- protect the rights of property owners, and maintain adequate levels of public housing;
- provide for the education and training of the young.

#### 3.d.14

Christians are to be aware that they are citizens of the kingdom of this world, and of Christ's kingdom of faith and righteousness; both exist under God, to fulfil his purposes. Seeking to do God's will, Christians will live honestly and unselfishly, participating in the work of government on an appropriate level, praying for it, and supporting its work for the common good (eg in the payment of taxes). In faith, and empowered by the gospel, Christians also seeks to live for Christ, serving the neighbour in their daily needs. As a witness to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, Christians proclaim this message of love and forgiveness also in and through the routines of ordinary existence and everyday work. In faith, and under the lordship of Christ, the false distinction between 'sacred and secular' now falls away and ceases to exist!

### **3.e SUMMARY VIEW OF WORK AND VOCATION**

For strength to work till close of day,  
for time to rest and time to play,  
for your protection on the way:  
Father, we thank you.

For human rights in which we share,  
for legislation just and fair,  
for all your loving, watchful care:  
Father, we thank you.

For rolling mill and furnace heat,  
for molten ore, for metal sheet,  
for each machine's unerring beat:  
Father, we thank you.

For fellow workers at our side,  
for cherished friendships, true and tried,  
for pleasure in our work, and pride:  
Father, we thank you.

For hands which laboured once below  
your grace on sinners to bestow,  
and still the marks of suffering show:  
Father, we thank you.

Lord, sanctify our hands each day,  
and consecrate our skill, we pray,  
that at your altar we may lay  
our work to thank you.

(HPV Renner, Supplement to Lutheran Hymnal, 813)

### **Resources for Further Study**

For a fuller understanding of the Lutheran teaching on vocation:

Altmann, W, *Luther on Liberation*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1987.

Billing, E, *Our Calling*, Fortress Press, 1964

Heiges, D, *The Christian's Calling*, Fortress Press, 1984

Kolden, M, *Called by the Gospel*, Augsburg Publishing House, 1983

*Luther's Works*, American edition, Concordia Publishing House, Fortress Press, 1956-1986

vol 1: 'Lectures on Genesis', chapters 1-5

vol 21: 295-358 'The Magnificat'

vol 31: 327-377 'The freedom of a Christian'

vol 45: 339-378 'To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany, that they Establish and Maintain Christian Schools'

See also *What Luther Says*, compiled by E Plass, (Concordia Publishing House, 1959) sections on 'Society', 'Work'.

Wingren, G, *Luther on Vocation*, Muhlenberg Press, 1957

Reference works:

*A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, (ed) J Childress and J Macquarie SCM 1986, articles on Unemployment, Work, Vocation.

*A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, (ed) A Richardson and J Bowden, SCM, 1983, Articles on Calling, Vocation, Work.

*The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, Augsburg, 1965, Article on 'Work, Vocation, Calling'.

Some helpful (non-Lutheran) approaches to modern questions about work:

Daines, J & Day-Lower, D, *Modern Work and Human Meaning*, Westminster Press, 1986

Haughey, J, *Converting Nine to Five: A Spirituality of Daily Work*, Crossroad, 1989

*Laborem Exercens: On Human Work* by John Paul II, St Paul Publications, 1981.