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The prosperity teaching should be rejected as an accretion to Black Pentecostalism and an example of the perverted economic theories which have helped to keep Black oppression alive.

(abridged)

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Reclaiming the Biblical Doctrine of Work

John R.W. Stott

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In a world of riches and poverty, slavery and inertia, class and economic oppression, protest and revolt are not enough. One, but only one, facet of our Christian response must be the recovery of the work ethic of the Kingdom of God—an ethic that leads to service and to maturity through co-operation with the Creator in the stewardship of creation, and to accountability in redeeming the consequences of the Fall. In this brief article, John Stott explores some aspects of the divine-human collaboration in work that brings “fulfillment to the worker, benefit to the community and glory to God”.

(Editor)

Let me say it before you think it: a clergyman is the last person in the world to expatiate on this topic. For everybody knows that no clergyman has ever done a day's work in his life. Instead, according to the old quip, he is “six days invisible and one day incomprehensible.” A few years ago a rather drunk Welsh Communist boarded the train in which I was travelling. When he learned that I was a pastor, he told me it was high time I became productive, and ceased to be a parasite on the body politic.

What is our attitude to our work? Here is a popular view:

*I don't mind work
If I've nothing else to do;
I quite admit it's true
That now and then I shirk
Particularly boring kinds of work—
Don't you?
But, on the whole, I think it's fair to say,
Provided I can do it my own way
And that I need not start on it today—
I quite like work!*

What has been called “the orthodox view” of work (or so I have read in a secular book on the social psychology of industry), and has been the basis of industrial psychology and managerial practice (or so I am assured in the same book) is “the Old Testament belief that physical labor is a curse imposed on man as a punishment for his sin.” The author

goes on to write that this view has recently been modified. But even so it is a serious distortion of Scripture. The fall certainly turned work into drudgery, because [p. 94](#) the ground was cursed with thorns and thistles, and cultivation became possible only by the sweat of the brow. But work is a consequence of creation, not the fall; the fall has aggravated its problems without destroying its joys.

So we badly need to recover the biblical doctrine of work. In the first two chapters of Genesis God reveals himself to us as a worker. Day by day, stage by stage, his creative work unfolded. And when he created mankind male and female to his own image, he made them workers too. He gave them dominion, told them to subdue the earth, and thus made them his representatives to care for the environment on his behalf. Then when he planted a garden, he put the man he had made into the garden he had planted, in order that he might cultivate it. It is from these revealed truths about God and man that we must develop a biblical doctrine of work.

First, work is intended for the fulfillment of the worker. The two sentences of [Genesis 1:26](#) belong together: “let us make men in our image” and “let them have dominion.” It is because we bear God’s image that we share God’s dominion. Therefore our potential for creative work is an essential part of our Godlike humanness, and without work we are not fully human. If we are idle (instead of busy) or destructive (instead of creative) we deny our humanity and so forfeit our self-fulfillment. “There is nothing better than that a man should find enjoyment in his work” ([Eccl. 2:24; 3:22](#)). And although employers should do their utmost to relieve the discomfort and danger of certain jobs, even such work as this can yield a measure of job satisfaction.

Secondly, work is intended for the benefit of the community. By cultivating the garden of Eden Adam will have fed and perhaps clothed his family. The Bible emphasizes productivity for service. The produce of the “land flowing with milk and honey” was to be shared with the poor, the orphan, the widow, and the alien. Paul told the thief to stop stealing and start working “so that he might be able to give to those in need” ([Eph. 4:28](#)).

Thirdly, work is intended for the glory of God. God the Creator has deliberately humbled himself to require the co-operation of human beings. He created the earth, but entrusted to humans the task of subduing it, He planted a garden, but then appointed a gardener. “You should have seen this ’ere garden,” said the Cockney gardener to the person who piously praised God for the lovely flowers, “when Gawd ’ad it all to ’isself!” The fact is that creation and cultivation, nature and culture, raw materials and [p. 95](#) craftsmanship belong together. As Luther put it, “God even milks the cows through you.”

This concept of divine-human collaboration applies to all honorable work. God has so ordered life on earth as to depend on us. The human baby is the most helpless of creatures. Each infant is indeed a gift of the Lord, but he then drops it into a human lap saying, as it were, “now you take over.” For years children depend on their parents and teachers, Even in adult life, though we depend on God for life, we depend on each other for the necessities of life, not only of physical life (food, clothing, shelter, warmth and health) but of social life too (everything that goes to make up civilized society). So whatever our work, we need to see it as being—either directly or indirectly—co-operation with God in leading human beings into maturity. It is this that glorifies him. Some years ago the chief health inspector of the Port of London wrote to me that to work for his own ends did not satisfy him. “I like to think,” he went on, “that I am responsible for a part of the greater field pattern whereby all serve human welfare and obey the will of our wonderful Creator.”

According to God’s intention, then, work might be defined as “the expenditure of manual or mental energy in service, which brings fulfillment to the worker, benefit to the community, and glory to God.”

The attentive reader will observe that I have made no reference to pay, for it is “work” which I have tried to define, not “employment.” We need to remember that though all employment is work, not all work is employment. Adam was not paid for working in the garden. The housewife is not paid for keeping the home and bringing up the children. And millions of people do spare time to work for the church in a voluntary capacity.

Unemployment is a problem of enormous magnitude. Of the total labor force 6 percent is now unemployed in Britain, 7 percent in the United States and 8 percent in Canada. And the true percentages would be higher if we included those who do not register as unemployed persons and those who are underemployed on account of “overmanning.” Worst hit are young people under the age of twenty-five (44 percent of the unemployed in Britain belong to this category), the blacks, the disabled, and the unskilled. The Third World figures are much worse, however. It is reckoned that 35 per cent of the work force of developing countries are unemployed (about 300 million people) as compared with an average of 5 percent in the West (some 17 million).

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Barnabas—Son of Encouragement

Dick France

Reprinted from Themelios (September 1978) with permission

The Holy Spirit is the *parakletos*, and we all know how impossible it is to find an adequate word to translate that rich idea. But among its many aspects we must certainly include that of ‘encouragement’, and it was probably in this sense that the nickname of the Cypriot Levite Joseph was intended—Barnabas, son of *paraklesis*. For in the part Barnabas played in the early years of the Christian mission this ministry of the Paraclete was seen time and again, as he took the side of the misunderstood and the rejected, and proved to be for them a son of encouragement, or as we might put it, a tower of strength.

It is a gift the church still needs. A church plagued by divisions and suspicion, often more concerned with nit-picking controversy than with fellowship and outreach, needs more Barnabases. Readers of *Themelios*, who aspire to positions of responsibility in the church, would be well advised to consider the example of Barnabas lest they turn out to be, like too many of the church’s leaders past and present, effective sons of discouragement.

A full study of Barnabas would need to include the remarkable gift of his family estate which first brings him into the narrative of Acts ([4:36f.](#)), and which may not be entirely unconnected with the fact that he later had to work for his living ([1 Cor. 9:6](#)). But I want to focus on his ministry of encouragement by considering three of the objects of his *paraklesis*.

THE OUTSIDERS