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# TGIF! A Theology of Workers and their Work

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*'Nothing ruins a Friday more than an understanding that today is Tuesday.'*

– Anonymous

## I Where is God in Work?

An old Chinese proverb states, 'May you live in interesting times.' Our times surely meet this criterion. We live in a western society dominated by a paradigm that emphasises increasing economic growth as the panacea for all that ails us and by global multinationals that influence, some might say control, various areas of our lives.<sup>1</sup> While combined, these factors have improved the living standard of many (in the West at least), at the same time they have contributed to significant societal, environmental, and economic harms.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of the organisations within western democratic, capitalist societies reflect this underlying paradigm. They have been set up in such way as to maximise return on investment whether they be for-profit organisations or not (for example, a hospital is required to use government money as efficiently and effectively as possible). As a result of this, conditions within these organisations are likely to reinforce conduct that enhances these economic goals and constrain behaviours that do not.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, we are forever reading about some organisation being involved in unethical practice, as individuals within it are acculturated into decision-making and behaviours that prioritise the bottom line often at the expense of 'being a good person' or

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1 C. Hamilton, *Growth Fetish* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2003); and J. Bakan, *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power* (New York: Free Press, 2004).

2 D. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2001).

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3 M. Lips-Wiersma, and V. Nilakant, 'Practical Compassion: Toward a Critical Spiritual Foundation for Corporate Responsibility', in J. Biberman and L. Tischler, eds., *Spirituality in Business: Theory, Practice, and Future Directions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 51–72.

‘doing the right thing’.<sup>4</sup>

Economic capitalism is not the only pressure one feels in the workforce today, however. In an increasingly industrialized world, many simply feel their work is disconnected from anything important, it has little value to them, and so it is compartmentalized and tolerated. Monday is a curse and Friday evening is the goal; everything in-between is simply to be endured.

We speak of Mondayitis, Wednesday has become known as ‘hump day’, and after-work drinks on a Friday represent the entrance to the promised land of the weekend; hence the common abbreviation, ‘TGIF’ (Thank G\*d it’s Friday)! Not insignificantly, this attitude is shared by many Christians as well. Such views as these need to be challenged and radically reoriented. What is required is a theology of work with practical relevance from Monday to Friday (and Saturday and Sunday for many who work these days as well).

Labour is an inherent part of what we do and so, by derivation, of who we are; it affects our lives both at work and at home. Unfortunately, much of how we understand work ‘is a modern invention, a product of industrialisation and governed by the laws of economic rationality’.<sup>5</sup> These ‘laws’ ensure that labour is reorganised in the interests of efficiency and profits. Workplaces, and the individuals within them, have come to be seen as machines—tools created

to achieve instrumental ends.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps, it is not surprising therefore, that interest in spirituality in the workplace (hereafter SWP) has developed not only as a bulwark against such thinking<sup>7</sup> but also to meet existential needs for greater connectedness and meaning through work.<sup>8</sup> As Mitroff has noted, ‘whether we like it or not, work is inextricably intertwined with our perpetual search for meaning. Work is an integral part of our spirituality, our search for ultimate meaning.’<sup>9</sup>

Much has been written about SWP in the last two decades. Organizational scholars have found beneficial relationships between SWP and employee well-being,<sup>10</sup> motivation,<sup>11</sup> and sense of

6 G. Morgan, *Images of Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997).

7 M. Benefiel, L. W. Fry, and D. Geigle, ‘Spirituality and Religion in the Workplace: History, Theory, and Research’, *Psychology of Religion & Spirituality* 6 no. 3 (2014): 175–87.

8 H. Ashar, and M. Lane-Mahar, ‘Success and Spirituality in the New Business Paradigm’, *Journal of Management Inquiry* 13 no. 3 (2004): 249–60.

9 I. I. Mitroff, ‘Do Not Promote Religion Under the Guise of Spirituality’, *Organization* 10 no. 2 (2003): 375.

10 W. J. Harrington, R. C., and D. J. Gooden, ‘Perceptions of Workplace Spirituality Among Professionals and Executives’, *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* 13 no. 3 (2001): 155–63; F. Karakas, ‘Spirituality and Performance in Organizations: A Literature Review’, *Journal of Business Ethics* 94 no. 1 (2010): 89–106; and D. C. Trott, ‘Spiritual Well-being of Workers: An Exploratory Study of Spirituality in the Workplace’ (PhD, The University of Texas, Austin, TX, 1996).

11 L. W. Fry, S. T. Hannah, M. Noel, and F. O. Walumbwa, ‘Impact of Spiritual Leadership on Unit Performance’, *The Leadership Quarterly* 22 no. 2 (2011): 259–70; Y.A. Nur, and D. W. Organ, ‘Selected Organizational Outcome Cor-

4 V. Anand, B. E. Ashforth, and M. Joshi, ‘Business as Usual: The Acceptance and Perpetuation of Corruption in Organizations’, *Academy of Management Executive* 18 no. 2 (2004): 39–53.

5 C. Casey, *Work, Self and Society* (London: Routledge, 1995), 28.

community.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, spirituality has become an applause word—it is the kind of word that generates applause whenever it is used.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, the modern understanding of the term depends on whoever is using it.

Locating SWP within a wider religious system such as Christianity, with its long history and analysis of work,<sup>14</sup> may produce better insights.<sup>15</sup> What might a distinctly theological approach to SWP look like and what would it consist of?

This essay builds on the notion that people want to integrate their spirituality into their work. It uses two suggestive themes: human beings are created to be ‘priests of creation’ and ‘mediators of order’. The essay begins with an overview of what such roles entail, what relevance they have to our labours, and how we might enact these callings in and through our work. These ideas then form the basis for conclusions drawn from a deductive analysis of Christians enacting their spirituality in several large New Zealand service organisations.<sup>16</sup>

## II A Theology of Workers

According to Scottish theologian, Thomas F. Torrance, human beings require others to fulfil their end or *telos*. Thus, he contends we are ‘defined by, and sustained within our relations to God, the created order and fellow human beings’.<sup>17</sup> Several pertinent ideas arise from this claim.

First, human beings are created by and contingent upon God and as such have both physical and spiritual aspects that are ‘essentially complementary and ontologically integrated’.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, differentiating between

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relates of Spirituality in the Workplace’, *Psychological Reports* 98 no. 1 (2006): 111–20; A. Rego, and M. P. Cunha, ‘Workplace Spirituality and Organizational Commitment’, *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 21 no. 1 (2008): 53–75.

12 A. Crawford, S. S. Hubbard, S. R. Lonis-Shumate, and M. O’Neill, ‘Workplace Spirituality and Employee Attitudes Within the Lodging Environment’, *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism* 8 no. 1 (2009): 64–81; R. W. Kolodinsky, R. A. Giacalone, and C. L. Jurkiewicz, ‘Workplace Values and Outcomes: Exploring Personal, Organisational and Interactive Workplace Spirituality’, *Journal of Business Ethics* 81 no. 2 (2008): 465–80; and J. F. Milliman, A. J. Czaplewski, and J. Ferguson, ‘Workplace Spirituality and Employee Work Attitudes: An Exploratory Empirical Assessment’, *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 16 no. 4 (2003): 426–47.

13 D. A. Carson, ‘When is Spirituality Spiritual? Reflections on Some Problems of Definitions’, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37 no. 3 (1994): 381–94.

14 M. Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (London: Oxford University Press, 1991).

15 P. K. McGhee, ‘Taking the Spirit to Work’, in M. Habets, ed., *The Spirit of Truth: Reading Scripture and Constructing Theology with the Holy Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 179–205.

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16 P. K. McGhee, ‘The Role of Spirituality in Ethical Decision Making and Behaviour’ (PhD, Auckland University, New Zealand, 2015).

17 E. G. Flett, ‘Priests of Creation, Mediators of Order: The Human Person as a Cultural Being in Thomas F. Torrance’s Theological Anthropology’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 no. 2 (2005): 163.

18 T. F. Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence in the Frame of Knowledge: Explorations in the Interrelations of Scientific and Theological Enterprise* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 105.

the physical (e.g. labour) and the spiritual (e.g. worship) is a *non sequitur*; rather these are two basic aspects of the Christian life, albeit different in form but irreducible to one another; together they are an inseparable unity.<sup>19</sup>

Second, because we are addressed and constituted by God, all that we are, and indeed can become, is dependent upon 'a continuing relation and proper orientation towards that same God'.<sup>20</sup> However, such a relationship is possible only through the person and work of Jesus Christ whom Torrance labels, the 'Personalising Person'<sup>21</sup> and 'Humanizing Man',<sup>22</sup> and upon the Holy Spirit who continually sustains 'communion between man and God'.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the work of Christ and the Spirit does not override humanity but recreates, reaffirms, and enables one to stand before God as his beloved child. Accordingly, in accepting the truth of Jesus Christ, we become more human not less; our lives, and therefore our labour, take on new meaning and importance as we participate in God's divine love and plan for creation. Here we might say we require not only a theology of work but a theology of *workers*.

Finally, this ontological change from self-will and self-understanding to lov-

ing God for his own sake liberates us from ourselves such that we can love our neighbour objectively.<sup>24</sup> Restored vertical relations with God ensure comparable horizontal relations with others. According to Torrance, this network of redeemed relationships (e.g. family, church, and society) enables humanity (and the created order of which we are part) to image or mirror God back to God though Christ by the Holy Spirit—this is the true *telos* of being human. Flett labels this a dynamic image; it is 'not only a creaturely reflection, or a spiritual reflection, but also a social reflection'.<sup>25</sup>

Without social contexts, such as workplaces, it is not possible 'for humanity in the image God to fulfil its calling and vocation as such a being'.<sup>26</sup> Solitary confinement is, in other words, the opposite of what a life well-lived looks like. Rather, a human person involved in a rich nexus of rightly ordered social relationships at church, at home, at work, and at play, provides the context for life to flourish.

These onto-personal relations (being constituting relations between persons and objects that are necessary for the healthy development of the self)<sup>27</sup> ensure that the image of God in humanity is both a description and an action, it is both one's nature and one's calling. Interestingly, work has often been viewed from a vocational perspective

19 Volf, *Work in the Spirit*.

20 Flett, 'Priests of Creation', 169.

21 T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 67.

22 Torrance, *Mediation*, 69.

23 T. F. Torrance, 'The Soul and Person in Theological Perspective', in *Religion, Reason, and the Self: Essays in Honour of Hywel D. Lewis*, S.R. Sutherland and T.A. Roberts, eds. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1989), 112.

24 T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965).

25 Flett, 'Priests of Creation', 170.

26 Flett, 'Priests of Creation', 171.

27 T. F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982).

in Christian thought.<sup>28</sup> However, as Volf has noted, this understanding often allows any type of work, no matter how dehumanizing, to be a calling.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, there can be ambiguity between one's spiritual and one's external call when the two conflict. This can lead to a compromising synthesis whereby one's external vocation becomes one's spiritual one.

Finally, Jensen has argued that such thinking has furthered the elevation of work to the status of a religion.<sup>30</sup> So what notion might conceptualise the image of God in a work context if the concept of vocation as historically understood has limitations? The concept of humanity as *priests of creation* and *mediators of order* recommends itself.

### 1. Priests of creation

Reflecting a unified view of creation and humanity under the triune creator God, Russian Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann writes:

In the Bible the food that man eats, the world of which he must partake in order to live, is given to him by God, and it is given as *communion with God*. The world as man's food is not something 'material' and limited to material functions, thus different from, and opposed to, the specifically 'spiritual' functions by which man is related to God. All

that exists is God's gift to man, and it all exists to make God known to man, to make man's life communion with God.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to eating—clearly a metaphorical use of the term—humanity is given the task of naming the animals, something which Schmemmann further comments on:

To name a thing is to manifest the meaning and value God gave it, to know it as coming from God and to know its place and function within the cosmos created by God. To name a thing, in other words, is to bless God for it and in it. And in the Bible to bless God is not a 'religious' or a 'cultic' act, but the very *way of life*. God blessed the world...and this means that He filled all that exists with His love and goodness...So the only *natural* (and not 'supernatural') reaction of man, to whom God gave this blessed and sanctified world, is to bless God in return, to thank Him, *to see the world as God sees it* and—in this act of gratitude and adoration—to know, name and possess the world.<sup>32</sup>

*To see the world as God sees it*. That is the vision for everyday life we require today. In order to see the world as God sees it, we must be Godlike; and that means not only giving but also receiving. Such a gift is possible only as we are in communion with God. The Gift cannot be abstracted from the Giver. All of this, the Orthodox, and

28 D. Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation*. Paternoster Theological Monographs (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005).

29 Volf, *Work in the Spirit*.

30 D. H. Jensen, *Responsive Labor: A Theology of Work* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

31 Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 2nd edition (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 14–15.

32 Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 15.

many western thinkers, subsume under the grand idea that humans are the God-ordained 'priests of creation'. The Spirit of God woos and entices us into this priestly vocation. Again, Schmemmann writes:

The first, the basic definition of man is that he is *the priest*. He stands in the centre of the world and unifies it in acts of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God—and by filling the world with his Eucharist, he transforms his life, the one that he receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him.<sup>33</sup>

Romanian Orthodox theologian, Dumitru Staniloae, prefers to describe men and women as creation's 'master' (*archon*), its created 'co-creator', 'co-worker' or 'continuator'.<sup>34</sup> Staniloae considers the world as God's gift to humanity in order that humanity may gift it back to God. In this way, argues Staniloae, the sacrifice offered to God by men and women is a Eucharist, making every person a priest of God for the world.<sup>35</sup> The language of Eucharist reminds us of priestly duty, specifically the priestly duty of humanity to represent the world to God.

Such is a vision for a rightly ordered concept of work; it is priestly labour, freely offered to God. In the hands of Thomas Torrance, the concept of priest

of creation captures what he means by the image of God being a calling.<sup>36</sup> As its priest, humanity's vocation is to 'assist the creation as a whole to realise and evidence its rational order and beauty and thus to express God'.<sup>37</sup>

'Nature itself is mute', writes Torrance, 'but human being is the one constituent of the created universe through whom its rational structure and astonishing beauty may be brought to word in praise of the Creator'.<sup>38</sup> As such, humanity is the *mediator of order* and the *priest of creation*, a creation 'freely brought into being by the will of God and graciously entrusted to a creature crafted after the image of God'.<sup>39</sup>

Torrance views redeemed humanity as co-creators with God. Our work brings forth 'forms of order and beauty of which it would not be capable otherwise'.<sup>40</sup> This is our priestly call to co-create and act as stewards of creation. For Torrance, the primary way this occurs is through the natural sciences.<sup>41</sup> However, as both Habets and Flett note, this seems too narrow an approach. If we take this idea into the workplace (a social context), then our daily labours also enact our priesthood.<sup>42</sup>

We see this in the original creation

33 Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 15.

34 Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology: Vol 2: The World: Creation and Deification*, trans. and ed. I. Ionita and R. Barringer (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), 21–112.

35 Dumitru Staniloae, 'The World as Gift and Sacrament of God's Love', *Sobornost* 9 (1969): 662–73.

36 T. F. Torrance, *The Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001).

37 M. Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 45.

38 T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 213.

39 Flett, 'Priests of Creation', 182.

40 Habets, *Theosis*, 45.

41 Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*.

42 Habets, *Theosis*, and Flett, 'Priests of Creation'.



story of the Garden of Eden. We must ask ourselves, is Eden merely a Mesopotamian farm and Adam and Eve its first gardeners? If so, does Genesis 1–2 then provide human creatures with a work ethic—to till the ground, multiply, and steward? Quite simply, No. Adam’s responsibility is not so much farming as priestly. The Garden of Eden functions as the earthly archetypal temple and Adam and Eve are its first priests.<sup>43</sup> The combined evidence suggests that the Genesis narrative identifies the Garden as the holy of holies, in which human creatures had access to the presence of God.

And so we return to ask what the ‘work’ was that Adam and Eve, and all their sons and daughters, were created for. God placed humans ‘in the garden to work it and keep it’ (Gen 2.15). Many simply read this as ‘cultivation’—thus ‘farming’. God meant us all to be farmers! But that is not what the text is saying at all.

The exact same vocabulary—‘work’ and ‘keep’ is used to describe the priestly responsibilities in the tabernacle: ‘They shall keep guard over him...before the tent of meeting as they minister/work at the tabernacle’ (Num 3.7-8; 8.26; 18.5-6 cf. 4.23-24, 26). This is the only other time in the Pentateuch when these words are used together—something the Rabbis noticed in their Midrash.

Thus we are on safe ground to assert that Adam and Eve’s responsibilities in the garden are primarily priestly rather than agricultural! As John Fesko has stated:

Adam was an archetypal priest, not a farmer. Scanning the horizon of redemptive history, we find further confirmation of the garden-temple thesis. At the end of redemptive history it is not a massive city-farm that descends out of the heavens, but a city-temple. If the end of redemptive history represents God’s intentions from the beginning, then he planted a temple in Eden, not a farm.<sup>44</sup>

It is from this relationship of Creator to creature that the human beings derive their significance and responsibility in the formation of the world towards its final consummation. As Flett notes, ‘*this* creature is peculiarly constituted and uniquely called to improvise with God as “scientist”, “midwife”, “priest”, and “instrument”, in order to draw the created order toward its liberating *telos*’.<sup>45</sup>

## 2. Mediators of order

Telling the story of God’s work in the world involves the embodiment and expression of God’s purposes for it. This story cannot be told apart from the formation of specific communities and their concrete action *in the world*. When human persons act in the world they function, implicitly or explicitly, as ‘mediators of order’. They cannot escape the fact that their actions have a purpose and that purposeful action is rooted in an overarching and comprehensive conception of order.

Consequently, the way in which human communities order their social

<sup>43</sup> J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1–3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Fern: Mentor, 2007), especially 57–75.

<sup>44</sup> Fesko, *Last Things First*, 75.

<sup>45</sup> Flett, ‘Priests of Creation’, 182.



and physical environments becomes a form of embodied worship, a living and concrete witness to their most comprehensive ideas of order, value, and purpose formed in conversation with a real and objective world. Our relationships with others, the created order, and God, form the fundamental basis upon which this activity takes place.

The quality of these relationships will determine also whether the result of that activity will sustain or subvert the very relations upon which it is built. Those relations, and the cultural environments they produce and sustain, can be morally legitimated only as they enable the embodiment of God's purposes for the created order and by so doing sustain the personhood and integrity of human agents created in God's image. And this can be done only when life is lived in relation to Jesus the Son of God incarnate.

In other words—when men and women function in their God-given roles as *priests of creation* and *mediators of order*, they initiate the great *shalom* of God, they embody worship (Rom 12.1), and they represent the world to God in their representation of God to the world. As such we work towards creating the 'order that ought to be'—the nudging of creation towards its intended *telos*. Eric Flett correctly argues that:

If that relation is construed properly, that identity and mission will thrust [the church] into the world as a royal priesthood, whose activity in the world of culture will not only bear witness to the God she worships, but will advance God's mis-

sion in the world through cultural transformation.<sup>46</sup>

As uniquely created beings in the image of God, humanity occupies an exclusive place on the boundary between the natural and the super natural.<sup>47</sup> As priest of creation, humanity has the function and privilege to assist the creation to realise and evidence its rational order and beauty and thus to express God's beauty and being back to God.

According to Torrance, 'through human cultivation and development nature should bring forth forms of order and beauty of which it would not be capable otherwise'.<sup>48</sup> True priestly functions of humanity include caring for the poor and the oppressed, developing sustainable farming practices, implementing ethical labour practices, and generally working in ways which respect God, creation, and humanity.

Through their work, Christians participate in God's new creation. This involves our labour reflecting God back to himself. Through their work, Christians also cooperate with God in the redemption of the world. Our mundane labours empowered by the Holy Spirit contribute to God's eschatological

46 E. G. Flett, *Persons, Powers, and Pluralities: Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Culture* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 222.

47 T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind: Order and Openness in Theology and Natural Science* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1985), 41, 62; and 'The Goodness and Dignity of Man in the Christian Tradition', *Modern Theology* 4 no. 4 (1988): 311.

48 T. F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 130.

transformation of the present.<sup>49</sup> These expectations ensure that legitimate forms of work have intrinsic value and invest it with ultimate meaning via its relation, indirectly through sanctification and directly through what humans create, to the new creation.

Not all work, however, qualifies. Criteria in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 suggest that under judgement, work that has ultimate significance, work that reflects and cooperates with the triune nature of God, is purified (is good). Insignificant work, on the other hand, work done counter to God's nature or in cooperation with powers that wish to ruin God's plan for creation, is illegitimate.

### III A Study of Christian Spirituality at Work

Using the preceding theology as the basis for deductive analysis, and as part of a larger study, 21 Christians from several New Zealand service organisations were interviewed about their spirituality and its relationship to their work.<sup>50</sup> After discussing 2 to 3 critical incidents, their answers were analysed, using the two key themes: first, Christians are co-creators and co-redeemers with God in and through their work, and, second, that such work has ultimate meaning and value in and of itself separate from other external goods.

#### 1. Co-creators in the workplace

As a result of this analysis, we found

participants frequently acted as 'embodied witnesses to the glory and eternal purposes of God' and in doing so brought another dimension to their organisations.<sup>51</sup> This dimension encouraged serving humanity's real needs, developed a corporate distinctiveness that focused on character and virtues, and made decisions that transcended individual and organizational selfishness.

This resonates with the Spirit's work in creation and contributes to the long-term flourishing of all.<sup>52</sup> Such behaviour was worship made flesh; an incarnate and tangible sign of God in the world through their work.

A good example of these ideas in action comes from Spencer, a privacy manager in a Government organisation. In response to questions about his influence in the workplace, Spencer provided a clear indication that his Christian spirituality played a significant role. When asked how, he stated it helped set the ethical tone at work and contributed momentum for sustainable ethical change:

Well I believe it [Christianity] enhances it [the organisation] significantly...I believe I help set the tone. I believe that being a spiritual person, and having that as a value means that I do my job different, better; more efficiently, more thoroughly than I would if I didn't have that. And that that does effect the organisation. And I think that having people who get that, who do value spirituality, it does create momentum towards making the organi-

<sup>49</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*.

<sup>50</sup> McGhee, 'The Role of Spirituality in Ethical Decision Making and Behaviour'.

<sup>51</sup> Flett, 'Priests of creation', 176.

<sup>52</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*.

sation a better place.

Spencer referenced improved working outcomes including caring about his team, looking out for broader interests besides his own, and working with integrity.

Unfortunately, organisational misbehaviour continues to make headlines around the world. From the collapse of Enron and WorldCom in 2001 through to Volkswagen's recent admission that 11 million of its vehicles were equipped with software to cheat emissions tests in 2016, there have been many well-known cases.<sup>53</sup> Why are such transgressions a prevalent and continuing blight in organisations? The simple answer is that we are, as Paul writes in Rom 3:9–10, 'all under sin...there is no one righteous, not even one'.

This response, appropriate as it is, does not explain such incidents' frequent occurrence. Many modern organisations operate within a pervasive economic system that is individualistic, self-interested, focused on pecuniary ends while rationalising such behaviour as conducive to greater well-being.<sup>54</sup> This ensures that organisations image this dominant paradigm and strive to realise its ends.<sup>55</sup> Sadly,

this often fosters policies, procedures, and practices that bolster unethical conduct.<sup>56</sup>

The potency of self-interest in many organisations suppresses moral choices, ensures means are more important than ends, and regularly ignores externalities as part of operational processes.<sup>57</sup> This incentivises individuals to view their organisation as a separate entity from society; an entity that prioritises economic goals over other concerns.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Schwartz, writing in his book, *Narcissistic Process and Corporate Decay*, argues that organisations

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are Destroying Good Management Practices', *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 4 no. 1 (2005): 75–91; R. A. Giacalone, 'A Transcendent Business Education for the 21st Century', *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 3 no. 4 (2004): 415–20.

<sup>56</sup> Anand, Ashforth, and Joshi, 'Business as Usual', 39–53; Bakan, *The Corporation*; A. Buchanan, 'Toward a Theory of the Ethics of Bureaucratic Organizations', *Business Ethics Quarterly* 6 no. 4 (1996): 419–40; J. M. Darley, 'How Organisations Socialize Individuals into Evil Doing', in *Codes of Conduct: Behavioral Research into Business Ethics*, eds. D. Messick, and A. E. Tenbrunsel (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996), 13–42; R. Jackall, *Moral Mazes: The World of Corporate Managers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); R. McKenna, and E. Tsahuridu, 'Must Managers Leave Ethics at Home? Economics and Moral Anomie in Business Organisations', *Reason in Practice* 1 no. 3 (2001): 67–76; and L. K. Trevino, and S. A. Youngblood, 'Bad Apples in Bad Barrels: A Causal Analysis of Ethical Decision-making Behavior', *Journal of Applied Psychology* 75 no. 4 (1990): 378–85.

<sup>57</sup> G. Moore, 'Re-imagining the Morality of Management: A Modern Virtue Ethics Approach', *Business Ethics Quarterly* 18 no. 4 (2008): 483–511.

<sup>58</sup> Lips-Wiersma, and Nilakant, 'Practical Compassion', 51–72.

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<sup>53</sup> G. Gates, J. Ewing, K. Russell, and D. Watkins, 'Explaining Volkswagen's Emissions Scandal', *New York Times*. (June 1, 2016). Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/business/international/vw-diesel-emissions-scandal-explained.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/business/international/vw-diesel-emissions-scandal-explained.html?_r=0)

<sup>54</sup> P. Berry, *Fostering Spirituality in the Workplace: A Leader's Guide to Sustainability* (New York: Business Expert Press, 2013); Hamilton, *Growth Fetish*; T. Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Lips-Wiersma, and Nilakant, 'Practical Compassion', 51–72.

<sup>55</sup> S. Ghoshal, 'Bad Management Theories

could not be the 'bastions of benign community oriented ethical reasoning we wished them to be because of the demands and requirements of the market'.<sup>59</sup>

Accordingly, organisations, and the people within them, create for themselves a 'self-contained, self-serving worldview, which rationalizes anything done on their behalf and does not require justification on any grounds outside of themselves'.<sup>60</sup> This worldview, Schwartz suggests, imposes a survival of the fittest requirement on all participants in organisational life that in turn ensures that to get ahead all must conform.

As embodied created beings living in community, human action has bearing not only on others, but on creation itself. As Paul writes in Romans 8:19-22, creation is frustrated by our sin. It bears the scars of humanity's disobedience. Unfortunately, business and industry often play a conspicuous role in such wounding.<sup>61</sup>

The church's mission, states Flett, is 'not spiritual in any narrow sense, but cultural, since it is her function to stand as an embodied witness of the

glory and eternal purpose of God'.<sup>62</sup> Christians in the workplace are to image God, not the dominant economic ideology. Our purpose and labours help liberate creation from its 'bondage to decay'; this is the true calling of Christ since it brings our work-life into 'conformity with the way it has been ordered by the Father and redeemed by the Son'.<sup>63</sup>

For Spencer, work was more than just a job—it was also about making a difference. His spirituality acts as a compass pointing him back to Christ. This ensures his work reflects God's nature and desires for creation:

I like to think what I do, it's not about getting information to parties, it's ultimately about the best interests of the parties that are involved...I know sometimes in meetings and things you hear other employees talking about, 'Well it's just about this request or whatever' and I always say, 'Well no it's not just about that request; it's about what is the best long-term decision for these parties.' Many times, we can lose that perspective.

But I think spirituality and understanding, for me, what God means and what Jesus has done in my life means that I do always get reminded: well look it's about more than just this...I think, well, when you're not tired and you are fresh you get reminded that no, this counts, this actually is making a difference for God's world. It might not be huge and it might not hit the media in a

59 H. S. Schwartz, *Narcissistic Process and Corporate Decay: The Theory of the Organizational Ideal*, cited in A. Gini, 'A Short Primer on Moral Courage', in *Moral Courage in Organizations: Doing the Right Thing at Work*, eds. D. R. Comer & G. Vega (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2011), 59.

60 Schwartz, *Narcissistic Process and Corporate Decay*, 59.

61 R. Ehrenfeld, and A. J. Hoffman, *Flourishing: A Frank Conversation about Sustainability* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Business Books, 2013); and N. Klein, *This Changes Everything* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

62 Flett, 'Priests of Creation', 176.

63 Flett, 'Priests of Creation', 178.

positive way but it's important and it counts.

As stated earlier, interpreting work from a traditional calling stance may be problematic. Several authors, writing in the theology of work literature, provide varied limitations of this approach.<sup>64</sup> While their criticisms differ, they share a belief that underpinning much of this perspective is the notion of individualism. Perhaps this is not surprising, given its ascetic roots, Protestant emphasis on freedom and close links to capitalism.<sup>65</sup>

Unfortunately, such a focus shifts our attention from the object of our faith, which is the Triune redeemer and recreator, to the subjective requirements of persons (or organisations). Our faith becomes primarily a transaction between an individual and God often at the expense of the wider community. Within the work context, this typically involves co-opting notions of faith, spirituality, and calling to serve instrumental ends.<sup>66</sup>

As *redeemer*, God frees us from sin. His spiritual presence enables us to reject evil and to choose his desires (2 Cor 3:17) and 'not to be instigators or active practioners of degrading or

debasement work either for ourselves or others'.<sup>67</sup> As *recreator*, God makes all things new. In adopting us through Christ by the Holy Spirit, God humanises our labours fully such that they participate in the completion of his new creation. Work that fails in these aspects, that fails to cooperate with God in his eschatological *transformation mundi*, has no place in this new creation.<sup>68</sup>

The participants in this study rejected any such co-optation and enacted their spirituality often in the face of counter-forces which encouraged dehumanising work practices.<sup>69</sup> They reframed their circumstances from a transcendent perspective and acted accordingly. This involved considering the impact of their decisions on a range of stakeholders as well as God's desire for his creation.

Again, we turn to Spencer for an example of such praxis in his refusing a superior's request to withhold documentation from its rightful owner because she feared compromising the organisation's reputation and/or having a potential claim against the organisation from the client:

Well I think to me the question becomes, if we remove documents for this reason, then what stops us from removing other documents for other reasons? I mean where does it end? And then you know even do we go further? Do we go through all the files, and start sort of rummaging

<sup>64</sup> See for example, Cosden, *Theology of Work*; Jensen, *Responsive Labor*; and Volf, *Work in the Spirit*.

<sup>65</sup> N. H. Nadesan, 'The Discourses of Corporate Spiritualism and Evangelical Capitalism', *Management Communication* 13 no. 1 (1999): 3–42.

<sup>66</sup> J. Carrette, and R. King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005); M. Lips-Wiersma, K. L. Dean, and C. J. Fornaciari, 'Theorizing the Dark Side of the Workplace Spirituality Movement', *Journal of Management Inquiry* 18 no. 4 (2009): 288–300.

<sup>67</sup> McGhee, 'Taking the Spirit to Work', 190.

<sup>68</sup> Volf, *Work in the Spirit*.

<sup>69</sup> Ghoshal, 'Bad Management Theories', 75–91; and Giacalone, 'A Transcendent Business Education', 415–20.

through files and say ‘Anything that doesn’t make us look good?’ I simply can’t do that!

She [his manager] wasn’t happy but we ended up getting someone else involved—another executive manager—and they decided not to remove the document from the file... As Christian I would have to say that they [his choices here] would have something to do at least with the teachings and the life and the death of Jesus of Nazareth.

And that would certainly include—but not be limited to—things like caring about others, loving our neighbour as ourselves, being in touch with God, through things like prayer and reading the bible. So yeah, those kind of principles upon which we build our lives—I think—that help us to make decisions to live how God wants us to.

Many times, participants told the story of God’s work in the world via their concrete embodied actions. And these actions helped shape their world in ways that effect God’s intended telos for creation. Interestingly, these benefits were not limited to our participants alone. Through their conduct, they initiated the great *shalom* of God as they helped others (often unbeknownst to them) represent themselves to God and back again. Spencer, for example, influenced his fellow privacy officers to act in similar redemptive ways.

## 2. Enacting meaningful work

Participants found such priestly work brought significant meaning and value to their lives. Indeed, many reported a deep-seated sense of fulfilment and

wholeness. Recall that for Torrance, human beings are constituted by their relations with God, creation, and others. As instruments in the hand of God, human beings are in tune when these onto-relations are transcendently determined. When we choose freely to image God in our labours by, for example, treating others as ends not means (e.g. opposing sweatshop labour), and stewarding God’s creation as opposed to diminishing it (e.g. reducing pollution), then we ‘are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit’ (2 Cor 3:18).

This progression, through Christ and by the Spirit, ensures we are no longer alienated from God, from each other, or from creation. Instead of being less, we are becoming more complete, more in-tune, indeed we are becoming more human. It is no surprise perhaps that participants felt and articulated enhanced well-being, ‘a sense of peace that transcends all understanding’ (Phil 4:7), when they laboured objectively for God as opposed to subjectively for themselves.

We see a good example of this from Daniel, an insurance agent in a large multinational company. Daniel chose to circumvent rules and policies to pay out clients who had suffered during a devastating earthquake in New Zealand and who had been unjustly rejected by his Insurance Company, even at the risk of his own job position and financial security. He transcended his role and the organisational culture to help these people:

So quite often I battled for the client, I looked for opportunities wherever I could to pay claims for the client, even though that actually went



away from the rules and regulations of the company...

There was some wheeling and dealing and maybe, as I say, when I was younger there's no way I would do that because I was probably more black and white. Now I would, I've changed in the fact of wanting to help people so how can I pay something, get under the radar and yet it [the claim] still lines up.

When asked why he did this, Daniel's answer reflected his desire to live an authentic Christian life, a life not compromised by inauthentic action. Daniel interpreted this authentic life using a phrase, 'living for God, living for the kingdom', which essentially means being true to your priestly calling daily. Interestingly, for Daniel, this was primarily about loving God and his neighbour objectively:

It's [Christianity] everything, so every day you want to be living for God, living for the kingdom. If it's not of the kingdom then you don't want to be doing it, so that's part of who I am, so every day is, yeah, it is a part of everyday life. So to me, [it is about] helping others, in this case we're to help other people, you know, their lives are decimated, so common sense tells us to pay what we can to get their house repaired, to put them in temporary accommodation, to get them some help. So what is living for Kingdom? [It is] loving God and others.

For Daniel, the consequence of these types of transcendent actions and this authentic living was an enhanced sense of well-being and the ongoing likelihood of such behaviours happening in other contexts:

This differs significantly from contemporary views of spirituality which are primarily about satisfying individual existential desires and organisations' instrumental needs. Such a view simply 'reinforces the idea of work providing a path to enlightenment through the notion of self-actualisation'<sup>70</sup> instead of through Christ, the personalising person and the humanizing human,<sup>71</sup> and the Holy Spirit. As Herrick puts it, such a limited perspective

calls for a self-adoration and exaltation of our own rational self-awareness—the divinity operating within us [and...] arrives at no more interesting destination than spiritual narcissism.<sup>72</sup>

Interestingly, those that failed in their 'priestly duties' often conveyed feelings of discontent, anxiety, and meaninglessness dependent on the extent of their inauthenticity in action. Communication of this was often in terms of damage to the self. If imagining God is the central aspect of a Christian's identity, then not acting thus may cause significant conative conflict and affective distress.<sup>73</sup> Several extracts are provided as evidence of this:

I feel guilty but—yeah but I feel, linking back to my faith, I feel like it's perhaps a hurt on my spiritual-

<sup>70</sup> E. Bell, and S. Taylor, 'The Elevation of Work: Pastoral Power and the New Age Work Ethic', *Organization* 10 no. 2 (2003): 336.

<sup>71</sup> Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*.

<sup>72</sup> J. A. Herrick, *The Making of the New Spirituality* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 259.

<sup>73</sup> C. Rozuel, and N. Kakabadse, 'Ethics, Spirituality and Self: Managerial Perspectives and Leadership Implications', *Business Ethics: A European Review* 19 no. 4 (2010): 423–36.



ity....It just feels like something to be avoided. I feel really conflicted, I stress a lot about those kinds of things and the net result is that I found it a lot more stress here than ever before and so then there's the physical, feeling tired and so on. You can't pinpoint it to whether it's just that issue but it sure doesn't help—*Zeta, Project Manager*

You're going to feel discomfort because you're dealing with people and their futures and all the rest of it. If you take that stuff [Christianity] seriously, if you have a sense of care for people and their wellbeing then some situations inevitably are uncomfortable because the outcomes have quite strong effects—*Michael, Director*

Oh, I felt awful; it was really difficult, I felt disconnected from my spiritual self like someone else was doing it—*Lucy, Communications Consultant*

Moreover, such individuals 'yield more easily to the pressure of social conformity, relinquishing their personal responsibility by claiming to be just an agent within a system'.<sup>74</sup> Being inauthentic ensures the ego takes precedence so 'moral decisions may no longer be genuine and in accordance with our values; instead, they may respond to our personal interests or to collective expectations'.<sup>75</sup> Such individuals can become compartmentalised, ignore they are created in the *imago Dei*, and risk developing psychopathologies.

## IV Conclusion

Writing in the *Journal of Management Inquiry*, Gull and Doh argued that organisations need transmutation towards more spiritual workplaces.<sup>76</sup> They contend that rationalism, power, self-will, and greed are rampant and as such, limit our capacity for connectedness with and compassion for others. This encourages a 'me' over the 'we' mentality which eventually corrupts behaviour. The solution to this problem, they argue, is to change the organisation's dominant schema.

This, however, cannot occur by simply espousing spirituality or by including a few spiritual mantras as part of the company's values statement. Training and incentives programmes will also be ineffective. Such a transmutation, according to Gull and Doh, will happen only if employees are permitted and encouraged to enact their spirituality fully in the life of the organisation.

Despite these lofty goals, Gull and Doh offer a very humanistic/existentialist solution that cannot achieve what they desire. The proposal presented in this paper, on the other hand, provides a short overview of the work of Thomas Torrance and its application to Christian faith in the workplace. It briefly discusses the findings of a deductive qualitative study that applied this framework to Christians in New Zealand Organisations. It finds that humans created in the *imago Dei* flourish when they fully live out their roles as mediators of order and priests of crea-

<sup>74</sup> Rozuel and Kakabadse, 'Ethics, Spirituality and Self', 426.

<sup>75</sup> Rozuel and Kakbadse, 'Ethics, Spirituality and Self', 426.

<sup>76</sup> G. A. Gull, and J. Doh, 'The "Transmutation" of the Organization: Towards a More Spiritual Workplace', *Journal of Management Inquiry* 13 no. 2 (2004): 128–39.

tion, ordering creation and presenting it back to God in worship.

Labour, which has so often instrumentalized humans and has been co-opted for power relations and economic control, must be seen, rather, as a key aspect of humanity's priestly duty to-

wards God. Once this shift occurs, as the qualitative study described above highlights, human beings can become the human persons God intended them to be, in harmony with God, with each other, and with all of creation.

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