

## Why Can't I Do God's Work Too?

*So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? . . . What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.*

*Ecclesiastes 2:17–19, 22–23*

Dissatisfaction with the day-to-day reality of our work is an increasingly common phenomenon in societies influenced by western values and ways of doing things. Longer working hours and higher performance expectations have led to a stressed-out workforce.<sup>2</sup> Depersonalization, allowing little room for self-expression and personal development; under-use of our skills and abilities; the pressure to cheat or cut corners – these are just a few of the negative realities that cause many of us to question

---

<sup>2</sup> According to the Self-reported Work-related Illness (SWI) report published by the Health and Safety Executive, over half a million people in Britain believed that in 2003–04 they were experiencing work-related stress at a level that was making them ill. The Stress and Health at Work Study (SHAW) indicated that nearly 1 in 5 of all working individuals thought their job was very or extremely stressful. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health website (NIOSH), various surveys indicate that 40 per cent of Americans believe their job “is

whether our work is really worth the investment of so much of our lives.

Of course, worker frustration is not new. It is an experience common to all – even Christians. It is bound up with the fallen human condition. Yet the frustration with work that we will reflect upon in this chapter is different from this shared human reality. Christians sometimes experience a further, distinctively religious, dimension of frustration – something that unfortunately we bring upon ourselves. My experiences teaching on work, both in academic and in various workshop and congregational settings, suggest that a growing number of Christians are what can only be called “spiritually” frustrated in and by their work.

The common effects of our fallenness are, of course, spiritual. But I’m referring to another, often crushing, kind of frustration that many of us feel. This frustration emerges, in fact, from our theology – from beliefs, especially about salvation, that we assume are correct. Many of us in the western church, however, hesitate to question our beliefs about salvation – beliefs we have fought so hard to preserve in the face of opposition. While something doesn’t seem quite right to many of us, we reason that our fundamental beliefs can’t be wrong. But, unfortunately, these beliefs as we commonly formulate them are the ones that lead us to assign less significance to the work done by those with “ordinary” (as opposed to “ministry”) jobs – and herein lies our deepest frustration.

Of course, we might see what we call ordinary work as respectable and even necessary as a discipline so that we can grow spiritually. We might even believe that faithfulness in our work now will lead to some kind of reward in eternity. Some of us might even view work as important strategically, as a platform

---

extremely stressful” (Northwest National Life Survey), 26 per cent say they are “often or very often burned out or stressed by their work” (Families and Work Institute), and 29% of workers say they are “quite a bit or extremely stressed at work” (Yale University).

for evangelism, or primarily as an opportunity to engage in some other ministry – for example, one that allows our real focus to be upon what we think of as a co-worker's “spiritual” state.

Yet many of us nevertheless experience a real spiritual struggle. In spite of all these positives, we wonder whether our work itself really matters – or simply the other things it provides or makes possible. Is there any real lasting or “eternal” value in our work? Most in evangelical circles would concede that in the final analysis – from the perspective of eternity – only things that relate to the soul or a person's inner spiritual state really matter for eternity. At best, ordinary work is seen as a means to these “religious” ends.

I recently had a conversation with a friend on this very topic. Craig is a civil engineer who spends his days designing roads and parking lots. He admitted that he finds it hard to imagine how civil engineering could have any value from the perspective of eternity. (Although he very much wanted to think that it could.) My suggestion that civil engineering could indeed have eternal value excited Craig. He truly enjoys many of the technical aspects of engineering and feels that his work dovetails with, although it does not totally encompass, who God has made him to be.

However, Craig also admitted that when he stands back and thinks about what he does every day, he often feels frustrated. He feels he is failing to make a contribution in really important *spiritual* matters. He wishes that he could do more obviously spiritual ministry than his work allows.

He also sees two advantages to his salary: first, he earns money he can give to various ministries; and, second, his day-job financially supports him to the degree that he can volunteer in the evenings and on weekends for the more fulfilling and “important” ministries at his church. Beyond these things, however, Craig is hard-pressed to see any eternal value in civil engineering.

As we will see in this chapter, thinking like this is actually ingrained in our western Christian spirituality. And it surfaces

in our attitudes, practices, and beliefs. But as we recognize the shape that ideas like these frequently take in our language and beliefs we will see more clearly not just why so many Christians have become spiritually frustrated, but also how we might be able to untangle and re-form our beliefs. Although it is necessary to start by deconstructing existing beliefs and attitudes, the goal is a constructive one – to bring into focus a way forward.

For those, however, whose experience in the faith is different, who do not feel the spiritual frustration I am exploring, let this exercise illustrate how beliefs and practices common in many of our churches can inadvertently cause problems.

But many of us have experienced something like this spiritual frustration, and the questions we need to ask are: Where did it come from? Why does our common Christian view of work not work?

## **Second-class Christians**

Who really is doing God's work in their work? This is another way to ask the theological question we are exploring. When asked, a lot of Christians who are engaged in what I am calling ordinary work often tie themselves up in knots. They know that the answer should be that as Christians we all are doing God's work, but they seldom are able to say this is true of themselves – at least not when they think about their work alongside their pastor's or their friends' who are in mission. Usually people avoid answering this question by talking instead about the work that they do outside their occupations in church-based ministries.

While these believers might not be conscious of what they are doing or might be unable to put their feelings into words, clearly anxiety and frustration often lie just below the surface. A little probing will usually bring this out. This is a real spiritual dilemma.

Most of us would like to believe that we are in our particular work and at our specific place of work because God in his

providence has, directly or indirectly, led us there. This is one prominent strand of our piety. Whether we view this as a specific calling or simply as where God has us for now, we rightly want to think that, by being where we are, we are accepting the providential workings of God and are therefore living obediently – or at least not disobediently. If we believed that we were out of God's will either morally or specifically we would, if it were possible, seek a change.

If we accept in obedience that we are where God has us for now, we of course should not feel spiritual frustration about this. We know that we can honor and glorify God where he has placed us. We believe that in our work we can love God and, hopefully, our neighbor as well. As the great Reformer Martin Luther taught, this is spiritually speaking our proper place in this life and a proper view of work. Spiritually, at least in this area of our lives, we should be at peace.

However, such peace often proves elusive because another strand of our piety, one particularly central in evangelicalism, unfortunately pushes us in the opposite direction. And here is where the tension develops that many of us feel. This aspect of our piety focuses on the ultimate question of our salvation. It is concerned primarily with evaluating everything we do in this life in relationship to eternity.

This strand of our piety begins with the obvious theological conclusion that if eternity or heaven is ultimate, then what is ultimately important are only the things directly related to it. This is quite a reasonable conclusion. However, it is when we think about our daily work in this way that things get complicated and many of us start to feel like second-class Christians.

We can see this demonstrated in the way many evangelicals understand God's call for some people to enter Christian ministry and make this their work. It starts like this: God calls some from among us into "full-time" or vocational Christian ministry of some sort. Of course we know that such language is awkward since all Christians are called to be full-time servants of God. Therefore, we reason that the special nature of this

calling is simply one of function, meaning service, rather than one of status. In itself this is all quite orthodox. God does lead some of us into ministry as our main, even paid, work.

Yet this piety does not leave us here – it has a power and force of its own once it is voiced. People typically think that God *frees up* a few believers to focus their energies on the ministry more directly than others who have a different, more general, calling. That is, other believers recognize them as gifted in special ways and, unlike the rest of us, set apart by God himself for work that will concentrate on spiritual matters pertaining to people’s eternal destinies.

Some might overtly refer to this as a “higher calling.” Others would find this language offensive. Yet in practice there is little difference. Those with this special call work on the things that really matter. Others do not.

It is hard to imagine how we might conclude differently. The desire for our life’s work to be an investment in something we believe to be lasting, even ultimate, is rooted deeply in our spirituality. That is why this idea of “special calling” appeals to many of us. We almost always hear about this kind of “calling” when “ministers” and those training for full-time ministry tell their stories and talk about their work.

Of course, those who embrace this spirituality that necessitates belief in a “special call” don’t intend to leave others out, to make some feel they are serving God less because they have a more earthly calling. To avoid such implications, therefore, we often call upon the other strand of our piety – as we proclaim that we all glorify God by being where he has put us.

Yet something does not quite work if we think about what we are saying. When we put these two strands of piety together we are forced to conclude something very strange indeed: God has called a chosen few to serve by focusing on eternal, lasting matters, while he has called others to serve by focusing on earthly, less ultimately important, matters.

If this is true, then some of us are bound to feel frustrated or even hurt – whether we try theologically to soften the blow or

not. The logic is relentless. If God has placed some of us in work that does not ultimately make that much difference, we who don't focus full-time on eternal matters are bound to feel the sting.

In practice we can see the dangers of this in more traditional or clerical expressions of the faith. Clericalism, or the belief that those in vocational ministry have a higher status or spiritual value, is a foundational assumption in many churches. The priest, many believe, spends more time in his or her work dealing with the things of eternity – the care of souls and the ministry of the word and sacrament – than do ordinary working Christians in the marketplace or home. A spiritually frustrating hierarchy within the people of God ensues.

Such hierarchical distinctions between the clergy and laity are also in evidence in low-church traditions – among those claiming most fervently to believe in and practice the spiritual priesthood of all believers.<sup>3</sup> The hierarchy in these traditions, however, usually takes the more subtle form of a sacred/secular divide. It is not Christian people, but rather it is work itself that is classified. Work is either sacred or secular – determined by a job's perceived relationship to eternal things.

Traditions influenced by revivalist and pietistic branches of Christianity express this tendency to the sacred/secular divide with some sort of challenge from a preacher, song, or prayer. Each and every true disciple is urged to invest most of his or her life's energy on eternal things rather than working at earthly things that do not last. Although a person's work might be good, "going into the ministry," or at least doing spiritual ministry with the first-fruits of our energies – especially while at work – is better.

What clearly emerges then, whether we want it to or not, is a two-tiered understanding of the Christian life in service to

---

<sup>3</sup> For more detailed discussion of this see R. Paul Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity: Vocation, Work and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999).

God. There is a first-class spirituality and special “Lord’s work” and therefore, by definition, also a second-class Christianity focused on the things of earth and lived out in ordinary work. The latter is still *sort of* the Lord’s work, but it is temporal and thus less meaningful than the former. Both are good, but one is clearly better. I have heard many sermons on Mary and Martha that actively promote this kind of spiritual thinking. Mary, by putting mundane working activities aside and focusing directly on her relationship with Jesus, becomes the spiritual model. She has clearly chosen the best and is more praiseworthy than Martha because she focused on that which will last. Martha, on the other hand, was obsessed with her daily work – and thus on things that are passing away and ultimately less important.

We do not have to look far to find this piety lived out in practice. At a recent graduation ceremony at an evangelical theological college, the speaker passionately challenged the graduates to resist the temptation to leave “the ministry” and undertake other kinds of ultimately less important work when vocational ministry becomes difficult, since this will not count as much for eternity. After the service, a graduate returning to a teaching career in a high school approached me and sarcastically commented about his “already having opted for second best.” What else could he conclude?

Subtle and overt expressions of this piety are the norm in many of our churches. We have noted where some of our song lyrics lead us. “The things of earth will soon be past, only what’s done for the Lord will last” (since we know it’s people that last for eternity, this implies evangelism or the nurture of souls). Then there is the chorus: “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.”

These songs pick up on common dualities in biblical language, like our earthly/spiritual bodies as well as the spirit/flesh distinctions that Paul makes. However, the songs do not simply allude to these dualities – they also interpret them. And herein

lies the question: Does Scripture really teach the kind of duality we often assume it does?

We will explore this question more fully. What is important to note here is that we are conveying, by the songs we sing and even by how we quote Scripture, that some work counts for more because it touches more directly upon eternal matters. This work is a first-rank or first-order Christian activity, as opposed to all other work, which is honorable but is at best second-class because it deals primarily with earthly things.

So what is the average Christian, who spends the vast majority of his or her energies in ordinary work, to conclude from all this? It would seem in practice that the very best most of us could ever hope to be is *second-class* Christians.

This conclusion is bound to cause frustration. Although our hearts may tell us that we *are* doing something spiritually worthwhile since we are obediently doing the ordinary work God has us doing, we will be more persuaded by the other message from our hearts – that time not spent working in evangelism or other “spiritual activities” is actually wasted.

So regardless of our “calling,” we face a spiritual dilemma. Most of us only get to spend a small percentage of time devoting our gifts and energies to so-called “eternal things.” It appears that we are called to serve God, and serve him in our ordinary work, but that somehow we also need to accept that, unlike the work of full-time ministers, what we do does not ultimately have eternal or lasting value. It's no wonder many Christians are feeling torn and even frustrated in their work.

This tension is often further compounded by the fact that many of us in the west today are constantly being bombarded either with choices about job or career changes, or with the need to make such changes given economic realities. It is increasingly assumed that, for one reason or another, a person will change his or her career at least once. This reality brings opportunity, but also pressure to climb the perceived ladder of spiritual success.

Many Christians, either because they want to grow spiritually or because they feel they already have, feel pressure at times of career change to switch to some form of specifically Christian work. Given a choice, they would rather invest their lives in something more “spiritual.”

Yet what if they do not hear God “call” them to do this? Or what if they cannot make this change, for any number of reasons? Then they must simply conclude either that their circumstances are their fault so God can’t work through them or that God does not want to use them in the really important things, at least not right now. The conclusion, whether they articulate it consciously or not, is that they really are second-tier, or second-class, Christians.

## **When Your Call is Higher than My Call**

“Second-class” Christians, then, are categorized according to the unofficial “hierarchy of callings” that often emerges in congregational life. This spiritually disastrous practice categorizes people’s work in a descending order of value according to perceived spiritual significance. As we have seen, Christians commonly view vocational ministry as a higher calling. But our assumptions about work cause us to make even further distinctions. Subtly, we prioritize even these special callings. A pastor, missionary, evangelist and full-time worker in a Christian agency might all have special ministry callings. But in some circles the missionary or evangelist is seen as having a higher calling than, say, a pastor, because (as ridiculous as this seems) the former appears to focus more, and more directly, upon eternal matters.

In contrast, the second-tier vocations or occupations focus on more mundane realities. As we have seen, if these “earthly vocations” impress upon eternity at all, they are thought to do so only indirectly. And we prioritize these second-level vocations as well. Firstly, we do so according to their perceived earthly good. So the helping professions rank at the top, while

the more “selfish” occupations like lawyer, politician, and businessperson are at the bottom.

It is never, of course, this simple in practice. Those at the bottom of this second tier, those perceived to be most tainted by money and power, are often the ones who have skills transferable to lay church leadership positions. Those following these careers are also the ones with more financial resources to give to the church. So, almost paradoxically, these people climb their way back up the ladder of spiritual perception – not because of their work, but because of how they use the fruits of it.

Likewise, those in other middle-of-the-road callings achieve higher spiritual status if they are seen to spend enough time attending church meetings or serving in the church. To complicate matters, people in the helping professions often end up ranking even lower on this scale because their demanding work generally allows less time and money to devote to church life.

As cynical as my musings here may sound, they only slightly overstate the reality in many congregations. Anyone attempting to navigate the corridors of this spirituality or hierarchy of calling will soon find that it is a complicated business. It is, of course, implicit and not always conscious. This perception of hierarchy only serves to contribute further to an underlying spiritual frustration among many ordinary working Christians.

This hierarchy of callings is rooted deeper in our spirituality than we might imagine, however. It does not simply result from our human inconsistencies or frailties in applying otherwise “sound” theological truth. Problematical hierarchies are at the heart of how we in the west commonly understand the Christian story.

A hierarchy of callings emerges naturally enough because, deep down, many of us believe that God designed creation itself to be hierarchical.<sup>4</sup> It is not just that hierarchical thinking

---

<sup>4</sup> If we believe that God himself represents some kind of hierarchy in God's internal Trinitarian relationships, and that people called to image him should do likewise in their social lives, then it is only

is deeply engrained in our practices; it is also woven into the very structures of our beliefs. To understand this we need to recognize that, in its most basic form, a spirit-material dualism (or hierarchy) has in fact been a building block in western thinking for most of the last two millennia – and in western theology, both Catholic and Protestant, we can see this clearly.

Throughout the rest of this chapter and the next one we will examine how and where such dualistic beliefs and assumptions have played a role in the structuring of our beliefs. We begin with an example from Roman Catholic thought that, in the process of teaching many important things about ordinary work, illustrates what western Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, has by and large believed – that God has created in the very fabric of reality a hierarchy in which the spiritual realm is higher in rank than the material.

In Chapter 2, in the process of thinking more carefully about whether our work really does need to survive and shape eternity to be “ultimately” valuable, we will explore Martin Luther’s theology – the superstructure for so much of Protestant theology and the basis of the tradition of pietism and, eventually, evangelical piety. There we will find a distinctively Protestant form of this dualism.

## **Spirit Matters More than Matter?**

In order to better grasp the shape and impact of that Protestant spirit-material dualism, however, we will first consider the western Catholic tradition out of which it grew and to which it reacted. This tradition is no more succinctly summarized than in the 1981 tract by John Paul II entitled *Laborem Exercens* (“On

---

natural that the cosmos will likewise reflect an ordering consistent with God’s own being. For an evaluation of whether God himself exhibits some sort of hierarchy see Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God* (London: SCM; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

Human Work”). In fact, this short pamphlet sums up what most western Christians, even evangelicals, claim to believe about God’s ordered design of the cosmos, if not about work itself.<sup>5</sup>

*Laborem Exercens* is one of a series of pastoral letters, called encyclicals, written occasionally by successive popes since 1891 to be circulated throughout the church. Like the other encyclicals, this one seeks to guide the church in addressing pressing cultural issues. Pastoral in style, *Laborem Exercens* is actually a personal reflection from John Paul II that builds upon the church’s theological heritage to offer the outline for a spirituality and ethics of work for late- and post-industrial societies.

*Laborem Exercens* presents a Christian alternative to the modern economist or materialist view of work that threatens to destroy people and the environment. It reasons from the scriptural account in Genesis that work can and should be both for our benefit and for the benefit of creation as a whole. It shows, biblically and theologically, the value of work and its place in this life that includes, but also goes beyond, the production of material wealth. It outlines how our work helps us to explore, discover and express our humanity to reflect God’s image.

In doing this the encyclical demonstrates clearly the importance of work for building society, meaning the family and the broader community, and it shows how through this work God works so that people can flourish. It likewise makes clear the positive place of the church – both to co-operate with God in the world through ordinary work and to equip members of the body for a Christian life and ministry at work. In sum, it shows us the importance and meaning of earthly work.

Yet how this letter goes about doing this is as telling for our purposes as what it proposes. Pope John Paul II’s overarching concern in this tract is to make clear that the church has always

---

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed evaluation of *Laborem Exercens*, see my book *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Paternoster Theological Monograph Series; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), 24–35.

believed that “in the first place work is ‘for man’ and not man ‘for work’ ” (*LE*, 6). In itself, this statement does not seem particularly controversial. In fact, it appears to echo Jesus’ statement in Mark 2:27 that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. Yet a deeper look at what Pope John Paul II means begins to reveal a dualistic and hierarchical understanding of things.

To substantiate his conclusion, John Paul II outlines two senses of work in *Laborem Exercens*. The first is what he calls the “objective sense” of work, which focuses on the goal of work that is external to the working person – work’s material nature and products, understood primarily in economic or material terms. For Pope John Paul II, this is unquestionably one important aspect of work.

The “subjective sense” of work, however, is the one that Pope John Paul II believes to be more important spiritually. The subjective sense focuses on the working person rather than on either the work itself or the use of its products by others. The concern here is with how our work impacts us as persons existentially, socially and spiritually.

John Paul II makes this distinction between work’s objective and subjective senses because, as he sees it from a Christian point of view, western society has lost its way by only recognizing the objective sense. As a result, we have become materialist.

Accordingly, we have erred in one of two ways. We have either valued the material over the personal/spiritual or we have placed both on the same level. In the modern west, as John Paul II rightly discerns, we have mostly ordered the objective sense of work over the subjective. Furthermore, but with no less dangerous consequences as he sees it, some have tried to correct this error by doing away with a “right hierarchical ordering” altogether and valuing both subjective and objective aspects of work on the same level. From his theological viewpoint, this approach equally strays from God’s design.

The argument he puts forth boils down to the conclusion that, theologically, a hierarchical ordering of the subjective sense of work over the objective should always be maintained – because this accurately reflects God’s pattern for ordering the world. In political and economic terms, the priority from a theological point of view should always be labor over capital. In human terms, we must maintain the primacy of persons over things. In the spiritual realm, the priority is always the spiritual over the material – or, as John Paul II says in a related encyclical, we believe in “the superiority of spirit over matter.”<sup>6</sup>

The priority of persons over things for western Christians, Roman Catholic and Protestant, is almost beyond question. Whether we see this only in earthly terms for the sake of ethics, or in eternal/spiritual terms relating to a person’s eternal destiny, western Christianity traditionally holds this to be a basic Christian belief.

The implications of this idea for spirit-matter dualisms in general and a hierarchy of callings in particular, however, could not be clearer. Ordinary work, what we in the Protestant tradition often refer to as “secular calling,” primarily deals with the physical or material, earthly side of reality. Spiritual calling, or what our tradition often refers to as “sacred” work, primarily deals with spiritual, personal, or eternal/heavenly matters. If we hold, as John Paul II does, to the strict priority of the spiritual – persons over the material – then work that deals primarily with the spiritual is bound to be somehow superior to that which deals primarily or only with earthly, material reality. Spiritual callings are bound to be thought of as higher callings. We are bound to rank our work according to its perceived relationship to spiritual reality. A hierarchy of callings is a built-in by-product of the theological belief in the absolute priority of persons over things.

---

<sup>6</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis: An Encyclical Letter* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1979), 16.

## **Making Points but Missing the Point**

It would be wrong to dismiss either *Laborem Exercens* itself or the broader ideas it offers as unhelpful to our theological thinking about work. Indeed the opposite is the case. Although we will further explore the biblical, theological, and practical problems with this view that God has instituted and operates a “spirit over matter” dualism, using this document to highlight these deeper theological questions is only one part of the story. *Laborem Exercens* does make some very important points about work that should not be overlooked.

Although the results of a hierarchy that strictly orders persons over things and spirit over matter are harmful, it is nevertheless essential to critique and challenge the dominant materialism that both destroys personhood and displaces eternal matters. On this latter point, this document speaks an important prophetic word. In rejecting the hierarchy we must be careful not to end up with mirror opposite side effects that lead to, or reinforce, the materialism that is even more devastating than the spiritual problem we are trying to solve.

What *Laborem Exercens* offers is a genuine theological alternative to the mainstream materialistic view of life and work found in the beliefs and values of western modernity. *Laborem Exercens*, and other expressions of piety that offer parallel visions, can do the church a great service. They make valid points but miss the central point, failing as they do to adequately address the spiritual frustration that grows out of a hierarchy of callings.

Although John Paul II states that our work in itself has positive value, not just for life in this world but also from the perspective of eternity, I doubt that the theological basis of his argument can solve the problems grounded in such hierarchical assumptions.

He suggests that our work is somehow gathered up into Christ’s suffering and toil in his work on the cross. This idea provides stimulating food for thought. It is appealing to think

that, in a real way, our work is taken into Christ's, and that human work becomes a participation in and reflection of Christ's work (not a contribution to it) which could be called a co-working and co-suffering with Christ for our ultimate sanctification. This understanding of work does suggest that work has value in relationship to eternity because it mirrors, and thus points to, eternal/spiritual things.

With this account, Christ's overcoming in the resurrection then becomes the basis for his exaltation to authority over creation. He is the new creation. We too, John Paul II suggests, as we live our resurrected life now, announce the values of the new heaven and new earth in our work.

Whether or not we would find the connections between Christ in his work on the cross and our own work theologically convincing, we are still left with larger questions. Is it our work itself that has value in and for eternity, or is its eternal value found only in what our working does to our souls? The answer, according to John Paul II, seems to be the latter. Further, is work's specifically new creation value according to John Paul II that the work itself will last, like people and their souls? Or is work spiritually valuable only as a pointer toward the new creation through its ethical out-workings in this current life? The answer for John Paul II seems to be that the material aspects of work (its objective sense) will not themselves last. Its value in relation to eternity is solely as a witness to it – work anticipates the new creation concretely in this life. While these are fruitful questions to consider, the basic assumptions underlying *Laborem Exercens* are such that a hierarchy of callings, and the resulting worker frustration, continue to lurk and threaten to torment the saints.

We must now consider whether or not the question as we are posing it is theologically legitimate. Does our work (and in some way its products) need to be "saved" by God to be meaningful or valuable in the final analysis? Although claiming that this is in fact the case might help us pragmatically in overcoming the spiritual frustration caused by a hierarchy of callings, the

more fundamental question is, of course, whether this view is true biblically and theologically. We want a solution, a view of work that works. But if the question is wrong because it assumes wrong beliefs, then the answer, although appearing to satisfy for a while, will eventually also be shown to be a view of work that does not work.

We need, then, to explore whether the idea “not eternal not valuable” is legitimate. Although the real biblical and theological test will come from our reflections on Scripture in Part II, we proceed now to clarify what the idea is and is not saying.