

# **The Proper Christian Work View in a Rapid-Changing World**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the Christian theology of work in a rapidly changing Information Age. This exploration is limited to work-related aspects of the three main doctrines in systematic theology: Creation, Redemption and Trinitarian. The paper attempts neither to explore every aspects of Christian work view (such as work ethics and theology of marketplace) nor to document fully the history of work written by the early church fathers and theologians. It does not directly address other doctrines, such as Eschatology, which can also make important contribution to an understanding of Christian work view.

The paper acknowledges God's full sovereignty and his high ways. It establishes that Christians should first focus on their own attitudes and their understanding based on God. Then it proposes a holistic understanding of the work view, and attempts to offer a work view that is consistent with the main teachings of the Bible and is practical to everyday lives experienced by Christians.

## **Focus Rationale**

Since the Industrial Revolution, the nature of work has been transformed dramatically. Advances in machinery and the development of management practices have brought about an increase in specialization, division of labor and dehumanization of workers. The pace of changes has picked up exponentially since the second half of the twentieth century, during

which most of the developed countries were transitioning into the Information Age (Volf, 2001). Research has shown that information, speed, knowledge and creativity are becoming crucially important factors in the value creation. In 2000, European Union government has predicted within a decade that more than 80% of all paid employment will consist of information processing (Bullinger, 2000). According to Population Reference Bureau (2008), the world has passed another milestone in 2008, whereas over one-half of the world's residents would live in urban areas and experience this rapid transformation.

In late 1990s, Peter Drucker (1999) predicted that every business would need to become globally competitive because the market would no longer be local. This phenomenon has become more widespread in this decade, with the continuous spread of globalization. Lore Hostasch, former Minister for Labor, Health and Social Affairs in Austria, wrote that:

Like work organization, the workplace itself is subject to changes. Flexible working time not

only engenders a greater need for worker mobility, but also brings about an intensification of

work. We have noted for some time that one of the major new drawbacks of ongoing

rationalization and innovation, leading to staff cutbacks and an ever-faster pace of work, is the

high level of stress in the workplace. It is alarming to note that 28% of European workers believe

that their health is suffering as a result of stress in the workplace (Hostasch, 2000, p.2).

Drucker observes that changes are proceeding much faster as process gets more routine and specialized. For example, the software for tuning a piano converts a process that historically

took three hours into one that now takes twenty minutes. The interior design of a major building that used to take twenty-five highly skilled draftsmen up to fifty days now takes a software program and a draftsman to complete in a couple of days (Drucker, 1999). The pace of speed is truly breathtaking. There are even informed predictions that computers and artificial intelligence will replace more and more workers (Malerich, 2009). So there is a dramatic increase in competition with respect to speed and efficiency, human beings and machines. The competitive nature of work is analogous to the story of Cain and Abel. It also reflects the rivalry between weeds and thorns competing against the good fruits of the land written in Genesis 3:18 (Anderson, 1998).

During the Information Age, workers, particularly those who are Christians, are facing many work-view related challenges, such as uncertainty in career choices, relationship between work and calling, the need for instant gratification, the frustrations with the speed of exponential changes, and the struggles to find significance in their works in the face of increasing specialization. This paper attempts to explore work-related aspects of the three main doctrines in Christian systematic theology: Creation, Redemption and Trinitarian. It then concludes with a few biblical-sound guidelines for these Christian workers to use in their lives.

### Creation

In the doctrine of Creation, we focus on discovering God's original intent with respect to work: how work has changed as a result of sin and how God is still involving us in his sustaining creation (ongoing creation). The broken relationships of man to God, himself, others and other creations will be discussed. They are then linked to the exploration of the doctrine of redemption, which will be discussed later.

God is a worker. The very first verse in the Bible is God's revelation and announcement of his own work in creation: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). The first two chapters of Genesis highlights God is an active worker in the whole creation process. His work is also described pictorially as a shepherd (Genesis 48:25, 49:24), a potter (Isaiah 29:16, 41:25), a craftsman (Proverb 8:30), a builder (Psalm 127:1, Hebrews 3:4), an architect (Hebrews 11:10), a gardener (John 15:1) and a healer (2 Chronicles 30:20). It is obvious that God reveals himself as a worker, and his work gives us a glimpse of his nature.

As workers ourselves, we reflect part of God's image. In Genesis 1:26, God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness ..." Since we are made in God's image,

resembling and reflecting who God is, work is part of our nature just as work is part of God's nature. It is important for us to engage in purposeful work and activities, because this is how God has designed us. Work is a vital expression of human nature (Wong, 2003). Martin Luther, in his exposition of Genesis 2:15, also emphasized that “man was created not for leisure but for work, even in the state of innocence” (Hart, 1995:1, p.38). However, just like God's work does not reflect the whole nature of God, our work also should not represent the whole essence and beings of human lives.

Not only has God designed us to work, God has also entrusted us to work with Him as stewards and partner, so that we can share His work and maintain our relationships with Him. He has given us the stewardship of taking care of His ongoing creations in his mandate in Genesis 1:28: “Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over ... every living creature.” The very first two tasks He assigned Adam and Eve have already reflected this stewardship mandate: to understand His creations by studying and naming animals (Genesis 2:19) and to work on His garden (Genesis 2:25). By entrusting the Garden of Eden to Adam and Eve, God has given humans the mandate and command to share in his work. Finally, by maintaining an intimate relationship with Adam and Eve, God has demonstrated that He cares more about the alignment of our work to His work and our relationship with Him during our work, rather than just the nature or the output of our work. This becomes self-evident in God's acceptance of Abel's offerings (Genesis 4:4) and his rejection of Cain's offerings (Genesis 4:5).

Before the fall, God has designed human work to be both enjoyable and fulfilling. First, work requires us to learn and take care of God's creation. For instance, Adam had to understand the characteristics and personality of each animal in details in order to give it an appropriate name. This is equivalent to being a modern-day biologist and animal behaviorist. Adam and Eve also needed to learn how to till the soil and take good care of the garden (gardener and environmentalist). Second, God intends work to involve many elements of creativity, trust and empowerment. For example, God allowed Adam complete discretion (trust) in using Adam's own study in naming the animals (creativity). Of course, God's wisdom is infinitely higher than Adam's wisdom and yet God did not choose to overwrite Adam's decision (empowerment). Third, God allows Adam to share with His work and His glory by being at Adam's side when he was working. Finally, God gave Adam and Eve every seed-bearing plant and fruits as food (Genesis 1:29) so they did not have to work for food. In other words, man did not need to work for food. All these elements together paint a very beautiful picture of a loving father sitting next to a child patiently when the child is practicing a new skill or performing a new task. We can see the nature of the work before the fall is what many of us are yearning for. There is also harmony in our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the rest of creation.

### The Fall

When men started to reject and disobey God (sinned) in Genesis 3, the nature of work was altered forever. While men still tries to retain the certain pre-fall elements of work, such as yearning for work that would exercise his creativity and discretion, they tend to do it independent of God and for their own glory. This is as a result of the damage done to four key relationships – with God, with ourselves, with others and with the rest of creation. Most of the damages were sustained even before God gave His punishments and curses.

Before the fall, Adam and Eve were at peace with God the Trinity. They enjoyed absolute intimacy and uninhibited access to God. They did not have to hide before God. Immediately after the fall, they hid from the God among the trees (Genesis 3:8). They disconnected permanently from God; and it was God who took the initiative to reach out to them by calling out to Adam (Genesis 3:9). As a result, men have since performed their work on their own, for their own glory, independent of God, which is totally different from God's original intentions. Some people even idolize work as an alternative to the true one and only God. As a result, our relationship with God is severely damaged.

Similarly, Adam and Eve were at peace with themselves before the fall. They were able to identify themselves as created beings and God's stewards as their calling. After the fall, men's relationship with themselves is broken. Men have to struggle with their identities. The first description of Adam's offspring (Cain and Abel) was their occupations (Genesis 4:2). Cain and Abel also attempted to use the outputs of their work to partially redeem themselves (Genesis 4:3-4). Since then, men have struggled to find its fulfillment from work, partly to find their own identities and partly to redeem themselves.

Before the fall, Adam and Eve accepted each others with love, intimacy, honesty and trust. They were naked and they felt no shame (Genesis 2:25). After the fall, their relationship with one another are broken; their relationship turned into blame-shifting, deceit and selfish (Genesis 3:12-13). Their responses lacked grace and love. Because of shame and guilt, they covered themselves with fig leaves (Genesis 3:7), thus losing the trust, love and intimacy with each other. Human relationships fell downhill quickly as the world witnessed the first murder and it was within the same family (Genesis 4:8). Relationships in our work have been deeply and adversely affected because of the loss of trust and lack of love between people.

Our relationship with the rest of creation is also broken. As discussed, God gave men the stewardship of taking care of His creations in Genesis 1:28. After the fall, God described the consequences of man's sins by announcing various curses in Genesis 3. The ground is cursed,

and as a result, men have to toil with sweat to sustain life (Genesis 3:17-19). Work is now necessary to sustain life. Moreover, the difficulty of work increases while the fruit and enjoyment of the work diminishes. Even though God still blesses people's work some of the times (Isaiah 65:23), the wise king in Ecclesiastes still correctly laments that without God, work and toil under the sun is meaningless, a chasing after the wind (Ecclesiastes 2:17-23, 3:4-8).

These changes in four key relationships have affected our work since then. Creation is not a one-time event in the beginning as God is still creating in every moment. For example, Jesus told the Jews that “my Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working” (John 5:17). Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Christ “sustaining all things by his powerful word”. Paul also makes it clearer in Colossians 1:17 by stating that Christ is “before all things, and in him all things hold together”. Even before Jesus, the psalmist in Psalm 104 understands that God’s creative work is a continuous and present process – some of God’s actions are in past tense and some in present tense.

After the fall, work is still an integral part of God's purpose. As everything in the world still depends upon God continually creating, we have hope in God’s continuous involvement in our lives and our work. For example, God provides sunshine and rain to both believers and nonbelievers. We understand ourselves as participating in an ongoing creation which culminates in an ultimate new creation when Christ returns. Of course, our eternal hope is found in the redemption and salvation covered in the next section. However, we should view our work as part of our participation in God’s sustaining creation in this world. Since God gives all lives, God is involved in some ways in everything. As a result, God may administer his creations and justice through us by giving us many different roles. As Martin Luther puts it, God gives new babies through fathers and mothers; God raises children through parents, other family members, teachers and other adults; God creates food through farmers, soil, sun and rain. Even though some people may not realize it themselves, they may serve God as God works through them in their roles. As Christians, who understand our involvement in God’s work, we can proactively use our work as the opportunity to love others and bless His creations.

### **Redemption**

Since Adam and Eve sinned, men have suffered eternal punishment and separation from God (Genesis 2:17). The scripture says: “for the wage of sin is death (separation from God), but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Just as the effects of sin are so profound and far-reaching, God's redemption plan is equally profound and comprehensive to bring full restoration to the created order (Colossians 1:15-20). Just as *all* things were created

by him (Christ) and for him (Colossians 1:16), and “through him to reconcile *all*

things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:20, qualifier mine). Romans 8:19-23 also shows clearly that the creation is eagerly waiting for the Christ to liberate its bondage to decay. So redemption through Christ reclaims, restores and fulfills the creative work of God.

The scope of God's redemption has deep and wide implications in restoration and transformation of everything that was affected by sin. Men are among the first to be redeemed (Ephesians 1:4-5, 12-14). It is by God's grace, through faith, that we are saved (Romans 3:24, Ephesians 2:8). God's redemption plan also starts the healing process of the four broken relationships resulting from sin. In this process, we can see the solutions that God has given us to address some of the problems and frustrations encountered in work.

Since the righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe (Romans 3:22), we are saved from God's wrath (Romans 5:9). We can also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (Romans 5:11). Thus, our relationship with God is restored through Jesus Christ.

There is also healing in our relationship with ourselves. Since the fall, men have struggled to find its fulfillment from work, partly to find their own identities and partly to redeem themselves (Psalm 49:7). With Christ, Christians can have their identity come from being children of God (1 John 3:1) and God's heirs (Galatians 4:7); instead of having their identity come from our work, our job and things that are not God (Galatians 4:8). We understand that while work is part of the manifestation of our vocational calling, our true calling is to be the genuine follower of Christ (Ephesians 4:1, 2 Peter 1:10). As Apostle Paul wrote that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been *called* according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28, qualifier mine), we do not need to idolize work.

Similarly, there is healing in our relationship with others. As Christian believers, we can now live in harmony with each other (Romans 12:16) and accept each other just as Christ accepted us (Romans 15:7). Believers are admonished to love each other (1 Corinthians 13, 1 John 3:11, 1 John 4:7). Even though there are both believers and nonbelievers in workplace, believers can still treat others in love and in harmony. “Because this is a fallen world, we will continue to bear the effects of sin in our work. The appropriate Christian response is to fight sin and bring work closer to what God intended” (Wong 2003, p.14).

Finally, there is healing in our relationship with the rest of creation. Creation has been subjected to frustration and has been waiting eagerly to be liberated from its bondage to decay (Romans 8:19-21). Even though the earth will not be completely redeemed until Jesus' second coming, Jesus' first coming to redeem us has marked an important turning point in the history of creation. In quoting Psalm 127:2, John Calvin explained that the curse on work had been partially lifted through Christ (Hart, 1995:2). With the restored relationship between humankind and God, we are reinstated to act as stewards of the earth. "Since God's plan is also to restore creation, it follows that he has renewed the stewardship mandate given to humankind" (Wong, 2003).

The doctrine of redemption has many important lessons to a correct understanding of biblical work view. The Bible clearly teaches us that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Since Christians are saved by faith in Christ alone and not by good works for God, our good works have no role in gaining our salvation. Christ has set us free to live in ways so that our lives and our work are our loving response to the great love and mercy of our God. Hence we can now use our good work to show love and bring blessings to other people.

Another important work-related understanding is that after our salvation, we as Christians still need to take up our own daily crosses because Jesus clearly taught so (Matthew 10:38, 16:24, Mark 8:34). We can carry our crosses daily by "dying and repenting daily". Apostle Paul in Romans 8:13-14 says: "for if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God". It is clear that we need to mortify the flesh and put to death the sinful self by the Holy Spirit on a daily basis. Paul further elaborates in Colossians 3:5 about what to be mortified: "put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry". Thus, our lives and our work can also be the location of God's sanctifying work of mortifying the flesh every day. We should not idolize our own career or nurture selfish ambitions in work because this is going opposite of mortification of sin and carrying one's daily cross. In his exposition of 1 Peter 4, Luther also criticized those who "do not use their talents in their calling or in the service of their neighbor; they use them only for their own glory and advantage ... The Gospel wants everyone to be the other person's servant" (Hart, 1995:1, p.38). Thus, this is a journey for each believer to walk before the Christ returns to the earth.

Finally, while we as Christians should care about doing good work, we should not be over-anxious about their work. Jesus taught the "do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?" (Matthew 6:25) We know that God is in control of everything as God is renewing things in his ongoing creation. Thus, we have the peace and

strength to deal with fast changes in work place.

### **Trinitarian (the Doctrine of Trinity)**

It is very important to ground our understanding of Christian work view on the Trinitarian, or the doctrine of Trinity. Webster's dictionary gives the following definition of Trinity: "The unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three persons in one Godhead according to Christian dogma." The development and formalization of the Trinity doctrine was brought about by the rise of heretical teachers who either denied the deity of Christ or that of the Holy Spirit. In 325 A.D., the First Council of Nicaea established the doctrine of the Trinity as orthodoxy. By the end of the fourth century, the doctrine of Trinitarian has reached substantially its current form, under the leadership of the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus).

Wayne Grudem in his book *Systematic Theology*, wrote that the proper Trinitarian doctrine involves three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as follow.

1.

God is three persons.

2.

Each person is fully God.

3.

There is one God. (Grudem, 1999, p.106)

According to Alister McGrath (1997), the doctrine of the Trinity “holds together the following [three] central elements of the biblical witness to the nature and purposes of God: God created the world. God redeemed us through Jesus Christ. God is present in his church through the Spirit.”

Recently, Christian theologians, such as Thomas Torrance and Jurgen Moltmann, have further expanded the Trinitarian paradigm in Immanent Trinity and Economic Trinity. In Immanent (also called Ontological or Essential) Trinity, God the Father, the Son and the Spirit (God *in se*, God as God) would exist eternally, outside of creation. God as God would exist even if God had never created anything. In Economy Trinity speaks about God’s relationship with us and his creations. The three persons of God, because of love, jointly created the world. We experience God in creation: in history, in the economy of “salvation” and in our personal lives.

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God the Father relied on the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit in creation (□□□ , 2002). Trinitarian theology is “the doctrine that God creates and redeems the cosmos in the power of the Holy Spirit through the external Word incarnate in Jesus Christ” (Groppe, 2002, p.743). Catherine Mowry LaCugna also tried to make the present-day Trinitarian paradigm more complete by offering the principle of the inseparability of theologia and oikonomia. In her work, “*theologia* refers to the mystery and being of God.

*Oikonomia*

, in turn, is the comprehensive plan of God reaching from creation to consummation, in which God and all creatures are destined to exist together in the mystery of love and communion” (Groppe, 2002, p.742).

Both the paradigms of economic Trinity and oikonomia help to tie together the two main building blocks, God’s creation and God’s redemption. LaCugna wrote in her book *God for Us*: “The reason for creation lies entirely in the unfathomable mystery of God, who is self-originating and self-communicating love. While the world is the gracious result of divine freedom, God’s freedom means necessarily being who and what God is” (Groppe, 2002, p.751).

Since men are created in the image of God, Trinitarian also teaches us another important truth, in which men should live in relationship with one another, in love. Stanley Grenz writes that “at the heart of the Christian’s understanding of God is the declaration that God is triune – Father, Son and Spirit. This means that in his eternal essence the one God is a social reality, the social Trinity. Because God is the social Trinity, a plurality in unity, the ideal for humankind does not focus on solitary persons, but on persons-in-community” (Grenz, 1994, p.98). The

<sup>1</sup> Karl Rahner, in his book *The Trinity*, argues that Immanent Trinity and Economic Trinity are the same. This view has a significant influence on the Western churches.

relationship should be maintained by love and serving others, which we can apply to our daily living, such as work place.

In the context of Trinitarian, there are some other theologians who attempt to offer alternatives to Luther's idea of particular callings. Miroslav Volf argued that Luther was wrong to ground vocation in the doctrines of providence and creation. He creatively stresses the New Testament language of gifts, in terms of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, as the proper basis for vocation. Though he does not mention explicitly the role of the Father and the Son, his idea nevertheless helps to supplement a more complete understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in choosing one's vocation.

The doctrine of Trinity has many ramifications to how we should live our lives and view our work. First, it teaches us that God values work through His examples. In the next section, we can see the Trinity is at work both in creation and in redemption. On earth, Jesus demonstrated to us that he worked diligently and lovingly. He valued human work by working as a carpenter before his public ministry on earth, using his hands to serve others (Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3). He washed his disciples' feet while the disciples were fighting among themselves to demonstrate his love and humbleness to his disciples (John 13:3-17). He willingly died on the Cross out of submission to God the Father. Even now, God is always at work in our lives and our ministries (Galatians 2:8). He is also at work within us (Ephesians 3:20, 1 Thessalonians 2:13). Thus, as children of God, we should not shy from working, and use our work to bless others.

Second, it shows that we should live our lives in fellowship. Since God is within Himself a fellowship, we who made in His image can live our lives fully only within a fellowship with God and with one another. Jesus prayed for his followers that "all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). As a result, Christians should learn to have true Christian fellowships, modeled after the divine fellowship. Christians should also strive to have harmony with other people, believers and nonbelievers, in their workplace as Apostle Paul also taught us to "live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited" (Romans 12:16).

During our lives, we will never fully comprehend the full mystery of Trinity. The Apostle Paul wrote that “now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). What we can do, however, is to hold firmly on what God has revealed to us by faith and to live out our lives in obedience to these truths.

### The Connection among the Three Doctrines

Trinity is deeply involved in the act of creation. Although God the Father clearly initiated the act of creation, there are many bible passages that show both the Son and the Holy Spirit are also active in creation. It is written in John 1:3 that “through him [Jesus, the Word] all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (qualifier mine). Apostle Paul wrote that “for by him [Jesus] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him” (Colossians 1:16, qualifier mine).

The Holy Spirit’s participation in creation is also written in many places, such as in Genesis 1:2: “now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” Psalmist also wrote “when you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth” (Psalms 104:30).

Trinity is also intimately involved in the act of redemption. Starting from the fall of human in Genesis, the Lord God said, “the man has now become like one of *us*, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:22, qualifier mine). Although the Son Jesus Christ clearly played a very visible role of redemption by dying on the Cross and rose from the death, there are many evidences that show the Father and the Holy Spirit were also active in the act of redemption. It was God the Father who sent and gave His one and only Son, Jesus, to the world (John 3:16-17). Jesus taught the Jews that “just as the living Father

*sent*

me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me” (John 6:57, qualifier mine). During the night before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed: “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ... Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do” (John 17:1,3-4).

The Holy Spirit participates in both the act of redemption through Jesus and the follow-up work of dwelling in each believer's heart. Jesus clearly explained about the fulfillment of Isaiah 61 in himself: "the Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners" (Luke 4:18). Jesus taught Nicodemus that "no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and *the Spirit*. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but *the Spirit* gives birth to spirit" (John 3:5-6, qualifier mine). Apostle Paul also wrote that "God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father'" (Galatians 4:4-6).

According to Jurgen Moltmann, the Trinity is a history of reciprocal relationships between the persons of the divine community in which the persons take initiative in action or are acted upon according to their functions in creation, redemption, and new creation (Kwok, 2007). As the three persons of God are being in communion and in community, we also see a reflection of God's diversity and unity in our churches (1 Corinthians 12:12) and in our societies (Revelation 7:9). When we see many of our everyday work activities as "a reflection of the wisdom of God in allowing us both unity and diversity, we can see a faint reflection of the glory of God in his Trinitarian existence" (Grudem, 1999, p.122). Learning from the love and acts of Trinity, we can also approach our work similarly in love and cooperation. We approach our lives and our work being-in-communion with the Trinity God. Similarly, we should ask our Trinitarian God for wisdom and guidance in our career choice and decision-making in our work.

In a similar way, as we become co-workers in God's ongoing activities, our work is the location of God's sanctifying work of helping us to put to death our sinful self so that our new self can live in the Christ's righteous. The act of creation and redemption allow us to see that we can use our lives, including our work lives, to express our acts of love from our new self, which is born in faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Synthesis of the three Doctrines**

Given our understanding of work from the three doctrines, we would like to examine some common work view-related problems experienced by Christians in this rapidly-changing Information Age. First, there is a general impatience with God's timing and provisions. Workers now expect good work to result in rewards and advancements, and they sometimes become impatient if progress is slow (Sheehy, 1990). This is due to employees' tendency for instant gratification (Criswell & Martin, 2007). Second, there are frustrations of heavy emphasis on a

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person's economic values versus one's intrinsic human worth (Flamholtz, 2005). The idea of work as a calling has often been replaced by the concept of public utility and usefulness. Governments often warn of poverty if people were to fail to work hard, and moralists stress the social duty of each person to be productive (Rodgers, 1978). Third, many Christians struggle to find meaning and significance in their work in this Information Age. Fourth, there is also a dualism of work views whereas one either elevate the status of "sacred" Christian work or idolize one's career or job.

We aim to apply the Christian understanding of the work view in the context of Creation, the Redemption and the Trinity in this rapidly changing world. First of all, we should put our work in proper prospect as our work is in "this world." Our understanding is also incomplete at best and there are sins and imperfectness in this fallen world. Marc Kolden has summarized it really well:

Theologically, creation, law, and work are all part of "this age", not "the age to come." "This

age" is a time both of God's creative goodness and of sin. It is marked by ambiguity and

incompleteness as well as by creativity and accomplishment. A common error of our time is that

many people regard this age as all there is. As a result, they seek ultimate meaning in the present.

Scripture, however, speaks not only of "this age" but also of "the age to come" and of judgment

and the need for renewal. This means that there is no perfection and or completeness or ultimacy now. (Kolden, 1994, p.268) With this understanding, we should view work as important but not of ultimate value, meaningful but ultimately upheld by God. Work can also be a source of joy (Ecclesiastes 6:18). Through work, we develop our abilities and make contributions to others. At the same time, living between the time of original Creation and the upcoming new Creation, we should not expect our work to lend more meaning to life than any other created

reality does. As we all live in this world permeated by both God's goodness on one hand and by our sins on the other hand; there will be aspects of work that we do not like. At that point, it will take discernment and faith in God for us to carry out God's calling, and part of the calling can be the work we do. This view is also supported by Gustaf Wingren in his important work *Luther on Vocation*.

He allows for a

more complete understanding of Luther's view of vocation to be applied to the world today: Vocation is our calling in our situation in life, through which we serve God's creative work by being under the law. It is the place in which the person of faith chooses sides in the ongoing combat between God and Satan. The "old self" must bear vocation's cross as long as life on earth lasts and the battle against the devil continues. After death there will be a new kingdom free from the cross, heaven will take the place of earth, and the "new self" will be raised from the dead. In this summary "vocation" refers to more than mere dedicated service in one's occupation. It refers above all to the whole theater of personal, communal, and historical relationships in which one lives. (Kolden, 1983, p.383)

We should place our hearts in the right place by starting with the two primary commandments for all Christians: to love God with all one's heart, soul, strength and mind; and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Matthew 22:37-40). I agree with Douglas Schuurman's idea in his book *Vocation*

that the north star for the right use of the doctrine of vocation is Christian love. He writes that "the norm of love should govern Christian action and character in each and every calling, though love may take different forms as its requirements. ... Any obligation of one's paid work, political life, or any other relational field that violates Christian love must be rejected as contrary to Christian vocation" (Schuurman, 2004, p.79). If a Christian lives out his life and works out his vocation for the love of God and people, then the Holy Spirit will be able to give him peace. This is also consistent with the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, developed by Moltmann, in the sphere of "God is love" – to think of God as a community whose freedom is found in self-giving love. This has a profound implication for how Christians are to lovingly relate to other human beings.

Once our hearts are in the right place, then we should understand the role of choice. As the pace of change becomes faster, workers are often being forced by circumstances to change jobs. Some Christians may be concerned about missing their calling or their station in life because of these frequent changes. In his Church Postil, Martin Luther taught that: "therefore, where you are in a calling that is not sinful in itself, you are certain placed there by God, and in the state that is pleasing to God; be only on your guard and do not sin in it" (Schuurman, 2004, p.127). Luther basically explained that Christians should use every opportunity afforded by one's current locations to serve God and neighbors. As long as they seek first God's kingdom

and His righteousness, they do not need to be overanxious in choosing the absolute right profession in this rapidly changing world. Another implication is that the station-in-life concept still applies to the moment of the work we do because God has asked us to obey our earthly master from our hearts and serve wholeheartedly for the Lord (Ephesians 6:5-7, Colossians 3:22-24). The correct interpretation of the station-in-life concept is that God's calling does not apply only to our job, but it also applies to our whole lives (Romans 8:28-30, 1 Corinthians 1:2,8,24,26, Ephesians 4:1, 2 Peter 1:10). Christians are called to belong to Jesus Christ and to the obedience that comes from faith (Romans 1:5-6).

Some Christians treat Christian work and professional priesthood as higher calling than normal everyday work. There are others who idolize their own career, making their work above everything else, including God. Both views, unfortunately, share a common root problem – a bifurcation of work and faith, or a separation sacred work and secular work. It may have started with some early Church Fathers who drew on Greek, Roman and Old Testament motifs in their theology of viewing sacred lives as above secular lives. For example, Augustine distinguished between the 'active life' and the 'contemplative life', and suggested that the "contemplative life was of a higher order" (McKenzie, 2001). This has subsequently led to the subordination of the laity to monasticism, the creation of the Roman Catholic Church (professional priesthood) and the loss of the New Testament view of the priesthood of all believers. Professional priests could run the risks of pursuing self-righteousness. Martin Luther was able to steer the church teaching back to the gospel that justification is by faith alone, and not by work (Romans 1:17, Romans 3:22-24). He condemned monasticism and taught that all Christians are priests (1 Peter 2:4, 9, Revelations 1:6, 5:10). For Luther, work is honorable and a blessing, thus elevating the status of ordinary Christians, including their daily work. However, some Christians in the modern world has swung the corrective pendulum too far to the other end by elevating the status of ordinary work above everything else, thus idolizing work above all. Thus both incorrect views violate the first two commandments of the Ten Commandments: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3) and "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below" (Exodus 20:4).

Finally, we should also understand that in the post-fall world, both human sins and God's mercy are present. Our merciful God also righteously and rightfully let the unbelievers who intentionally rejects Him to voluntarily go their own sinful ways and suffer the natural consequences (Romans 1:28-32). As a result, there will be no true external peace and justice in this fallen world until Christ's second coming. Some of the frustrations and sufferings we encounter in our work are natural consequences of our and others' sins. In fact, according to William Anderson (1998)'s expose of Ecclesiastes, a major portion of the book of Ecclesiastes deals with three broad areas of work-related frustrations: work in general (1:3-11, 2:17-23, 3:9-15), work in intellectual pursuits (1:13-18, 7:23-25, 12:9-12), work in business and achievements (2:4-24, 4:4-10, 5:9-16).

Even before Christ carried out his redemption plan two thousand years ago, God revealed to the ancient saints about work in Ecclesiastes 6:18: “then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him—for this is his lot.” With Christ’s redemption, now we have eternal hope as we should wait for the redemption of our bodies patiently (Romans 8:23-25). We have internal peace as God gives us the Holy Spirit to help us in our weakness (Romans 8:26). In the meanwhile, we as Christians will continue to bear the effects of sin in our work in this fallen world, and we will continue to fight sin and bring work closer to what God intended (Wong 2003). Apostle Paul admonishes us to work to please God: “Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs – he wants to please his commanding officer” (2 Timothy 2:3-4). We know that God will hold us accountable at the end:

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

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