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Reimagining Work: Explorations in integrating a theological vision of work into the discipleship programme of a parish church

Jacob John Belder

Abstract

The majority of Christians spend a significant amount of time each week in work, and yet the church has infrequently focused on work as an area of discipleship. In the last century, renewed attention has been given to the theology of work, but even with the availability of a considerable amount of popular resources on the subject, it remains a peripheral issue in many churches. As a result, Christians in work are not being supported in being enabled either to reimagine the significance of their work, or to faithfully practice their work. To address this issue, and to consider how the church might respond, a case study method is used to explore what happens when ten participants from a parish church encounter a theological vision of work in the context of the church's discipleship programme.

Using a phenomenological methodology, the study found, first, that participants exhibited a general ambivalence towards work, and struggled to find meaning in their work, particularly being unable to conceive of their work as having any theological significance. Second, the research showed that an encounter with a developed theological vision of work, rooted in the Reformed tradition, and delivered in the context of a small-group course, was insufficient to help participants begin to reimagine the significance of their work. In the end, drawing on resources from sociology, philosophy, and theology, the primary contention of the study is that, as the postures towards and practices of work are shaped by deeply rooted social imaginaries, churches must give sustained attention to liturgical formation to reshape these imaginaries with a renewed theological perspective rooted in the gospel if they are to support their parishioners in enabling the faithful practice of work.

**Reimagining Work:
Explorations in integrating a theological vision of work into the
discipleship programme of a parish church**

Jacob John Belder

A thesis in one volume submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Theology and Ministry

Department of Theology and Religion
Durham University
2017

Word count: 68,521

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None of the material contained in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree in this or any other institution. The thesis is my own work.

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

Acknowledgements

Three and a half years ago, I was selected to train for ordained ministry in the Church of England, and I sat with the Diocese of York's Director of Ordinands and Advisor on Vocations, David Mann, contemplating which training pathway would best suit me. Though I was hesitant initially, David strongly encouraged me to consider the Doctor of Theology and Ministry programme, and before long I found myself offered a place in the programme.

Now, with this research completed, I want to thank David for that encouragement and for his ongoing support during these three years. I am also grateful to the Archbishop of York and the Diocese for their continued support and willingness to work with my unusual situation, especially as visa requirements have complicated the process of transitioning from study to ordained ministry. Additionally, I wish to thank the Church of England for granting me the necessary financial provisions to make this study possible.

Beginning a study of this size is always daunting, and to take so many different ideas and elements of research and turn it into something that hangs together as a whole is a demanding task. To that end, I am deeply indebted to my supervisors, Mike Higton and David Goodhew, who in the course of the last few years, took a genuine interest in my work, offered helpful and generous feedback, asked the necessary critical questions, and provided continuous encouragement. I have benefitted from their wisdom and knowledge in many ways.

My first two years at Cranmer Hall overlapped with two other DThM colleagues, Beth Keith and Will Foulger, and I am thankful for their support and friendship, and for the time we shared in study and conversation. My deep gratitude goes out as well to my tutor at Cranmer, Jocelyn Bryan, for ensuring that I had the space to complete this work, and for prayerfully supporting me along the way. I'm thankful too for Pete Ward's open door, and for the discussions we shared about practical theology. I will also look back fondly on the annual Summer School, and the mutually enriching time I was able to share with friends and colleagues undertaking the DThM from a distance.

These three years have not been easy, and I am grateful for family and friends who have stood alongside me. In particular, I thank my parents for always supporting me as I sought to discern and faithfully respond to God's call, even when that took me across an ocean. I owe a great deal to my dear friend, Daniel Rosenlund, who never failed to provide a listening ear and much-needed encouragement when I felt like this thesis was getting the better of me. Likewise, I am grateful to Alastair Roberts for long walks around Durham and long chats that regularly provided me with ideas and insights to consider for this research.

Completing doctoral studies whilst fulfilling the demands of ordination training is difficult enough, but is even more demanding with a young family. And so my deepest and most heartfelt thanks go to my wife, Robin, who has had to bear so many extra loads in the past three years. I am eternally grateful for her willingness to do that, and for her love, support and encouragement. I could not have done this without her.

This work is dedicated to my two sons, in the hope that as they grow up and begin to work, they might find delight in sharing in God's work in the world.

Reimagining Work: Explorations in integrating a theological vision of work into the discipleship programme of a parish church

1. Introduction

1.1 Introductory remarks

Work is a defining feature of human existence. Though the character and nature of work has changed in profound ways over time, the vast majority of people will nonetheless spend more than half of their lives in work.¹ Even for those who do not, work still impacts their lives in many ways, whether they are dealing with unemployment or find themselves unable to work. This is not to mention the way the whole of our lives – indeed, the whole structure of society – is dependent on other people working.

Yet considering how central work is to our existence, my contention in this thesis is that it has infrequently been focused on as an area of discipleship in churches. That faith and work are so often separated in the church is hardly a novel idea, however; writing in 1950, J.H. Oldham argued that ‘unless men feel that to be a Christian makes some recognisable difference to what they do in the daily occupations which fill the greater part of their waking hours, they can hardly be expected to regard Christianity as having an important meaning for their earthly life’.² A few years earlier, writing on the subject of work and perceiving a profound detachment between faith and the world of

¹ This is based on the common assumption that the average person will be employed in some way or another between the ages of 18 and 65, and that the average life expectancy in the UK is around 81 years (Rebecca Jathonia, ‘Statistical bulletin: National life tables, UK: 2013-2015’, *Office for National Statistics*, 29 Sept 2016, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/lifeexpectancies/bulletins/nationallifetablesunitedkingdom/20132015>).

² J.H. Oldham, *Work in Modern Society* (London: SCM, 1950), 5.

work, Dorothy Sayers would likewise ask, ‘How can any one remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life?’³ Seventy years on, I believe that Sayers’ question is still poignant. Indeed, Mark Greene, executive director of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, an organisation that has in recent years developed resources to enable churches to bring work into focus as an area of discipleship, has argued repeatedly that the majority of Christians have neither heard a sermon on work, nor been asked about their work by the leaders of their churches.⁴ A recent report adopted at the February 2017 General Synod of the Church of England likewise noted that 62% of Christians in full-time employment ‘experienced little, not much, or no help/preparation from the life and ministries of the church to deal with the issues they faced at work’.⁵ This omission means that many Christians have not been enabled to discover a vision for how work fits into God’s creative and redemptive plan, and further, that the ministry of the church has not adequately supported them in being enabled to faithfully practice their work. The research that follows, then, is an attempt to address the question of the role churches can play in helping their parishioners cultivate a theological vision of work that invests their work with deep meaning and significance, and enables them to begin to reorient how they think about and practice their work. In the end, my primary contention will be that, as the postures towards and practices of work are shaped by deeply rooted social imaginaries,⁶ churches

³ Dorothy L. Sayers, ‘Why Work?’, in *Creed or Chaos? and Other Essays in Popular Theology* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1947), 56.

⁴ Mark Greene, *Thank God it’s Monday: Ministry in the Workplace* (Bletchley: Scripture Union, 2003), 15-18. He makes similar remarks in the first session of *Transforming Work* (London: The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, 2015). See also John Martin, *Gospel People: Evangelicals and the Future of Anglicanism* (London: SPCK, 1997), 179-180.

⁵ The Archbishop’s Council, ‘Setting God’s People Free’, *The Church of England*, February 2017, <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/3858033/gs-2056-setting-gods-people-free.pdf>. The existence of this report is encouraging, and its content is a commendable first step in moving the Church of England forward in its discipleship of people in their multiplicity of callings.

⁶ I have borrowed this term from Charles Taylor, who defines social imaginaries as ‘the ways in which [people] imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images

must give sustained attention to liturgical formation to reshape these imaginaries and to support their parishioners in enabling the faithful practice of work.

In this introduction, I will, first, discuss some of the personal experiences that have shaped both my desire to undertake this research and my approach to it; second, make some comments on terminology and definitions; and finally, briefly outline the structure of this thesis.

1.2 A personal narrative

No researcher approaches their research at random, but finds that personal interest and experience guide them into their studies. I have undertaken this project in part because of a long-standing interest in the theology of work, but also because of two significant experiences in my own life that act as impetuses for this research. The first is my own experience of work in the trades, and the second is my experience in ministry as I sought to walk alongside working members of the congregation in their journey of discipleship.

Compared with other people my age, I have not spent a significant amount of time in traditional paid employment.⁷ However, a number of working experiences have played a role in shaping my thinking about work. In North America, where I grew up, the academic year for universities ends at the end of April, with a long break until a new academic year begins in September. Like many of my fellow students, I utilised those

which underlie these expectations' (*A Secular Age* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007], 171). This is not unlike James Sire's concept of 'worldview', as articulated in *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), although with James K.A Smith, I am sympathetic to the way the notion of a social imaginary shifts 'the center of gravity of human identity from the cognitive to the affective' and 'embodied' (*Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009], 65). I will return to this in chapters three, five, and six.

⁷ In addition to undertaking a significant amount of formal study, I have spent five years in ministerial employment of different kinds. Though in some ways this could be considered traditional paid employment, I think the stipendiary structure makes it qualitatively different.

summer breaks to work, spending one summer with a builder, and a number of summers working for different landscaping companies. A number of reasons lay behind my decision to seek employment in the trades, including a desire to gain some useful skills, to be able to spend time working outside and with my hands, and because of the prospect of seeing something come together that I had participated in constructing. In the communities I grew up in, which had significant numbers of tradespeople, this was also simply a common practice for young men.

However, whatever notions I had of the pleasures of such work were immediately dispelled when I started working for the builder. In the first place, this was a trade I had virtually no knowledge of, and thus I spent the summer ignorant of most of what was going on around me. Although that was an obstacle that could have been overcome with time, my employer demonstrated no interest in teaching me the trade or giving me any responsibility, despite my willingness to learn. Instead, he clearly intended for me to be nothing more than a ‘gopher’,⁸ made constant demands that I work more quickly, and paid me poorly. In time, I discovered that this was partly because my employer was working under contract with a large housing development company, responsible for building as many houses as quickly as possible, and thus required ‘gophers’ like myself to keep his machine running and churning out products. With an introduction to the working world that was so unpleasant and dissatisfying, I soon decided that I would look for different work the next summer, and spent the rest of the summer seeking motivation by reminding myself that this job was contributing towards the financial provision for my university degree.

⁸ In North America, the term ‘gopher’ is a derogatory term used for someone responsible for the menial tasks on the jobsite. In the building trade, this will mean such tasks as moving materials around, loading and unloading tools from the van, and keeping the jobsite tidy. It carries connotations of inferiority.

These were patterns that would continue into my jobs with landscaping companies, with only minor variations. Employers were not interested in employees like myself exercising their mental faculties or in entrusting us with responsibility, but simply looked to us to provide the manual labour to help get different jobs done as efficiently as possible. We were a means to their end of completing jobs and generating profits; the difficult labour was merely a means to our end of providing ourselves with an income. Despite operating at this point with some basic theological convictions about work, including a belief in its inherent goodness, the reality I was confronted with was that my labour was nothing more than one part of an economic exchange,⁹ and the church I was a part of at the time certainly offered nothing through its means of discipleship to help me find meaning and significance in what I did for so many hours each week, or conversely, to critique either the work itself or the structures I was embedded in.

A second factor driving my interest in this research comes from my experience of ministry prior to beginning the Doctor of Theology and Ministry programme and my ordination training. As a senior staff member of a large evangelical church, I shared in some of the pastoral work, and found these same patterns I had seen in my own working life also emerging in my interactions with those in work in this church. The church, set in a largely working-class city, was made up of a mix of people from both working- and middle-class backgrounds, and I observed that people's attitudes to and experiences of work were essentially no different from what I had experienced in work, and from the prevailing cultural attitudes. In addition to quite a number of the congregation being employed as teachers, many of them worked in the manufacturing or industrial sector,

⁹ I remember one job in which we were installing an in-ground sprinkler system and over lunch, I raised the issue of the environmental ethics of that particular work. The supervisor on the site, also a confessing Christian, looked at me confusedly, and remarked, 'But they are paying for it, so we do what they want.'

or in low- to mid-level management positions in the service industry. Most considered work a necessity, and accepted that somewhat grudgingly. As Christians, they would talk about work being a good thing because it enabled you to provide for your family, it enabled you to give to the work of the church, and most importantly, it was the ‘frontline’ for your personal evangelism. Yet these pious overtones only masked the fact that they encountered the same reality of the general meaninglessness of work. They too had little sense of responsibility in work, and merely saw it as a means to an end. To talk about work in the way they did only served as a means of trying to cope with the necessity of work, albeit ineffectively – most Sundays saw members of the congregation sighing deeply at the thought of returning to work the next morning. Operating at this point with much more robust theological convictions about work, I again observed this particular church doing very little to help people conceive of their work differently, and had little support from the senior leadership in the church when I suggested trying to address this part of our parishioners’ lives in our work of discipleship.

As I mentioned above, I have long been interested in the subject of the theology of work, and these experiences have solidified my commitment to helping Christians encounter a theological vision of work that enables them to see their work in a new way, as something good and dignified, and as a participation in God’s work in the world, and equipped with such a vision, to be enabled to practice their work more faithfully.

1.3 Some preliminary definitions

With any project of this size, the researcher is forced at the beginning to define both their terms, and the boundaries and scope of the research. As a result, I have had to set a number of parameters within which to conduct my research. In the first place, when I speak of ‘work’ I have decided to limit this to paid employment. This is in no

way meant to downplay the complexity of what we speak of when we speak of work, nor to minimise the significance of employments lacking monetary remuneration, such as those who engage in voluntary work and those who have committed themselves to being stay-at-home parents. It is simply that, were this study to take all those varying nuances and factors into account, it would suffer from a lack of focus. Additionally, the material I use for my action research is specifically focused on those in paid employment. I think there is good reason to consider the question of how a theological vision of work might relate to or be informed by those in unemployment or voluntary work, but that will have to be addressed in another project undertaken by someone else.

Second, the concept of a ‘theology of work’ is a contested term. Darrell Cosden notes that ‘although theological reflection on work is as old as Christian theology itself, the concept of a “theology of work” is quite a recent development’, the term itself first mentioned in the writing of the Roman Catholic theologian, Marie-Dominique Chenu.¹⁰ Miroslav Volf is intent on differentiating between a theology of work and theological reflections on work, the former which he likewise notes to be a more recent and decisive shift.¹¹ Cosden elaborates:

The shift is what points to the difference between a theology of work and other theological reflections on work, or an ethics of work. Unlike other approaches, a theology of work attempts to be a comprehensive theological study, dogmatically reflecting on the nature and place of the phenomenon of work in God’s universe... It is a theological exploration of work itself undertaken by exploring work with reference to a multitude of doctrines within a systematic theology. A theology of work thus defined is a genitive theology.¹²

For this reason, I have chosen to speak more frequently of a theological *vision* of work, because whilst a major aim of my project was to help my participants reflect, as Cosden

¹⁰ Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), 4-5.

¹¹ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 71.

¹² Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 5. The term is found in Marie-Dominique Chenu’s, *The Theology of Work: An Exploration*, trans. Lilian Soiron (Dublin: Gill and Son, 1963).

says, on the nature and place of work in God's universe, this research does not have the genitive aim of a systematic theological study, but rather is primarily focused on renewed praxis for the church.

Finally, I frequently employ the terms 'evangelical' and 'evangelicalism' in this thesis, and do so aware of the highly contentious nature of these labels in the church at present. Though there has always been debate over how exactly the terms are defined, recent controversies such as evangelical support for Donald Trump in the 2016 American presidential election, and a move amongst some self-identifying evangelicals in the Church of England to strongly advocate for the acceptance of same-sex relationships and marriage, has seen the debate reignited with renewed furore. This is further complicated by the fact that within the Church of England, there are at least three distinct expressions of evangelicalism, often identified, according to Graham Kings, as conservative, open, and charismatic, each with their own particular emphases and characteristics,¹³ although many evangelical churches find themselves overlapping those boundaries in different ways. Given the situatedness of my research in a specific context, I am operating here with quite a traditional understanding of evangelicalism. Following David Hilborn, in a document he wrote for the Evangelical Alliance, I would suggest traditional evangelicalism has five defining features: an emphasis on the authority of Scripture, a focus on the person of Christ, the centrality of the cross and atonement for salvation, the need for personal repentance and conversion, and a commitment to evangelism and social service.¹⁴ My contention, as I will discuss further

¹³ Graham Kings, 'Canal, River and Rapids: Contemporary Evangelicalism in the Church of England', in *Anvil* vol. 20, no.3 (September 2003): 167-184.

¹⁴ David Hilborn, 'Evangelicalism: A brief definition', *Evangelical Alliance*, accessed 28 Sept 2017, <http://www.eauk.org/connect/about-us/upload/Evangelicalism-a-brief-definition.pdf>. Hilborn acknowledges his debt to David Bebbington's well-known defining characteristics of evangelicalism (Cf. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* [London: Routledge, 1988]). There is much more that could be said here, but in terms of the value of this definition, it is worth noting that the Evangelical Alliance's statement of faith is often employed by traditional evangelical churches to articulate their beliefs and emphases.

in chapter four, is that these emphases shape the ministry of evangelical churches, and perhaps inadvertently narrow the scope of discipleship and mission, two of the main focal aspects of this thesis. In terms of the Church of England, to once again employ Kings' taxonomy, I want to suggest that these identifiers above would helpfully define the group of churches that would straddle the boundaries between more conservative and open evangelicalism. Indeed, although written fifteen years ago, Kings' article identifies St Nicholas' Church in Durham, the location of my research, as open, but leaning more towards conservative.¹⁵ In many ways, I would argue that this is still the case, and although space does not allow for a detailed analysis of the church, I believe that both the contents of its website and of many of the sermons quite safely allow for this categorisation to be made.

1.4 The structure of this study

Though I will discuss this in more detail in chapter three as I outline my methodological approach, I will briefly note the structure of this thesis here. I begin with a discussion of the development of the theology of work, giving attention to the ways a number of Christian traditions have approached the issue, and making some comments on why I think the Reformed approach to work and vocation might best serve the church in its work of discipleship. I then turn to the methodological foundations of the research, outlining a phenomenological approach that gives attention to the experiences of Christians in work, and why I make use of both a case study and action research method to carry out the empirical aspect of the study. Chapters four and five deal in depth with the data collected from my empirical research. First, I analyse the interviews conducted with my participants, and demonstrate both that their experiences

¹⁵ Kings, 'Canal, River and Rapids', 174.

of work are not overly positive, and that they are largely unable to demonstrate an operative theological vision of work, with some analysis of the dynamics that shape their experience and practice of work. Second, I analyse the small group sessions that make up the action research phase and the follow-up interviews, in order to demonstrate that an encounter with a theological vision of work in the context of a small group course is insufficient to reorient the way my participants experience and make meaning of their work, with sustained attention given to why this might be the case, focusing on a number of factors, including the formation of our imaginaries and the way those imaginaries shape our perceptions and practices. Finally, after reflecting on the data, I make some suggestions for how the church might respond and renew its work of discipleship amongst its parishioners in work, giving particular attention to the role of liturgical formation in discipleship, and focusing on the need to reshape a church's worshipping culture as the locus of the renewal of ministerial practice.

2. The theology of work: A survey and assessment¹⁶

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned to survey and evaluate some of the major literary contributions in the field of the theology of work, with a view to assessing the ways in which these various approaches might be employed in the service of discipleship in a parish or local church. First tracing the origins of the theology of work by briefly exploring the history of work, I then turn my attention to surveying and evaluating major contributions to its development. Finally, some comments are offered on how a theological vision of work might be used in the context of a parish church, with particular attention given to the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity's recent course, *Transforming Work*, as it is a key resource employed as part of my research.

2.2 Historical understandings of work

According to J.H. Oldham, 'Work in the Bible is not presented as a problem. It is taken for granted as part of the order of the created world... The fact that work has become a problem in our time is an indication of the predicament in which we find ourselves'.¹⁷ Indeed, what is commonly referred to as the 'theology of work' is a recent development, the term only being used for the first time around 70 years ago.¹⁸ This is in part due to the modern Western conception of work, 'a product of industrialization and...governed by the rules of economic reality',¹⁹ which has so radically transformed

¹⁶ The basis of this chapter is a literature review I submitted in August 2015 as per the summative assessment criteria for the Doctor of Theology and Ministry programme. It has been significantly revised and expanded.

¹⁷ Oldham, *Work in Modern Society*, 49.

¹⁸ Chenu, *The Theology of Work*, 3. Chenu does not indicate with whom the term originates.

¹⁹ Catherine Casey, *Work, Self and Society: After Industrialism* (London: Routledge, 1995), 28.

the nature and purpose of work, and the human experience of work, that it has presented a problem demanding a theological response.²⁰ Therefore, before we turn to analysing the different theological approaches to work that have developed in recent centuries, it is worth beginning with a brief survey of the history of work that has brought us to the point we are at today.

2.2.1 *Ancient and medieval perspectives on work*

Gilbert Meilaender states that ‘in the history of the West work has had no single meaning or significance’.²¹ Throughout the centuries, we see very different understandings of the nature of work in play. In analysing the earliest perspectives on the place of work in human life two dominant themes emerge. The first is that work was something merely borne of necessity, and the second, that it was to be avoided. Richard Donkin notes that there is evidence that even amongst the early hunter-gatherers, despite the fact that it was required for survival, ‘work...seemed to be viewed as something they would rather not be doing’.²² That is why, as early as the dynastic period in ancient Egypt, ‘manual work, at least, had already come to be recognised as something to be avoided by those privileged enough to escape its clutches’.²³ Similarly, ‘the Greeks and Romans generally despised work and idealized leisure,²⁴ and believed

²⁰ Chenu, *The Theology of Work*, 5.

²¹ Gilbert C. Meilaender, *Working: Its Meaning and Its Limits* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 1.

²² Richard Donkin, *The History of Work* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4. Donkin makes this suggestion based on an anthropological study of a primitive tribe in Africa. The tribe, who are hunter-gatherers, have a specific word for various chores and tasks that must be done, a word which excludes hunting. Furthermore, Donkin notes that the men in the tribe go to great lengths to avoid these chores, and prefer to sit around together. Whilst recognising why Donkin would choose to study a contemporary tribe, given the near impossibility of studying the original hunter-gatherers, I would want to suggest that caution be exercised in suggesting a contemporary African tribe be considered ‘primitive’, and that conflating their culture and lifestyle with that of early hunter-gatherers is open to question.

²³ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁴ Edward Vanderkloet, ‘Why Work Anyway?’, in *Labour of Love: Essays on Work*, ed. Josina Van Nuis Zylstra (Toronto: Wedge Publishing, 1980), 21.

very simply that ‘work was a curse and nothing else’.²⁵ Lee Hardy notes that the Greeks in particular ‘associated work with that endless cycle of activity forced upon us by embodied existence’,²⁶ and could not conceive of a life wholly devoted to such a meaninglessness. Thus they ‘sought to escape the necessity of work altogether and to live in a way that takes part in the immortality of the gods’.²⁷ Aristotle would encourage citizens to pursue as much leisure as possible, for ‘leisure is a necessity, both for growth in goodness and for the pursuit of political activities’.²⁸ As a result, in order to avoid work, ancient societies established elaborate systems of slavery whereby most of the necessary work could be carried out. P.D. Anthony notes that this was a result of the ‘classic ideology of work’, because the ancient world ‘regarded human activity as arranged hierarchically so that superior activities were reserved for cultivated and superior men... Work was assigned to slaves and foreigners so that gentlemen could avoid the demands it would make on their time and the corruption of its menial character’.²⁹ There was an ordering of society that was not arbitrary, but believed to be divinely mandated.

Lee Hardy notes that ‘the basic Greek attitude toward work and its place in human life was largely preserved in both the thought and practice of the Christian church during the Middle Ages’.³⁰ Medieval writers, including Thomas Aquinas, tended to employ Augustine’s distinction of the *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*,³¹ and whilst Aquinas would not go so far as to condemn the *vita activa*, he would argue that ‘a man could give no more eloquent proof of his love for God...than by renouncing everything

²⁵ Adriano Tilgher, *Work: What It Has Meant to Men Through the Ages* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 3.

²⁶ Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of this World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁸ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1329a, 1-2.

²⁹ P.D. Anthony, *The Ideology of Work* (London: Routledge, 2001), 20, 25.

³⁰ Hardy, *The Fabric of this World*, 16.

³¹ Paul Marshall, ‘Vocation, Work, and Jobs’, in *Labour of Love: Essays on Work*, ed. Josina Van Nuys Zylstra (Toronto: Wedge Publishing, 1980), 7.

which belongs to this life and giving himself entirely over to divine contemplation'.³² Not all could do so, of course, and Aquinas recognised a fixed social hierarchy grounded in natural and divine law consigning manual labour to those in the lowest strata. Katherine Archibald remarks that, 'though St Thomas concedes that all useful human labor has dignity, he constructs an elaborate scale of greater or lesser dignity for various kinds of labor'.³³ It is hard to underestimate how influential Aquinas' theology was in giving shape to theological understandings of work;³⁴ throughout the medieval era the dominant theme would remain that 'work is done out of necessity, because it was ordered so by a natural cycle and by God'.³⁵ Even if there was discontent with work, the givenness of society's transcendental ordering meant there was no conception of establishing 'a different order in which workers would take a different place'.³⁶

Some monastics, most notably Benedict of Nursia, ascribed a more positive role to work, which is significant given that his monastic rule was the most popular and influential of all medieval rules.³⁷ For Benedict, manual labour was a complement to the monk's intellectual labours, 'a school for the service of the Lord'.³⁸ Among his concerns was the avoidance of idleness, which he condemned as 'the enemy of the soul',³⁹ and thus work was prescribed as part of the Benedictine life, and was encouraged even when a monk was unable to focus on his intellectual work: 'If anyone is so remiss and indolent that he is unwilling or unable to study or to read, he is to be

³² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II, 2nd, Q. 182, art. 1 & 2.

³³ Katherine Archibald, 'Social Hierarchy in Thomas Aquinas', in *St. Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics*, trans. and ed. Paul. E. Sigmund (New York: Norton, 1988), 139.

³⁴ Joshua R. Sweeden, *The Church and Work: The Ecclesiological Grounding of Good Work* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 34.

³⁵ Anthony, *The Ideology of Work*, 37.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 37. Cf. Robert L. Calhoun, 'Work and Vocation in Christian History', in *Work and Vocation*, ed. John Oliver Nelson (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1954), 99.

³⁷ Patricia Ranft, *Medieval Theology of Work: Peter Damian and the Medieval Religious Renewal Movement* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 25.

³⁸ Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of St Benedict*, Prologue, 45.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.1.

given some work in order that he may not be idle'.⁴⁰ Further, he envisioned a self-supporting monastery, because he believed that the 'spiritual well-being of the community was directly related to the degree to which the community's labour made its separation from the world possible'.⁴¹ Without wanting to overstate their significance, it is important at this point to recognise the impact of monastic, and particularly Benedictine, attitudes to work on the development of modern Western perspectives on work.⁴² Benedict's vision of a self-supporting monastery introduced practices and structures that are now central to work: the division of labour, market strategy, an acceptance of technology and technological creativity.⁴³ Yet, whilst acknowledging the centrality of work in Benedict's rule, the primary role of the monk was still intellectual; manual work facilitated the ability to carry out those intellectual labours. It was not until the Renaissance that work more fully began to reflect our modern perspectives on work.

2.2.2 *The modern construction of work*

It is with the advent of the Renaissance that we see the most radical shift in attitudes towards work yet. Lee Hardy summarises the shift:

What the Ancients took to be beneath the dignity of a free person, the Renaissance thinkers took to be the very way in which we express our freedom. And what the Medievals took to be a hindrance imposed upon us by the necessity of nature, the Renaissance thinkers took to be an opportunity to exert our control over nature. Through work humanity can establish itself as a sovereign lord over a world of its own making.⁴⁴

John Hughes notes that with the advent of the Renaissance, 'labour replaces contemplation as the highest form of life, while the latter is demoted to become its

⁴⁰ Ibid., 48.23.

⁴¹ Ranft, *Medieval Theology of Work*, 27.

⁴² Ibid., 28.

⁴³ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁴ Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 29.

antithesis, identified with sloth'.⁴⁵ Here is a profoundly reconceptualised anthropology, where 'man is free, the master of his fortune, not chained to his place in a universal hierarchy but capable of all things'.⁴⁶

This anthropocentric view dominated the period of the Enlightenment as well, and particularly the thought of Adam Smith, whose writing has profoundly shaped modern ideas of work. Most significant to Smith's project was his focus on self-interest; according to Joshua Sweeden, Smith would argue that 'self-interest and individual desire are instinctive to human nature. Accordingly, economic and political systems are most appropriate when they indulge these instincts rather than discourage them'.⁴⁷

Smith suggested that

every individual... neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it... he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention... By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.⁴⁸

Indulging these instincts would result in a society where people would flourish and prosper, insofar as they participated. The pursuit of prosperity required an adapted economic structure, however, and an overriding concern for efficiency and utility begins to characterise work and labour. The latter became commodities to be bought and sold, because '[the utilitarian ethic] evaluates human activities only in terms of utility effects and which considers the increasing acquisition of goods for humankind as the most

⁴⁵ John Hughes, *The End of Work: Theological Critiques of Capitalism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 35. This transition is gradual, though: compare the working lives of Jane Austen's early-19th century Mr Bingley and Mr Darcy, with Thomas Hardy's late-19th century Bathsheba Everdene and Michael Henchard.

⁴⁶ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, vol. 1: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 266.

⁴⁷ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 41 n.68.

⁴⁸ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1843), 184.

important source of utility'.⁴⁹ Indeed, says Smith, 'labour was the first price, the original purchase – money that was paid for all things. It was not by gold or by silver, but by labour, that all wealth of the world was originally purchased'.⁵⁰ The fundamental value of work, then, was reduced to its ability to produce both utilities for consumption, and the means to consume: 'economic measurement [alone becomes] the criterion of work'.⁵¹

Smith, of course, had a profoundly naïve understanding of human nature, and although he might have had strong social concerns behind his proposals,⁵² his 'moral principle of selfishness is a process of demoralization unprecedented in history'.⁵³ A profound paradox emerged here: structuring work exclusively according to economic rationale meant that 'the ends of production are [now] taken as "given" and the worker is to be "adjusted" to his job so that the human equation matches the industrial equation',⁵⁴ and required that 'economic rationality prevail over all other forms of rationality...and human goals and interests'.⁵⁵ The primacy Smith ascribed to the individual and their self-interest resulted in the individual being required to relinquish their agency and control and submit themselves to a process. It is hardly surprising that Smith's thesis was, and continues to be, radically challenged. Key critiques include that of Karl Marx, who offered a 'profound analysis of human alienation in the modern capitalist process of production in which the labourer is estranged...from his work'.⁵⁶ Marx understood the worker to be alienated from their work because they did not own

⁴⁹ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 34.

⁵⁰ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 13.

⁵¹ M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 212. This would be Smith's rationale for the idea of the complex division of labour.

⁵² Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 40.

⁵³ Meeks, *God the Economist*, 132.

⁵⁴ Daniel Bell, *Work and its Discontents: The Cult of Efficiency in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), 24-25.

⁵⁵ Casey, *Work, Self and Society*, 29.

⁵⁶ Bob Goudzwaard, *Capitalism and Progress: A Diagnosis of Western Society*, trans. and ed. Josina Van Nuis Zylstra (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979), 72.

the means of production, and thus were always expending themselves for an alien object: ‘The worker puts his life into the object, and his life then belongs no longer to himself but to the object. What is embodied in the product of his labor is no longer his own’ because it is owned by those who own the means of production.⁵⁷ Thus, the worker ‘does not fulfil himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well-being, does not develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased’.⁵⁸ Very simply, Marx saw that, when workers had to sacrifice themselves for someone else, work was no longer ‘one of man’s human functions of creativity and self-creativity’, but instead, ‘man is reduced to animality’.⁵⁹ Whilst Marx’s critique carries with it all kinds of significant problems,⁶⁰ his identification of the alienation of the worker as one of the key problems of labour in the modern political economy has been enormously influential in subsequent thinking on work. It would also play a key role in shaping the theologies of work as they began to emerge, even if their reasons for identifying the problem as such do not wholly resonate with Marx’s critique.

Modern Western society continues to be shaped by Adam Smith’s economic theories, and though working conditions have vastly improved over the types of conditions seen during the Industrial Revolution⁶¹ – recent sociological studies of work show increasing attentiveness to what constitutes good work and how work can be structured for the benefit of workers⁶² – there can be no doubt that work is still

⁵⁷ Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. and ed. T. B. Bottomore (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964), 122.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁵⁹ Clark M. Williamson, ‘Notes on a Theology of Work’, *Encounter* 37:3 (Summer 1976): 298.

⁶⁰ See Hughes, *The End of Work*, 63-96, for a sustained evaluation of Marx’s thinking on work.

⁶¹ I do not say this without qualification. There is still much work to do in improving working conditions, not to mention the impact Western consumer society continues to have on working conditions around the world, subjecting workers in other societies to conditions that rival that of the Industrial Revolution in their deplorability.

⁶² Cf. Tony J. Watson, *Sociology, Work and Industry*, 7th ed. (London: Routledge, 2017).

operating within the confines of economic rationality, and is dominated by concerns of efficiency and utility. This will be seen below when we begin to analyse the data gathered from my participants, but for now, one only need read the accounts of workers gathered by the American sociologist, Studs Terkel, in his fascinating book, *Working*, to get a picture of the reality of work for many people. Terkel summarises his findings in the introduction:

To survive the day is triumph enough for the walking wounded among the great many of us... [The stories of the workers are] about a search, too, for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor: in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying...

There are, of course, the happy few who find a savor in their daily job... But for the many, there is a hardly concealed discontent. The blue-collar blues is no more bitterly sung than the white-collar moan.⁶³

Here is the ‘problem of work’ as it is encountered in the lives of everyday people, and it is in response to this that theologies of work begin to emerge.⁶⁴

2.3 Theological visions of work

As I noted in chapter one, the theology of work, and most of the writing that would fall under the umbrella of that term, is a relatively recent development. Darrell Cosden suggests that in Roman Catholic theology, the move towards the development of a theology of work begins with Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, with which ‘a new era in Catholic social thought had officially begun’.⁶⁵ For Protestants, it is more difficult to say, as a renewed theology of calling and vocation emerges already during the Reformation, and with it, a reconceiving of the place of work in the life of

⁶³ Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), xiii-xiv.

⁶⁴ Space does not permit a discussion here of unemployment, nor is it the focus of this project, but it is important to acknowledge that unemployment is very much a problem of work as well.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

Christians. This thinking continues to inform much of the Protestant theology of work. Additionally, Cosden notes, ‘Protestant theological understandings of work have become as diversified as Protestantism itself’.⁶⁶

For that reason, the theology of work tends to be categorised in various ways. To help sort through the literary sources, particularly of Protestant theologies of work, Cosden employs a taxonomy. He suggests that theologies of work fall into two broad categories, those that operate from within a dominantly vocational paradigm, and those that do not.⁶⁷ Those that begin from the standpoint of vocation have a largely protological understanding of work, grounded in the doctrine of creation. Theologies of work that depart from the vocational model to one degree or another can be further broken down into three categories. The first are contextual methodologies, which tend to explore theologies of work from particular ethical concerns or agendas; the second are theologies of work that begin with the idea of Sabbath and rest; and the third look to frame the theology of work from the standpoint of eschatology.⁶⁸ Though not writing from an academic perspective, R. Paul Stevens also attempts a taxonomy of theologies of work, and suggests that ‘most attempts at elaborating a theology of work concentrate on [one doctrine within systematic theology]’.⁶⁹ Thus he proposes that theologies of work are grounded in Trinitarian theology, creation theology, image of God theology, curse theology, new creation theology, vocation theology, Spirit theology, Kingdom theology, or heaven and end times theology.⁷⁰ Stevens’ taxonomy has the appearance of clarity, but is actually more convoluted than Cosden’s, not least because there are

⁶⁶ Ibid., 37.

⁶⁷ Strictly speaking, Cosden would probably be hesitant to identify those that operate from within the vocational paradigm as ‘theologies of work’ since they are less concerned with understanding work itself than how work fits into the broader calling of God’s people in the world. Whilst he has a point, it can be argued that recent theologies of work coming from this paradigm are more concerned with the transformation of work itself.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 42-77.

⁶⁹ R. Paul Stevens, *Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2-4.

significant overlaps between a number of his categories. Further, Cosden is right to highlight the significant impact of the vocational paradigm on theologies of work, the majority of which ‘seem, in some modified form, to have re-appropriated many of its contributions’.⁷¹ Those who have appropriated different models, says Cosden, ‘have come “through” vocational thinking even if they have not retained it as a model’.⁷²

In what follows, I will explore three major traditions and their contributions to the theology of work, all of which operate in some way from within the vocational paradigm, before analysing two recent and important contributions that attempt to add in significant ways to the ongoing conversation.⁷³

2.4 Major Roman Catholic contributions

Roman Catholic social thought is counted among the most significant theological developments of the twentieth century. Few traditions have sought so thoroughly to engage in public and political life. A key part of this has been Roman Catholicism’s contributions to the theology of work. The Dominican, Marie-Dominique Chenu was one of the first to mention the phrase the ‘theology of work’, and writing in 1955, suggested that the term had only been around for five or six years.⁷⁴ One of the central figures in the post-war period of serious theological development of Catholic social theory, Chenu ‘introduced into Catholicism a new paradigm for thinking

⁷¹ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 43.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 43. This will be evident below.

⁷³ There is also some writing on the theology of work that could be seen as being rooted in a Sabbath paradigm, that is, taking the idea of Sabbath as the starting point for reflections on work. However, I choose not to include those here because they tend to focus more on the relationship of the Sabbath and work rather than work itself. Cf., Ellen F. Davis, ‘Slaves or Sabbath-Keepers? A Biblical Perspective on Human Work’, *Anglican Theological Review* vol. 83, no. 1 (2001): 25-40; Waldemar Janzen, ‘The Theology of Work from an Old Testament Perspective’, *Conrad Grebel Review* 10.2 (1992): 121-138; Alan Richardson, *The Biblical Doctrine of Work* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1952), 51-56; and in particular Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III:4*, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961).

⁷⁴ Chenu, *The Theology of Work*, 3.

theologically about work'.⁷⁵ Key to his theology of work is that work has 'its own value, for its own integrity'⁷⁶ and that it is not just about 'providing daily bread'.⁷⁷ Indeed, for Chenu, work has transformational power, both for human beings and for nature. Through work, human beings are acting as co-creators with God, a key theme for Chenu, and thus becoming what they are meant to be. More, 'work is the means of the transformation, the humanization, of nature',⁷⁸ and human beings act as the 'transforming force' effecting that change.⁷⁹ Needless to say, Chenu's theology of work has lofty aspirations, which is precisely why his critics have noted 'an uncritical celebration of technology, modernity, and progress' and that he 'is quite content to pass over the phenomenological critiques of the effects of industrialization'.⁸⁰ Further, he is 'too optimistic about what we can expect humans to achieve through their work'.⁸¹ Nonetheless, Chenu's theology of work contains some highly significant features, which would come to play a central role in the further development of the theology of work, not least his insistence on human beings being co-creators with God.

The late Pope John Paul II's writing on work is contained largely in his 1981 encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*, a document with which, Cosden observes, 'official Catholic social teaching reaches its culmination with respect to work'.⁸² John Paul II shared with Chenu the 'optimistic account of human agency and correspondingly high view of the value of work'.⁸³ Likewise, John Paul II believed work to be an intrinsic

⁷⁵ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 21. It is worth noting that Chenu elsewhere articulates the idea of a vocation in all of life, and that this forms an important backdrop for his exploration of a theology of work. Cf. Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, tr. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 222.

⁷⁶ Chenu, *The Theology of Work*, 22.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁸ Hughes, *The End of Work*, 16.

⁷⁹ Chenu, *The Theology of Work*, 17.

⁸⁰ Hughes, *The End of Work*, 17.

⁸¹ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 21.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸³ Hughes, *The End of Work*, 18.

part of being human, ‘not something humans banefully endure in creation, but a central part of God’s created order’.⁸⁴ Thus *Laborem Exercens* took a protological and vocational approach:

Man is made to be in the visible universe an image and likeness of God himself, and he is placed in it in order to subdue the earth. From the beginning therefore he is called to work. Work is one of the characteristics that distinguishes man from the rest of creatures.⁸⁵

Here too we have the idea of the role of human beings as co-creators with God, but John Paul II is careful to moderate how that might be understood by emphasising that human labour is set in ‘a much more *participatory* relationship to divine labour, rather than as an extrinsicist supplementation to God’s work’.⁸⁶ This participation is what gives dignity to the worker, one of the most important emphases in John Paul II’s work. He argues that ‘work is about who we *are*, as well as what we *do* and produce... Workers are above all *persons*, which means that in work, properly understood, human beings are always *becoming* more, not just *making* more’.⁸⁷ For John Paul II, ‘this spiritual and moral character – this “subjectivity” – gives work its genuine value and gives workers their specific dignity’.⁸⁸ Through work, the worker ‘*achieves fulfilment* as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes “a more human being”’.⁸⁹

Critiques of John Paul II’s theology of work centre primarily on its foundation in a ‘decadent natural law tradition of moral theology’ resulting in a lack of substantial theological grounding.⁹⁰ Further, whilst it makes important contributions towards the re-

⁸⁴ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 58.

⁸⁵ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, Vatican website, 14 September 1981, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html, I.1.

⁸⁶ Hughes, *The End of Work*, 19 (emphasis his).

⁸⁷ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of John Paul II* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), 420 (emphasis his).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 420.

⁸⁹ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, II.9 (emphasis his).

⁹⁰ Hughes, *The End of Work*, 22.

humanizing of work, ‘one must recognise the undoubted romanticism in some of the descriptions of work in the encyclical’.⁹¹ Philip West argues that *Laborem Exercens* equates ‘too closely the establishment of the Kingdom of God with human progress, and correspondingly [underrates] the seriousness and pervasiveness of human sin’,⁹² and like Chenu, John Paul II is somewhat blinded to the need for a structural transformation of work.

One of the strongest critiques⁹³ comes from Stanley Hauerwas, who takes John Paul II to task on the idea that human beings might be co-creators with God, famously calling it a ‘remarkably bad idea’. Hauerwas argues that it introduces a deistic element, since ‘God completed his creation and...mankind needs to do nothing more to see its perfection’.⁹⁴ Instead, he says, we must see ourselves as representatives, reflecting ‘what [God’s] activity has already accomplished’.⁹⁵ Robert Brimlow, who stands in the same tradition as Hauerwas, argues that ‘the fact that we must work to survive does not express our dignity; it expresses our fallen nature and sinfulness’.⁹⁶ Further, Hauerwas states, this view of work leads us to pride and idolatry: any attempt to ascribe any sort of dignity to common work ‘underwrites our already overwhelming temptation to attribute too much significance to our individual efforts’.⁹⁷ Reflecting on the co-creation paradigm, John Hughes suggests that Hauerwas is correct to recognise the possibility of

⁹¹ Ibid., 22-23.

⁹² Philip West, ‘Cruciform Labour? The Cross in Two Recent Theologies of Work’, *Modern Churchman* XXVIII, no.4 (1986): 13.

⁹³ There are more minor critiques that have to do with the choice of language. Elizabeth Ostring argues, in a thesis on the theology of work in Genesis, that it would be better to speak of being ‘co-labourers’ with God, owing to the specific Hebrew word used for God’s creative work, and the way in which human work is designed to convey God’s blessing. Cf. Elizabeth E. Ostring, ‘The Theology of Human Work as Found in the Genesis Narrative Compared with the Co-Creationist Theology of Human Work’, PhD diss., Avondale College of Higher Education, 2014.

⁹⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, ‘Work as Co-Creation: A Critique of a Remarkably Bad Idea’ in *Co-Creation and Capitalism*, eds. John Houck and Oliver Williams (London: University Press of America, 1983), 45-46.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁹⁶ Robert Brimlow, *Paganism and the Professions* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 6.

⁹⁷ Hauerwas, ‘Work as Co-Creation’, 50.

a deistic tendency in this element of John Paul II's theology of work, and certainly the caution about idolatry is trenchant as well. That said, Hauerwas' position presents a number of problems. In the first place, it is plagued by a pietistic dualism that separates the life of the church in a very sharp way from the world of the profane.⁹⁸ The problem with Hauerwas' (and the general neo-Anabaptist) view, according to James Davison Hunter, is not that there is no constructive theology of work presented, but that there is no wisdom or encouragement for believers who have to, or want to, work outside the church.⁹⁹ The result is 'an implicit elitism...that stratifies those who work in the church and those who work for a living outside the church'.¹⁰⁰ Hunter notes an underlying gnosticism as well that offers a disembodied theology:

What people do with their bodies and minds through most of their waking hours has no real meaning. The implication is that labor is dirty and therefore the bodies that engage in labor – the bodies that *must* engage in labour to survive, to provide for children to survive – are dirty as well... There is no good in the world that can be affirmed...no delight in anything that is not the church.¹⁰¹

Hauerwas writes from the standpoint of being critical of capitalism, and in that respect shares the view of Jacques Ellul that any sense of work being a vocation is simply a reflection of the growing importance of work in the [modern] capitalist economy'.¹⁰² Thus, Hauerwas wants to recognise the disenchantment of work caused by unbridled capitalism in the modern world.¹⁰³ Yet as Hunter observes, a Hauerwasian perspective itself 'goes a long way toward underwriting modernity's nightmare of

⁹⁸ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 251.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 251.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 251.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 251 (emphasis his).

¹⁰² Cf. Jacques Ellul, 'Work and Calling', in *Katallēgete* 4/2-3 (Fall-Winter 1972), 8ff. Gilbert Meilaender picks up on this critique as well, although with more moderation than Ellul (see *Working: It's Meaning and Limits*, 2-13).

¹⁰³ His critique would suggest he sees John Paul II's theology of work as a servant to this same capitalism. The late Pope's views on capitalism remain debated (for a brief overview, see Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 615-616), but *Laborem Exercens* is clear in its recognition of the ills of modern work.

disenchantment'.¹⁰⁴ Ultimately, Hauerwas' perspective is not shared by the vast majority of writers on the theology of work, many of whom pick up, to varying degrees, the idea of humans being co-creators with God.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, this idea will be one of Catholicism's most important contributions to the theology of work,¹⁰⁶ and more, is why this vocational emphasis brings it so closely in line with the Reformed tradition, as observed below.¹⁰⁷

2.5 Major Protestant contributions

Owing to the fact that the theology of work is a recent development, and that its Protestant expressions are quite varied, it is difficult to point to a few specific thinkers who have contributed to the theology of work in the way that Chenu and John Paul II have in the Roman Catholic tradition. It is better to examine the sources by their traditions.

¹⁰⁴ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 251.

¹⁰⁵ One notable exception is Karl Barth. Barth's writing on work is extensive, although like Hauerwas, he has a dominantly negative attitude to work, and downplays its significance, viewing it more as a necessity than a calling or obligation (*Church Dogmatics III:4*). Hughes notes that Barth is writing in response to the 'glib identification of Protestant ideology with capitalist modernity' (13), and what he perceives as an idolizing of work. Thus he is sceptical of attempts to cast work in terms of cultivation of cultural activity (*CD III:4*, 472, 486), and is thoroughly opposed to the idea that human beings can ever be considered co-creators with God (482). Hughes notes the resulting secularising tendency in Barth's account of work (*The End of Work*, 15), something Hauerwas is guilty of as well. For that reason, Barth will not receive further treatment here. For a thoroughly biblical account of why Christians can consider themselves participants in the work of God, see Jason B. Hood, *Imitating God in Christ: Recapturing a Biblical Pattern* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 49-57.

¹⁰⁶ It is important to note that although Chenu and John Paul II are by far the most significant contributors to the Roman Catholic theology of work, their work continues to be developed. Cf. Jose Luis Illanes, *On the Theology of Work*, trans. M. Adams (Dublin: Scepter Books, 1967); John M. Todd, ed., *Work: Christian Thought and Practice* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1960); and the work of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/labor-employment/index.cfm>).

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Hardy: 'The official Catholic theology of work virtual coincides with the traditional Protestant position at every major point' (*The Fabric of This World*, 68).

2.5.1 *The Reformed tradition*

The Reformers, most notably Martin Luther and John Calvin, explicitly rejected the medieval distinction between the active and contemplative life. Both argued that there was significant value in daily work, and invested it with renewed dignity. However, it was Calvin and the Reformed tradition that gave the most shape to the vocational paradigm that continues to influence so many theologies of work today.¹⁰⁸

Calvin did not just object to traditional portrayals of work as something negative, he rejected the whole vision of the purpose of human life that lay behind those understandings.¹⁰⁹ Contrary to the idea that the contemplative life was ideal, he asserts, ‘we know that men were created for the express purpose of being employed in labour of various kinds, and that no sacrifice is more pleasing to God than when every man applies diligently to his own calling’.¹¹⁰ In his sermon on the fourth commandment Calvin notes that ‘God does not intend for us to be lazy living in this world; for he has given men hands and feet; he has given them industry’, and points to the fact that Adam was placed in the garden in order to tend it, thus giving work a protological foundation.¹¹¹ Because God has given all human beings a calling to work, Calvin observes, in a very clear break from the ancient and medieval traditions, that ‘no task will be so sordid and base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God’s sight’.¹¹² Indeed, for Calvin and the Reformers,

¹⁰⁸ In fact, I would argue that its influence is so significant, that when I speak of the vocational paradigm below, I will often be using the term as if it were synonymous with the Reformed tradition.

¹⁰⁹ Hardy, *The Fabric of this World*, 56.

¹¹⁰ John Calvin, *A Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists*, vol. 2, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 143.

¹¹¹ John Calvin, *John Calvin’s Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, trans. and ed. Benjamin W. Farley (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 117.

¹¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), III.x.6. It is important to note that for the Reformers, the idea of ‘vocation’ is not synonymous with ‘work’, despite the fact that the two are often conflated. Broadly speaking, in the Reformed tradition, vocations, or callings, are the spheres in which God calls people to exercise their gifts and talents in the service of others. Work, therefore, fits within the idea of vocation, but only makes up one aspect of the broader concept. (Cf. Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 44ff.)

‘all work, provided it contributes to the common good, possesses an inherent religious dignity, no matter how mean or low it may be in outward appearance. For the divine intent for human life is that we be employed in mutual service’.¹¹³

Here is evident one of Calvin’s main emphases, that work serves the common good. He builds on Luther’s insistence that fulfilling one’s vocation was the means by which God’s providence works. God placed people in various ‘stations’ and gave them various callings, and it was through those stations that they might serve their neighbours.¹¹⁴ According to Gustav Wingren, Luther speaks of Christians fulfilling their vocations as working in cooperation with God to bless the world:

In his *Kirchenpostille* we find the concept of a Christian as a conduit or a channel, which receives from above, from God, through faith, ‘and then gives forth below’ to others, through love... God is present on earth with his goodness when a Christian directs his service downward to others. God...is near and working on earth with man as his co-operator.¹¹⁵

Calvin and the Reformed tradition would go further by arguing that there is a ‘divinely intended order for human society’ in which all ‘human beings should live...bound together by common needs and mutual service’.¹¹⁶ Further, given that each person had different talents and abilities, each member would contribute according to their specific abilities and receive according to their need.¹¹⁷ The vocational paradigm thus created a vision in which work had a distinct place in contributing to the flourishing of society, and where an individual could faithfully exercise their calling by seeking to contribute to the good of all.

¹¹³ Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 58.

¹¹⁴ Gustaf Wingren, *The Christian’s Calling: Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1958), 6-8.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹¹⁶ Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 60.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

Calvin already begins to hint at language of participation and cooperation with God as well when he speaks of human beings fulfilling their vocations ‘in cooperation with [God’s] purpose in creation’.¹¹⁸ Whilst recognising that the creation has been distorted by sin, Calvin observes that those who have been redeemed through Christ are given gifts of the Spirit to contribute to the mutual flourishing of all,¹¹⁹ and as Carly Friesen summaries, by employing those gifts, God ‘enables man to fulfil, at least in part, his nature as co-operator with God in the furtherance of creation’.¹²⁰

Evaluating the contributions of the Reformed tradition to a theology of work is complicated in part by Max Weber’s highly contentious thesis linking Calvinism, and in particular, its Puritan stream, with the flourishing of capitalism in the modern world.¹²¹ Weber’s argument has received considerable – and in many ways, justified – criticism,¹²² and it is hardly surprising that such a blanket assertion about a movement as multifarious as Puritanism remains inconclusive.¹²³ That being said, Alistair McKenzie notes that ‘it is clear that from the later part of the 17th century the old restraints on money-getting were corroded and the “calling” doctrine was being forced to adapt to accommodate the interests of industrial and commercial acquisitiveness’,¹²⁴ and whilst Weber’s thesis takes this too far in ascribing it to Puritanism, it still remains that the movement did prescribe an ethic of diligence and hard work.¹²⁵ However, Hughes, following R.H. Tawney, argues that the influence of Calvinist ideas on the Puritans here should be downplayed, emphasising instead ‘the more general

¹¹⁸ Carly Friesen, ‘Labor: Sin or Sacrament?’, *Direction* vol. 10, no. 4 (1981): 9.

¹¹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.i.3.

¹²⁰ Friesen, ‘Labor: Sin or Sacrament?’, 10.

¹²¹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹²² See Hughes for a thorough analysis of Weber’s thesis in *The End of Work*, 33-62.

¹²³ Cf. John Coffey, ‘Puritan Legacies’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, eds. John Coffey and Paul C.H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 327-345.

¹²⁴ Alistair McKenzie, ‘Faith and Work: From the Puritans to the Present’, *Latimer Occasional Papers* 13 (2001): 4.

¹²⁵ Vanderkloet, ‘Why Work Anyway?’, 29.

significance of secularisation'.¹²⁶ Despite the fact that Weber's thesis remains so contested today, the Reformed tradition continues to draw criticism for a weddedness to capitalism. Interestingly, that critique might be more valid today than in Weber's time, as a small movement of conservative Reformed Christians in America, heirs of part of the Puritan tradition, have been working to make a biblical and theological case for political and economic structures that reflect a very libertarian strain.¹²⁷

More significant, I believe, is the development of Calvin's thinking found in the Neocalvinist, or Reformational, tradition, particularly in the thinking of the Dutch theologian and statesman, Abraham Kuyper. Whereas Calvin primarily rooted his ideas of work and vocation in creation, Kuyper would add the dimension of the lordship and sovereignty of Christ. Reacting to understandings of Christianity that only saw salvation as something affecting the soul, Kuyper refused to let a person's life in the world be separate from their Christianity.¹²⁸ Christ's lordship would not permit Christians to split their lives in such a manner. Instead,

if it is true that Christ our Savior has to do not only with our soul but also with our body, that all things in the world belong to Christ and are claimed by him, that one day he will triumph...[and] rule as king on a new earth under a new heaven – then, of course, everything is different.¹²⁹

Thus, for Kuyper, Christ rightfully makes a claim on every part of his people's lives, including their work:

Wherever man may stand, whatever he may do, to whatever he may apply his hand, in agriculture, in commerce, and in industry, or his mind,

¹²⁶ Hughes, *The End of Work*, 59. Cf. R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (London: Penguin, 1990).

¹²⁷ Cf. David W. Hall, *Calvin in the Public Square: Liberal Democracies, Rights, and Civil Liberties* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2009). See also the work of The Acton Institute, self-described as 'a think-tank whose mission is to promote a free and virtuous society characterized by individual liberty and sustained by religious principles. This direction recognizes the benefits of a limited government, but also the beneficent consequences of a free market.'

¹²⁸ Abraham Kuyper, 'Common Grace', in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 174.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

in the world of art, and science, he is, in whatsoever it may be, constantly standing before the face of his God, he is employed in the service of his God, he has strictly to obey his God, and above all, he has to aim at the glory of his God.¹³⁰

On the whole, it is fair to say that the theology of work emerging from the Reformed tradition has not changed significantly since the time of Calvin. It still bears the emphasis that work is rooted in creation, and that work is the place where Christians serve their neighbours with their gifts and abilities. Lee Hardy, drawing from Calvin and summarising the Reformed understanding of work, argues that good work is found when people can responsibly exercise their significant range of talents and abilities in service of their neighbours.¹³¹ Modern inheritors of the Reformed tradition note the significance of Kuyper's influence as well, which adds a particular missiological dimension to work, as it becomes one of the places in which Christians can witness to the lordship of Christ by means of transforming the way they practice their work, and seeking to bring his redemption to bear on all areas of life.

This strain of the Reformed tradition with its emphasis on vocation draws critique as well. Cosden highlights common critiques of this paradigm, which include it being 'too inwardly oriented and individualistic, that there was not enough concern about social/structural questions related to work, that it was too closely aligned to the spirit of capitalism, and, that it was dependent on, and encouraged, a far too static form of society'.¹³² Meilaender adds that the vocational paradigm does not adequately deal with the fact that work is often irksome and a sort of drudgery since it gives significance to everyday life by ascribing to each person a calling from God.¹³³ Whilst

¹³⁰ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 53.

¹³¹ Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 179.

¹³² Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 40-41. Interestingly, Volf offers a more substantial critique of the idea of vocation (*Work in the Spirit*, 107-111), but limits it to Luther's concept of vocation, which is far less developed and nuanced than that of the Reformed tradition.

¹³³ Meilaender, *The Limits of Work*, 10-12. I do not think Meilaender does justice to the vocational paradigm. The fact that work is difficult and that many struggle to find meaning in it does not negate its

acknowledging the powerful vision of work as a calling from God, Meilaender further wonders if the ‘enhanced religious aura’ given to the world of work through the concept of vocation goes so far as to make a human being ‘essentially and primarily a worker’.¹³⁴ However, whilst it is important to heed these cautions, the best of the vocational paradigm avoids these tendencies.¹³⁵ Hardy, who I think offers the most helpful articulation of the Reformed tradition’s theology of work, emphasises that whilst vocation is indeed concerned with individual calling, it always seeks to understand that calling in service to the world, requiring of us both ‘to cultivate our gifts, and to locate the place where those gifts can be exercised for the good of the human community’.¹³⁶ Further, where the structures of work hinder that, they need to be transformed.¹³⁷ As noted above, if not already the full expression, certainly the seeds of this understanding of work and vocation are present in the Reformed tradition from early on, and continue today to be developed primarily in the popular literature generated from within the tradition.¹³⁸

original purpose and worth, but is simply a testament to the distorting effects of sin. Most proponents of the co-creation paradigm readily acknowledge these difficulties, moving beyond romantic notions of work. Yet Meilaender does not give adequate attention to this; he instead seeks a theology of work that begins with the reality of work as we know it. In the end, this seems to leave him unable to make space for any sort of transformation or redemption of work, and we are left with little more than an attempt to cope with the struggles of modern work.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 12-13.

¹³⁵ The contributors to *Labour of Love: Essays on Work*, for instance, all of whom are heirs of the Kuyperian tradition and were involved in labour movements and unions, are deeply concerned with structural change.

¹³⁶ Hardy, *The Fabric of this World*, 124.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 124ff.

¹³⁸ It should be noted that this is, indeed, one of the unique features of the Reformed tradition, that a great deal of its literature on the theology of work is written at a popular level. There is a myriad of books intended for popular audiences looking at work from a vocational standpoint. Significant contributions include Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavour: Connecting Your Work to God’s Plan for the World* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2012); Gary D. Badcock, *This Way of Life: A Theology of Christian Vocation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2014); Tom Nelson, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011); R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Amy L. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2011); Douglas Schuurman, *Vocation: Discerning our Callings in Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). No other tradition has produced anywhere near this amount of popular resources on the subject of work.

2.5.2 *The English tradition*

With the onset of the Industrial Revolution, a tradition of thinking emerged in England, broadly known as Romanticism, that responded with ‘hostility towards the disenchantment, quantification, mechanization, artificiality, and social-dissolution that they saw in the modern industrialized and urban world’.¹³⁹ It sought above all a redesign and transformation of work that would enable workers to flourish to their full potential. Though some would hesitate to suggest that this tradition could be considered to fall within the vocational paradigm, and indeed on the surface bears more the marks of an ethical reflection on work, I believe it can be considered vocational, even if only in part, because of the distinct emphasis on the worker and their specifically creative calling in relation to the Creator.

One of the most significant thinkers in this tradition is John Ruskin. Hughes notes that ‘Ruskin was as scathing as Marx in his condemnation of the injustices of capitalist society’, and as he looked to the political economy of his day, he saw ‘an economy and society that was nothing less than the idolatry of mammonism’.¹⁴⁰ He thoroughly rejects both the notion that self-interest can function as the basis for a society’s flourishing, and the concept of ‘*homo economicus*’, which effectively reduces human beings to machines, and values labour only insofar as it contributes to the growth of the political economy. Instead, for Ruskin, labour has value in and of itself, and while ‘the worth of the work may not be easily known...it *has* a worth, just as fixed and real as the specific gravity of a substance’.¹⁴¹ Like the political economists, Ruskin would employ the language of utility in speaking of labour, but in contrast to them,

¹³⁹ Hughes, *The End of Work*, 99.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

¹⁴¹ John Ruskin, *‘Unto this Last’: Four Essays on the First Principles of Political Economy* (New York: John Wiley and Son, 1872), 77.

would argue that labour's usefulness is entirely bound up with human flourishing.¹⁴² For Ruskin, then, the end of labour is not 'every thing to every man, but of the right thing to the right man'.¹⁴³ That is, production must not be an end in itself, but always in view of consumption for the benefit of others.

It is because labour is not oriented towards its proper end, Ruskin argues, that people 'have no pleasure in the work by which they make their bread, and therefore look to wealth as the only means of pleasure'.¹⁴⁴ Thus work needs to be restructured, and Ruskin looks back to the Gothic era as an ideal of labour, which for him encapsulates a sort of antithesis of all the ills of modern labour: 'an overcoming of the division of labour, the free creativity of every workman, the subsequent reunification of labour and thought, function and ornamentation, work and play, utility and beauty'.¹⁴⁵ For Ruskin, the systemic division of labour in the modern industrial society requires men to work like tools, something they are not designed to do, and which inevitably dehumanizes them.¹⁴⁶ He wants workers to find pleasure in their work, and that pleasure requires 'freedom to use their own intellect and imagination to express themselves in their labour'.¹⁴⁷

Though Ruskin is not a theologian, his work here has a distinctly theological focus. Hughes notes in particular the emphasis on morality in Ruskin's writings as he responds to what he saw as the distinctly immoral basis of the political economy (even if its purveyors would argue it was amoral).¹⁴⁸ For Ruskin, all economic activity is value-laden, and thus he continually emphasises the need to 'reconceive production and

¹⁴² Hughes, *The End of Work*, 106.

¹⁴³ Ruskin, 'Unto this Last', 104.

¹⁴⁴ Ruskin, *On the Nature of Gothic Architecture* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1854), 9.

¹⁴⁵ Hughes, *The End of Work*, 112.

¹⁴⁶ Ruskin, *On the Nature of Gothic Architecture*, 8.

¹⁴⁷ Hughes, *The End of Work*, 113.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 99-109.

consumption in moral terms'.¹⁴⁹ Hughes notes that some see this moral emphasis as a weakness in Ruskin, but observes that it gives Ruskin more credibility than critics like Marx, because the former 'retains a sense of the transcendent goods to which labour and consumption must constantly be oriented'.¹⁵⁰

However, it is Dorothy L. Sayers, writing a century later and clearly standing in the same tradition as Ruskin, who brings forward many of the same concerns with much more explicitly theological overtones. Like Ruskin, she is highly critical of economic structures solely based on accruing capital, which result in a 'society founded on trash and waste'.¹⁵¹ In such an economy, 'labour was valued [only] in terms of its cash returns, and not in terms of the work'.¹⁵² Sayers' theology of work has a unique focus on the primacy of the product, and she would argue that work needs to be estimated 'not by the money it brings to the producer, but by the worth of the thing that is made'.¹⁵³

William Harrison notes that this is the heart of Sayers' theology of work, and that it comes through clearly in one of her plays, *The Zeal of Thy House*. The plot of the play focuses on the construction of Canterbury Cathedral, and the choice of an architect to design and build it. Sayers' theology of work comes through here as she 'decides the bout in favour of the those who care more for the product than for the purity of those who make it'.¹⁵⁴ This flows out of Sayers' belief that work is something humans were created for. 'Work', she writes, 'is the natural exercise and function of man – the creature who is made in the image of his Creator'. Therefore, 'work is not, primarily, a

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 98.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 98.

¹⁵¹ Sayers, 'Why Work?' 47.

¹⁵² Ibid., 51.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 50.

¹⁵⁴ William T. Harrison, 'Loving the Creation, Loving the Creator: Dorothy L. Sayers's Theology of Work'. *Anglican Theological Review* vol. 86, no. 2 (2004): 242.

thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do'.¹⁵⁵ Following from that, she believes, like Ruskin, that work is to be a place where workers use all their faculties. As it stands, 'the employer is obsessed by the notion that he must find cheap labour, and the worker by the notion that the best-paid job is the job for him'.¹⁵⁶ Work then becomes an 'enemy from whom tolls and contributions have to be exacted'.¹⁵⁷ As a result, she urges workers to fight for the ability to do good work, 'to clamour to be engaged in work that was worth doing and in which we could take a pride'.¹⁵⁸ Ultimately, for Sayers, as Harrison summarises, 'the true solution to the economic problem is in good theology, and especially in theological anthropology. Human beings must be understood as creators, made in the image of the triune Creator God'.¹⁵⁹ There is no place for evaluating work and workers solely in terms of economics.¹⁶⁰

Criticisms of this tradition are fairly predictable, and certainly implied in the fact that it has been labelled the English *Romantic* tradition. Ruskin and Sayers present a view of work that, for all its appeal, is virtually unattainable.¹⁶¹ Whilst Hughes likewise looks to the artist and craftsman as an ideal of work, his realism moderates his proposals; the whole-scale systemic change required for work to realise this potential is, he concedes, nearly impossible.¹⁶² That being said, it is interesting to note a renewed

¹⁵⁵ Sayers, 'Why Work?', 54-55. As she writes elsewhere, 'The characteristic common to God and man is... the desire and the ability to make things' (*The Mind of the Maker*, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1941, 17).

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁵⁹ Harrison, 'Loving the Creator', 256.

¹⁶⁰ Dorothy L. Sayers, 'Christian Morality', in *Unpopular Opinions* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946), 12.

¹⁶¹ That being said, Ruskin in particular was highly influential in the thinking both of William Morris and R.H. Tawney, who would in turn be active in the early socialist movement in Britain. Further, despite the unlikelihood of such an endeavour succeeding, there are proposals for economic change that allow for a transformation of work. See, for example, Bob Goudzwaard, *Towards Reformation in Economics* (Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies, 1980); and more radically, E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (London: Vintage, 1993). Paul Marshall argues strongly that if work is not what it should be, it simply must change ('Work and Rest', *The Reformed Journal* 38 [June, 1988]: 11).

¹⁶² Hughes, *The End of Work*, 230.

emphasis on craftsmanship emerging in popular literature,¹⁶³ something that is only explored in small ways in Christian literature, usually within theological explorations of the character of God.¹⁶⁴ Certainly the creative calling of human beings is not an emphasis to be ignored; neither Ruskin nor Sayers, or Hughes for that matter, are suggesting every worker be an artist in the narrow sense of the word, but are instead emphasising the need for work to be place where the worker's full faculties are employed so they can participate in their creative vocation, and that what they produce is something good and worthy that contributes to wider human flourishing. This undergirds their call for structural change and the transformation of work.¹⁶⁵ It is here that the important contributions this tradition offers to the theology of work are found.¹⁶⁶

2.5.3 Recent contributions

Two notable recent contributions to the theology of work include the work of Miroslav Volf and Darrell Cosden. Volf's work has a 'revisionary intention and sets out to replace much traditional thinking on work'.¹⁶⁷ He notes that 'the purpose of a theology of work is to interpret, evaluate, and facilitate the transformation of human

¹⁶³ See, for example, Matthew Crawford, *The Case for Working with Your Hands: Or Why Office Work is Bad for Us and Fixing Things Feels Good* (London: Viking, 2009); Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Penguin, 2009); and Peter Korn, *Why We Make Things and Why It Matters: The Education of a Craftsman* (London: Square Peg, 2015).

¹⁶⁴ On a popular level, see Robert Banks, *God the Worker: Journeys Into the Mind, Heart and Imagination of God* (Sutherland: Albatross Books, 1992). See also Christine M. Fletcher, *The Artist and the Trinity: Dorothy L. Sayers' Theology of Work* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2014). A more academic example would include Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), especially 193ff.

¹⁶⁵ This is a distinct emphasis in Hardy's propositions for good work (*The Fabric of This World*, 124ff.). See also James K.A. Smith, 'The Beauty of Work, the Injustice of Toil', *Comment* (Spring 2015): 21-29.

¹⁶⁶ One of the strengths of the English tradition's theology of work is its refusal to accept the market economy as the status quo, something other traditions are guilty of, as David W. Haddorff observes in 'Theology and the Market Ethos: Towards an Ecclesial Understanding of Work and Leisure', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* vol. 50, no. 1 (1996): 83-105. Haddorff argues that this is one of the biggest obstacles to the development of a truly transformational theology of work. Hughes is likewise critical of the way much of the theology of work is to acquiescent to current structures (*The End of Work*, 11-32).

¹⁶⁷ Hughes, *The End of Work*, 23.

work'.¹⁶⁸ Where Volf's account of the theology of work is unique is in its relocation: 'whereas traditionally it has been placed with much Christian anthropology under the doctrine of creation, Volf suggests we would be better to look to the *new* creation'.¹⁶⁹ This is because, for Volf, a key question with respect to work is the question of continuity between the current created order and the future order. If there is continuity, and not an annihilation of the current order, 'then human work is of eternal significance in a direct way'.¹⁷⁰ This does not mean he entirely rejects traditional understandings of the theology of work; in particular, he continues to draw on the idea of human work as being cooperative with God's creative work, noting that 'God makes human work a means by which God accomplishes his work in the world',¹⁷¹ and considers his theology of work 'an heir to the vocational understanding of work'.¹⁷² But whereas traditional vocational theologies of work adopt a protological foundation, Volf instead takes an eschatological orientation, arguing that human work is a cooperation with God in his Kingdom, both completing creation and renewing heaven and earth.¹⁷³ This accounts for Volf's pneumatological approach, which is the primary focus of his theology of work. He places a distinct emphasis on charisms, the gifts of the Spirit, as the means by which human beings are enabled to fulfil their callings in the world.¹⁷⁴ More than that, however, 'through the gifts of the Spirit Christ is realising his eschatological rule in the world'.¹⁷⁵ Volf thus emphasises that Christians should understand their work to be a

¹⁶⁸ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 7.

¹⁶⁹ Hughes, *The End of Work*, 25 (emphasis his).

¹⁷⁰ Miroslav Volf: 'Human Work, Divine Spirit, and New Creation: Toward a Pneumatological Understanding of Work', in *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* (Fall 1987): 175-176.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁷² Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 105.

¹⁷³ Volf, 'Human Work', 179.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 186. It is interesting that Volf presents his account of charisms as unique, when as noted above, Calvin also highlights the role of the Spirit in the fulfilment of human callings.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

cooperation with God in the power of the Spirit in building the Kingdom, both completing creation and renewing heaven and earth.¹⁷⁶

Darrell Cosden's work is worth mentioning here as well because he, like Volf, wants to represent a significant departure from traditional theologies of work.¹⁷⁷ Cosden argues that his work is unique in offering a theology of work from an ontological perspective, and whilst observing that the idea of an ontology of work is not unique to him, he suggests that he can 'offer a more comprehensive and coherent development of the idea from systematic theology than has yet been provided'.¹⁷⁸ Summarising his work, Cosden defines his project in this way:

By defining it as ontological, I speak of work as a thing in itself with its own intrinsic value apart from but of course related to [its instrumental and relational] functions. Rather than simply seeing work's combined practical uses as constituent of its essence, I understand work's essential nature to be derived ontologically from its having been built into the fabric of creation by God. The person is a worker, not as an accident of nature but because God first is a worker and persons are created in his image. Humanity's work, however, is not identical to God's but is specific to our created existence.¹⁷⁹

In addition, Cosden, similar to Volf, is clear to link creation and new creation, and does so because of his ontological lens, as he 'affirms that work not only has intrinsic value as part of the initial creation, but eschatological value as it enters into consummation with the rest of creation'.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 186. Volf here borrows directly from Moltmann, 'The Right to Meaningful Work', in *On Human Dignity, Political Theology, and Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 45.

¹⁷⁷ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 6. Cosden notes his deep indebtedness to Volf in his own project, and acknowledges Volf's significance in orienting and shaping his theology of work. Additionally, both Volf and Cosden acknowledge the influence of Jürgen Moltmann's eschatological-orientated theology in shaping their thought. This is particularly interesting, because Moltmann gets little or no mention in much of the other literature on the theology of work.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 13.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁸⁰ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 67.

Cosden suggests that a particularly eschatological orientation represents ‘a sea change in our theological thinking about work’.¹⁸¹ Whilst wanting to recognise the helpfulness of an eschatological perspective, I find myself in agreement with Richard Langer when he notes that both Volf and Cosden ‘assume an overstated discontinuity between old and new creations when discussing traditional views of work’, which leads them to neglect the fact that various theologies of work already have an eschatological focus.¹⁸² To point to the Reformed tradition once again, for instance, the calling to transform work is to make present as far as possible an eschatological vision of what work will be in light of Christ’s present and final redemption.¹⁸³ Additionally, while Cosden might lay claim to a fuller ontology of work than has yet been seen in systematic theology, he overreaches on his claims, particularly in light of the creational bases of work seen already in the Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions. In the end, I remain sceptical of the degree of originality both Volf and Cosden claim for their projects, and see their emphases more as complimenting and enriching previous theologies of work.

2.6 The theology of work and this research

It has been demonstrated above that the theology of work, though a relatively recent development, has become a diverse, rich and varied field, and its literary sources quite vast. The contributions discussed above offer significant resources to Christians who are looking to find theological meaning in their work.

It remains now to situate my own research. I choose to draw most heavily from the vocational paradigm as articulated by the Reformed tradition, as I find its core

¹⁸¹ Richard Langer, ‘Niggle’s Leaf and Holland’s Opus: Reflections on the Theological Significance of Work’, *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33:2 (2009): 100.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁸³ Marshall, ‘Work and Rest’, 9-11.

convictions – its shared emphasis with the Roman Catholic tradition on human work as a participation in the work of God, as well as ‘a vision of Christ’s lordship that extends to every sphere of our lives; a refusal of any dualism that carves up our lives into “sacred” and “secular” compartments; a [deep]...affirmation of the goodness of creaturely life’¹⁸⁴ – most convincing. This appeals to me for two reasons. First, I find scriptural warrant for this approach. Timothy Keller notes that ‘the Bible begins talking about work as soon as it begins talking about anything – that is how important and basic it is’.¹⁸⁵ He notes further the significance of the way Scripture speaks about God’s work: ‘Repeatedly the first chapters of the book of Genesis describe God at “work”, using the Hebrew word *mlkh*, the word for ordinary human work’.¹⁸⁶ That paves the way for the idea that human work is connected in an intimate way to God’s work. Colin Gunton, reflecting on the mandate of Genesis 1.26-27, notes:

Eden is a garden, not a paradise. This is an important distinction. In paradise, the fruits simply fall off the trees on to our tables; in a garden, trees have to be tended. Further, tending the garden would appear, certainly if it is eschatologically understood, to be a beginning of a task which will be completed only at the end of the world. Outside of the boundaries of Eden, the world is not yet fit for habitation. That there is a task to complete is shown by the command to ‘subdue’: things are not yet as they should be.¹⁸⁷

The Reformed tradition, along with figures like John Paul II and Dorothy Sayers, understands this mandate as a calling to work, to take part in God’s creative activity in the world. Keller again says that ‘God left creation with deep untapped potential for cultivation that people were to unlock through their labour’.¹⁸⁸ Oliver O’Donovan notes that there is a sense of obligation here as well: the place God assigned to human beings in the created order as rulers means that the flourishing of creation is dependent on

¹⁸⁴ Smith, ‘The Beauty of Work’, 22.

¹⁸⁵ Keller, *Every Good Endeavour*, 33.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁸⁷ Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, 197.

¹⁸⁸ Keller, *Every Good Endeavour*, 36.

human beings taking up their role. He says that ‘man’s ordering to flourish as its ruler is a necessary condition for the rest of creation to fulfil its own ordering. His rule is the rule which liberates other beings to be, to be in themselves, to be for others, and to be for God’.¹⁸⁹ Whilst the New Testament cannot be said to contain any systematic teaching on work, nonetheless it remains full of work: Jesus worked as a carpenter, the disciples largely came from humble working backgrounds, and many of Jesus’ parables refer to people in work.¹⁹⁰ Additionally, Paul’s writing

contained a sustained polemic against idleness and he gave many exhortations on work. He made no distinction between physical and spiritual work and used the same terms to refer to both the manual labour by which he earned a living and his apostolic service. Often it is difficult to know to which he was referring. For him all the different types of work originated in faith. The work he considered was not limited to liberal pursuits; in fact, it was manual labour which most often drew his attention.¹⁹¹

Thus there is a firm biblical foundation for work. Yet, contrary to the critiques often levelled at this paradigm, this does not entail a blindness to the realities of the difficulties of work; in fact, the Reformed tradition is known for a robust doctrine of sin that recognises that the fall into sin in Genesis 3 ‘has unravelled the fabric of the entire world – and in no area as profoundly as our work’.¹⁹² More, adherents of the tradition even assume a degree of personal responsibility and complicity in the disordered nature of work. Paul Marshall says,

Through our sin, creation is fallen. We have acted disobediently and erected structures and economies shaped in sin, whose practices and results may be awful, no matter what the honesty or diligence with which a Christian, or any other, serves in them. Even the ground is

¹⁸⁹ Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 38.

¹⁹⁰ Marshall, ‘Vocation, Work, and Jobs’, 2.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹⁹² Keller, *Every Good Endeavour*, 84. One detects here an overemphasis for the purpose of making a point; this assertion is, of course, open to significant debate.

cursed and unruly. We know that we need to be redeemed from this condition.¹⁹³

Marshall's words here already begin to address another criticism of the Reformed tradition, that it does not place enough emphasis on the need for the structural renewal of work. He writes elsewhere,

The biblical picture of work as responsibility to God implies that those of us that can must seek to restructure work so that it can really and honestly be an expression of our service and calling. We need to shape our workplaces and organizational structures so that people can exercise genuine responsibility and be treated as God's image-bearers. This means we should concentrate on good, useful work and turn away from the notion that people are simply commodities to be bought and sold in a "labor" market. As much as we can, we should seek to help ourselves and others find and shape work as an act of responsibility, a genuine way of serving our neighbour and of serving God.¹⁹⁴

Thus our purpose is not only to share in God's creative work, but in his redemptive work, as in Christ all things are reconciled (Colossians 1.15-20), and we look forward to the day when the glory and honour of the nations – the fruit of our fulfilment of the cultural mandate – will be brought into the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21.24-27).¹⁹⁵

All this demonstrates the second reason the Reformed approach appeals to me, and that is because I think it speaks most helpfully to the context of real life. It recognises the positive foundation of work, the way work is distorted, and the possibilities of work's transformation, and in doing so, offers a vision of work that can be captured by people in all kinds of occupations as they seek to faithfully practice their work.

Following from this, my intention with this study for my action research¹⁹⁶ was to use a practical resource developed for use in the context of a local church that would

¹⁹³ Marshall, 'Work, Vocation, and Jobs', 15.

¹⁹⁴ Paul Marshall, *Heaven is Not My Home: Living in the Now of God's Creation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 84.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

¹⁹⁶ See more about this in the next chapter.

draw primarily on the vocational paradigm. Interestingly, the vast majority of practical resources available are rooted in the Reformed tradition to one degree or another, which among other things, could be seen as a testament to this paradigm's ability to speak realistically to Christians in work. As will be seen in the next section, the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity draws significantly from this paradigm in its recently published resource, *Transforming Work*.

2.6.1 The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity and Transforming Work

Here in the United Kingdom, the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (hereafter, LICC), particularly under Mark Greene's leadership, has been a primary player in developing resources that enable churches to bring people into an encounter with a theological vision of work, a project which emerged as part of LICC's focus on making 'whole-life discipleship operational and central in the UK church'.¹⁹⁷ In 2015, they published a new resource called *Transforming Work*, a course designed to bring together 'a group of working Christians to form a learning community who meet together for eight sessions spaced over a year', in order to take 'a journey of seeing work differently and doing work differently, of God at work with us and in us, and in those we work with'.¹⁹⁸ Important and significant is the fact that the course is authored and presented by five people who have been employed in a range of occupations and fields. Coming out of an organisation founded by John Stott, and with a strong evangelical identity, the course draws heavily on Reformed perspectives on work and

¹⁹⁷ This quote is taken from my notes from a conversation with LICC's head of theology, Antony Billington, and their Commercial and Projects Manager, David Leeds, on 11 November 2015 (hereafter, 'Conversation with LICC').

¹⁹⁸ Mark Greene, et. al. *Transforming Work: Leader's Pack* (London: London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, 2015), 4-5.

vocation.¹⁹⁹ In the introduction to the leader's guide for *Transforming Work*, the authors state,

Working with God is about far more than coping. Working with God is about working with the King of the Universe in his great mission – the reconciliation and renewal of all things... Christians at work, then, are strategically placed to bring biblical values and heartfelt prayers to every task and every relationship and every organisation. Through our work we can play a significant role in changing the way that work gets done for the better – changing the systems, the structures, the products, the services, changing the relationships, the atmosphere.²⁰⁰

Antony Billington, LICC's head of theology, notes that 'the story of redemption should shape how we talk about work',²⁰¹ and this emphasis on participating with God in the renewal of all things through work is a clear indication of the emphasis of the Reformed tradition on the course.

A brief analysis of the content of the course will help further demonstrate its affinity with the Reformed tradition's theological vision of work. The first session deals with the question, 'Why does work matter?', and immediately establishes the basis of work as rooted in God's creational design. Some introductory reading prior to the session introduces participants to the so-called 'sacred-secular divide', a paradigm the authors argue has been particularly influential in the church, and one that has resulted in the lack of attention to work in the discipleship programmes of churches.²⁰² The first video session then goes on to demonstrate the central place of work in God's design, with an appeal to Genesis 2 and the role God assigned to Adam in the Garden of

¹⁹⁹ 'Conversation with LICC'. Billington notes the significance of the creation-fall-redemption paradigm in shaping the theology behind *Transforming Work*, and a strong focus on God's work and our reflection, or mirroring, of that work.

²⁰⁰ *Leader's Pack*, 4.

²⁰¹ 'Conversation with LICC'.

²⁰² Mark Greene, et. al. 'The Great Divide: The Heart of the Issue', London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, 'Transforming Work LICC', Google Play Store, Ver. 1.03 (2015), https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=ly.mann.kevinmann.transformingwork&hl=en_GB (accessed 14 Sept 2017).

Eden.²⁰³ It is evident that the authors are addressing a very specific perception common in evangelical circles, that the mission of Christians does not extend beyond evangelism, and thus for those not employed by churches or mission agencies, it is only as they engage in evangelising their work colleagues that their work acquires any significance. In response, Mark Greene, in the first video session, says,

God isn't sitting up in heaven looking down at us and our jobs, thinking, "I really, really wish they were doing something else right now." No, work is a context for us to use our talents, our resources, our power, our freedom, our opportunities, to serve other people for the benefit of other people and to the glory of God.²⁰⁴

There is a marked influence here of the vocational paradigm, which affirms the goodness of work and roots it in the creational design, as well as affirming the call of Christians to be faithful in whatever they do, for the benefit of others. This forms the foundation for the rest of the course.

Subsequent sessions narrow the focus from this broad perspective to specific issues. The second session deals with how to do good work, and builds on the idea of work being a participation in God's work, noting that 'as God created, he brought order out of chaos, worked in a rhythm of creation and rest, made provision, produced joy, created beauty and released potential'. Participants are then invited to reflect on how these characteristics of God's work are reflected in their own work.²⁰⁵ There is further a particular emphasis on how participants' work 'can bring healing and restoration where God's world has been damaged',²⁰⁶ the aim being to help participants begin to imagine both themselves and their work as agents in God's transformative and redemptive mission. Following this, the sessions begin to focus more on the individual in their work

²⁰³ London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, *Transforming Work*, presented by Mark Green, Ruth Walker, Charles Hipsley, David Leeds, and Ros Turner (London: LICC, 2015), DVD, session 1.1, 03:54.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 05:51.

²⁰⁵ *Leader's Pack*, 16.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

setting. In the third session, the course considers how workers can flourish, beginning by addressing questions of identity and the need for Christians to define themselves in relation to Christ rather than their work. It is here that the reality of work begins to play a role, as the course considers dealing with difficult bosses, and using the agency each worker has as a force for good in a workplace.²⁰⁷ Participants are asked to pray about ‘the most strategic area you feel God is calling you to focus on proactively at this time’.²⁰⁸ Session four builds on this, asking how each participant can influence the culture of their workplace. Recognising, along with all theologies of work, that there are systemic issues that shape work positively or negatively, participants are invited to consider their role in addressing those issues and ‘prayerfully look to influence for the better’.²⁰⁹ Again demonstrating an awareness of the realities of work, the course says, ‘We’re not going to be able to transform our entire workplace culture at once. We can always, however, look for small things to influence. These “one-degree shifts” can gradually change the direction an aspect of workplace culture is going in’.²¹⁰ Narrowing the focus further, the fifth session considers relationships in the workplace, and how participants can cultivate their relationships with their colleagues for the good of whole workplace. It is not until the sixth session that the question of evangelism is dealt with, setting the issue in the context of flourishing.²¹¹

The final two sessions begin to bring everything together. Session seven invites participants to begin to think about how to practically apply the principles of the first six sessions, using, first, a scenario proposed by the course leaders that they are invited to think through together, and second, scenarios from their own work contexts that they

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 20.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 21.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 24.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 24.

²¹¹ *Transforming Work*, session 6.1, 00:19.

want to respond to faithfully. In the final session, participants are asked to look back over the duration of the course, and ask themselves, ‘In the light of what God has been teaching each person in this group, what has been changing in them [throughout the course]?’²¹² before considering what actions or goals they want to commit to as they look forward and consider the work that lies ahead of them.

Undergirding the whole of the course is something LICC calls ‘The 6M Framework’, a model introduced initially in their course, and in Mark Greene’s book of the same name, *Fruitfulness on the Frontline*.²¹³ This framework ‘helps expand the vision of what it means to be a fruitful Christian in the workplace. It goes beyond simply being a nice person and having evangelistic conversations to help you see where God is already at work through you and to spot other opportunities in your everyday work’.²¹⁴ Participants are introduced to the 6Ms in the first session, and invited to reflect on them in all subsequent sessions. They are intended to provide a lens through which participants can reframe their understanding of their work. The 6Ms are reproduced in full in Appendix D, but the basic framework is as follows:

- M1: Modelling godly character
- M2: Making good work
- M3: Ministering love and grace
- M4: Making culture
- M5: Being a mouthpiece for truth and justice
- M6: Being a messenger of the gospel²¹⁵

These are the basic principles that participants are continually reminded of throughout the course, to be a framework within which they can situate their own work, and themselves as workers.

²¹² *Leader’s Pack*, 40.

²¹³ Mark Greene, *Fruitfulness on the Frontline: Making a Difference Where You Are* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2014).

²¹⁴ *Leader’s Pack*, 44.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

As stated above, *Transforming Work* finds deep affinity with the Reformed tradition, although it could place greater stress on our work as a participation in God's work and our creative calling, as well as the possibilities of the redemptive nature of work. Whilst it helpfully emphasises both the significance of our work to God and the way God wants to use our work, I believe this would go one step further in helping participants deepen their conviction of the significance of their work. In short, though, *Transforming Work* is a well-thought through and carefully developed resource that communicates a robust theological vision of work in an accessible way. It presents an inspiring vision of the possibilities of work and the place of Christians in the workplace, while at the same time dealing with the complex realities both of the world of work and the larger economic structures of society.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter began with a brief survey of the history of work, tracing the development of work and the problem of work in modern society, in order to set the context for the emergence of the theology of work. I then surveyed various developments in the theology of work, and situated them according to the traditions from which the different theologies of work emerge. I have discussed the unique contributions of the Roman Catholic tradition, as well as major contributions from the Protestant tradition, with a view to assessing their ability to contribute to a meaningful practical theology of work. In particular, I noted the strengths of the Reformed tradition's contribution towards a theology of work, with its recognition of the creational foundation of work, the difficulties of work, and the possibilities of work's transformation in light of Christ's redemption, and argued that this vision of work speaks most helpfully to the context of real life. I then examined the material in LICC's

Transforming Work course, demonstrating its affinity with the Reformed tradition, and noting its potential as a resource to help Christians cultivate a theological vision of work. What remains now is to assess how it fares in that regard, which is the subject of the remaining chapters.

3. Methodological foundations

3.1 Introduction

The fundamental concern of practical theology is ‘critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God’s redemptive practices in, to, and for the world’.²¹⁶ That interaction between the practices of the church and the practices of the world makes the relationship between Christians and their work a prime area for practical theological study, and thus an exploration of how churches can help to form and enable Christians to faithfully practice their work is essential.

In this chapter I outline the methodological foundations of my research, as well as the methods I employ in conducting the research and analysing the data collected during the research phase. This is an ethnographic study that attempts to understand both the practices of Christian workers, and the practices by which the church might help form them for their work. This study adopts a phenomenological methodology for the purpose of giving primary attention to the experiences of Christian workers, the ways in which they are formed to enact their working lives, and the meaning they ascribe to their work. To that end, I employ a case study method, which includes a piece of action research, in order to assess how the church might respond to and engage those experiences, with the aim of determining how the practices of the church can best present a theological vision of work that helps enable Christians in work both to reimagine the meaning and significance of their work, and to reorient how they practice their work.

²¹⁶ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 6.

3.1.1 Practicalities

In designing this project, I decided, with the cooperation and encouragement of the vicar at the time, Stephen Bellamy, that my research would be conducted with a group of participants from The Parish Church of St Nicholas, Durham (colloquially known, and hereafter referred to, as St Nic's). St Nic's describes itself as 'evangelical Anglican church which holds to the classic marks of that tradition',²¹⁷ and in the current terminology in use in the Church of England, would fairly neatly be classified as an 'open evangelical' church,²¹⁸ although taking a slightly more conservative theological standpoint.²¹⁹ This meant it was an ideal place in which to conduct my action research, as the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, whose material would feature in my research, could be said to belong to this tradition as well, its programmes and resources therefore finding a natural home in such a context. In addition, St Nic's has a history, particularly in recent years under the previous incumbent, Stephen Bellamy, of emphasising discipleship in the whole of life. The church says of itself that it has a 'long history of nurturing people and sending them out, both in terms of supporting congregation members in their daily work and in terms of full-time Christian ministry'.²²⁰ This emphasis meant that the church was especially willing to allow me to conduct my research amongst them.

In addition to the suitability of the context, a number of logistical factors influenced my decision to conduct my study at St Nic's. In the first place, it belongs to the Church of England, meaning that I could undertake a term-time placement there as

²¹⁷ 'Who We Are', *St Nicholas' Church, Durham*, 2014, http://www.stnics.org.uk/who_we_are/.

²¹⁸ Ibid. 'We want to affirm an orthodoxy that is...generous and nourishing and which will create a space in which...genuine differences can be explored in a gracious spirit.'

²¹⁹ Kings, 'Canal, River and Rapids', 174. Though Kings wrote fifteen years ago, after three years of regular attendance at the church, I believe the same can still be said of St Nic's today.

²²⁰ 'St Nicholas' Church Durham City Parish profile', *St Nicholas' Church, Durham*, 2016. www.stnics.org.uk/index.php/download_file/view/2567/1/, 4.

part of my ordination training whilst conducting my research. It also was important for me to conduct the research in an environment that will be similar to the context I will find myself in as an incumbent, as practical theology has a focus on practical ministerial outcomes. This meant that the conclusions of my research would be directly applicable to my future ministry, as well as being something I could contribute to the wider church, both at diocesan levels and beyond. Additionally, given the demographics of the other Church of England parishes in this area, St Nic's, with an average adult attendance of 251 across its three services,²²¹ afforded the most likely opportunity to find enough willing participants in full-time work. A final practicality concerned ease of access to the church and my participants – as I did not have my own transportation when beginning the research, I needed to situate my research in a church within walking distance of my house.

3.2 The value of practical theology and ethnographic research

In 1950, J.H. Oldman wrote,

The right answers to the questions of [the meaning of work] cannot be given by theologians working in isolation. These are, for the most part, without first-hand experience of the perplexities and pressures of life in secular society. While a Christian doctrine of work cannot be anything but a *theological* doctrine of work, if it were formulated by theologians alone it would not go far beyond the enunciation of general principles which make little connection with the living experience of those who wrestle with the problems which they encounter in their daily work, and would take too little account of the social and economic realities of modern society.²²²

Whilst Oldham is concerned more with the systematic development of the theology of work in his essay, his concern for the interconnection of practice and theology is key.

As I noted above, the fundamental concern of practical theology is 'critical, theological

²²¹ Ibid., 15. Average yearly attendance figures for 2015/16.

²²² Oldham, *Work in Modern Society*, 8.

reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to, and for the world'.²²³ Practical theology claims that this focus on practice is unique to its enterprise. Bonnie Miller-McLemore says that 'practical theology refers to an activity of believers seeking to sustain a life of reflective faith in the everyday, [and] a method or way of understanding or analysing theology in practice',²²⁴ and that its aim is to engage 'personal, ecclesial, and social experience to discern the meaning of divine presence and to enable faithful human response'. In doing so, it always 'focuses on the tangible, the local, the concrete, and the embodied'.²²⁵ In its current form, practical theology is something that has been developing in the last few decades, and was borne out of a perception that more traditional theology was, at worst, entirely theoretical and unconcerned with practice, and at best, engaged in a movement from theory to practice rather than beginning with practice. This concern with practice became the defining feature of the discipline of practical theology. Further, 'the field's attention to Christian life and ministry' and their practices means that 'practical theology places these concerns in the foreground of attention and takes special responsibility for educating and forming ministers to lead communities in a wide variety of contexts'.²²⁶

In order for practical theology to perform its task, it must engage in fieldwork, to engage the practices of Christians and Christian communities in meaningful ways. Pete Ward argues that 'to understand the church, we should view it as being simultaneously

²²³ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 6.

²²⁴ Bonnie J. Miller Mc-Lemore, 'The Contributions of Practical Theology', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 5. She suggests practical theology has two additional distinct enterprises in theological education and academia.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

²²⁶ Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, 'Introduction', in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, eds. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 2.

theological and social/cultural’ and that as a result, practical theological research ‘must embrace methods that are simultaneously theological and “ethnographic”’.²²⁷ Ward argues that our theology lacks plausibility when it fails to give attention to lived realities, and that ‘the turn to ethnography’ ensures that ‘assertions about the lived reality of the church require a kind of discipline and rigor similar to those that pertain to other areas of theological writing’.²²⁸ Though writing specifically about ecclesiology here, Ward’s comment is applicable to the lived experience of faith in general, including the experiences of Christians in work, as I am addressing in this thesis. Commenting on what ethnographic research can contribute, Ward writes,

Fieldwork offers a connection to life that is operative for both the author and the reader. Participation in the life of the church and focused attention on the expression and practices of communities shape the theologian and orientate what the theologian eventually writes. The practice of ethnographic fieldwork has a symbiosis with a theology of person, place, and identification that is rooted in the mission of God. This orientation aligns the writer with the concerns of communities and practitioners in such a way that our ecclesial readers recognise a commonality between our research and their own calling and vocation. It is this recognition that offers the potential of plausibility.²²⁹

If, as Swinton and Mowat argue, practical theology’s aim is ‘ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God’s redemptive practices in, to, and for the world’, then ethnographic research is crucial for engaging and shaping the practices that will enable this faithful participation.

Another significant feature of practical theology is its intention of serving the church and its leaders. Ward notes that practical theology is ‘the one area of theology that intentionally sets out to help the minister wrestle with questions that come out of

²²⁷ Pete Ward, ‘Introduction’, in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 2.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

practice and church life'.²³⁰ This is essential, because as Peter W. Marty writes, practical theology 'takes forming people in a way of life in and for the world as its purpose'.²³¹ For all its work of studying practice and seeking understanding, 'all the best thinking and learning in the world of theology will be pointless if it is not at the service of forming lives that matter'.²³² Marty asserts that this is what makes practical theology so important for those in positions of pastoral leadership who are entrusted with the responsibility of nurturing the lives of parishioners and communities.²³³ This perspective is shared as well by Gerben Heitink, who notes that the pastor has a unique role as they 'attempt to understand the reality of humanity and the world in light of Scripture and tradition'.²³⁴ In order to perform this role, pastors and church leaders need a degree of competence, which includes both a vested authority, and certain skills, and these are given 'to equip the church itself for what it is supposed to be: a missionary community that continues to learn and is ready to serve'.²³⁵ This is why Richard Osmer speaks of a congregational leader as an 'interpretive guide' who 'travels with [people] into new territory'.²³⁶ Practical theology is meant to be of service to those who are seeking to cultivate an 'embodied wisdom' in the church, a wisdom 'without which Christianity is just an idea and not a living reality in service to God and others'.²³⁷

²³⁰ Pete Ward, *Participation and Mediation: A Practical Theology for the Liquid Church* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 46.

²³¹ Peter W. Marty, 'Shaping Communities', in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, eds. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 321.

²³² *Ibid.*, 321.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 321-325.

²³⁴ Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains*, trans. Reinder Bruinsma (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 319.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 320.

²³⁶ Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 19.

²³⁷ Dorothy C. Bass, et. al., 'Engaging the Intelligence of Practice', in *Christian Practical Wisdom: What It Is, Why It Matters*, eds. Dorothy C. Bass, et. al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 2016), 4.

3.2.1 Situating this research

In light of what I am suggesting here about the value of practical theology and empirical research, I am making the contention that both the practices of Christian workers and the practices of the church in forming Christian workers are worthy foci for a practical theological study. I want to argue that there are two significant areas of study, which at present remain noticeably absent, that would both aid the further development of the theology of work, and would serve the church in its work of discipleship. The first is an in-depth assessment of how an encounter with the theological vision of work reshapes the way Christians workers think about and practice their work, which will be the primary focus below. For all the effort to bring the theology of work down to a more popular level, little has been done to study its effects. In some ways, this is surprising, given the desire of the authors noted especially in the previous chapter to seek the transformation of work. Cosden concludes his theology of work by saying, ‘I am convinced that [the church’s] task must increasingly be to guide all of her children into a deeper integrative understanding of the nature and meaning of human work’,²³⁸ a sentiment expressed by many recent contributors to the theology of work. With those concerns so frequently articulated, the absence of studies assessing the practical impact of these theologies is conspicuous.

One exception is a study conducted by an American pastor, Kenneth Baker, who authored a course on faith and work for his congregation, rooted firmly in the theology of work that emerges from the Reformed tradition. Baker noted that his denomination, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, did ‘little to encourage, equip and enable adults to integrate their faith and work in the marketplace’, and argued that the

²³⁸ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 187.

church should be active in helping Christians fulfil their calling in work.²³⁹ Baker suggests that one of the best ways the church can do this is by providing an adult education course that brings Christians into contact with a theology of work. However, the bulk of his project is given over to the development of the course, and the evaluation of the course's impact on the people in his congregation is fairly limited, acquired only by means of an evaluation form he asked participants to fill out.²⁴⁰ Likewise, his analysis of the feedback is fairly limited, although he clearly states that his objective was more about developing an educational tool. Whilst there are a couple of additional studies with similar objectives as Baker's, again the emphasis is on the development of resources rather than an empirical analysis of their effects.²⁴¹ Significant scope remains, then, for a much more in-depth analysis of the ability of these resources to enable Christians to cultivate a theological vision of work, which again is the primary part of what I am proposing to do with my own research.

The second thing noticeably lacking with respect to the theology of work is that very little has been done to bring the experiences and insights of Christians in work into dialogue with the theology of work. This is something that has been called for in numerous places; Albert Nolan, for instance, argues for the importance of the contribution of workers and their reflection on their experience of work to the theology of work.²⁴² Despite these calls, no significant work has been done to gather this kind of data from Christians in work. One study approximating this aim is some research

²³⁹ Kenneth Baker, 'Equipping Christians to integrate faith and work: An adult education course for the Christian Reformed Church' (DMin diss., Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2003), 1-2.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 97-101.

²⁴¹ See David W. Buschman, 'Students at the threshold: a course to prepare college seniors to integrate their Christian faith in their first workplace experience' (DMin diss., Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2008); and William Glen Messenger, 'Mission plan for the Theology of Work Project, Inc.' (DMin diss., Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2007).

²⁴² Albert Nolan, 'Work, the Bible, Workers, and Theologians: Elements of a Workers' Theology', *Semeia* 73 (1996): 213-220. See also Carol Lois Haywood, 'Does Our Theology of Work Need Reworking?', *Currents in Theology and Missions* 8 (October 1981): 298-301.

carried out in 1980 purporting to analyse the theology of work and leisure in ten middle-aged persons. However, whilst the title of the project claims to be an analysis of theological understandings of work and leisure, only one of the ten questions the researcher uses in his interview schedule directly refers to the participants' Christian faith.²⁴³ Further, when it comes to his evaluation of the interviews, he only spends two pages working through the ways in which his participants related their faith and work.²⁴⁴ Again, then, significant scope remains for a much more in-depth analysis of the ways in which Christians already reflect theologically on their work and their experiences of work, and the contributions those can make towards further development of the theology of work. This is worthy of a study in its own right, but here will comprise a small part of my conclusion.

The main focus of this thesis, then, is to give attention to the experiences of Christian workers and how those experiences might be shaped by a theological vision of work, and to consider how the church might offer help and support to its parishioners in order to enable them to faithfully practice their work. It is my hope that the findings that emerge might serve the church, and Christians in work, to this end.

3.3 Notes on methodology

As I have just said, one of the the aims of this research is to determine the role the church might play in enabling its working parishioners both to reimagine the meaning and significance of their work, and to reorient how they practice their work. Therefore, my primary concern at the outset is to give attention to the experiences of my

²⁴³ James Richardson, 'The theology of work and leisure in the lifestyles of ten middle-aged persons' (ThM diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1980), 41. Whilst a few of his questions could be seen to elicit reflections on faith and theological convictions from his participants, the subsequent analysis shows that these reflections only emerge as a result of this more direct question.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 51-53.

participants in their work, and as a result, this study is a phenomenological inquiry. Following John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, I understand phenomenology to be ‘a philosophy of experience that attempts to understand the ways in which meaning is constructed in and through human experience’.²⁴⁵ Mark D. Vagle, borrowing from Robert Sokolowski, helpfully summarises phenomenology as ‘looking at what we look through’.²⁴⁶ It is my concern in this study to examine the ways in which my participants experience their work, and to look at the lenses through which they make meaning of their work.

My methodological approach begins with the contention that Christian workers are formed more by the dominant cultural habits and patterns of work than by any critical theological reflection on work. This leads me in particular to the French phenomenological tradition, and is built on insights from the French sociologist and philosopher, Pierre Bourdieu, who, as Christian Scharen summarises, argues that the social context of our lives shapes us in such a way that we develop a “*habitus*,” or mode of being in the world, by which we practically navigate day-to-day life’.²⁴⁷ Following Mark T. Mulder and James K.A. Smith, who draw heavily from Bourdieu, my research is ‘informed by a thicker understanding of human persons that understands them as creatures of habit and practice *before* they are thinking things or believing animals’.²⁴⁸ Human beings therefore are trained to inhabit the world in a certain way, and ‘absorb cultural teleologies and visions of the good life through rituals and practices that inscribe an orientation on and through the body in ways that usually elude

²⁴⁵ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 106.

²⁴⁶ Mark D. Vagle, *Crafting Phenomenological Research* (Walnut Grove: Left Coast Press, 2014), 12.

²⁴⁷ Christian Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology: Exploring the Social Context of God’s Work in the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 15.

²⁴⁸ Mark T. Mulder and James K.A. Smith, ‘Understanding Religion Takes Practice: Anti-Urban Bias, Geographical Habits, and Theological Influences’, in *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Christian B. Scharen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 99 (emphasis theirs). Smith unpacks this in much more depth in his Cultural Liturgies Project.

conscious reflection'.²⁴⁹ Indeed, as Bourdieu would say, 'types of behaviour can be directed towards certain ends without being consciously directed to these ends, or even determined by them'.²⁵⁰ This finds resonance with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's embodiment theory,²⁵¹ that human beings are not always conscious of their mode of being in the world. 'Most of the time, we act and do things seemingly unthinkingly – it is as if the body already knows what to do and how to do it'.²⁵² With James K.A. Smith, whose work is indebted in many ways to Merleau-Ponty, I suggest that 'the way we inhabit the world is not primarily as thinkers, or even believers, but as more affective, embodied creatures who make our way in the world more by feeling our way around it',²⁵³ and begin from this theory as I attempt to discern the embodied relationship between Christians and their work. I will demonstrate in chapter four that my participants' work is predominately done pre-reflectively, which is not to say that specific tasks are done without any conscious reflection, but that their posture towards and practice of their work is largely unconscious and shaped by their embeddedness in dominant cultural habits and patterns of work. This does not entail arguing that participants will have done no theological reflection on their work; as they all come from and are rooted in an evangelical context where such intellectual reflection is encouraged, I show that a sort of 'ordinary theology' arises in conversation,²⁵⁴ although I also demonstrate that these are largely wedded to traditional evangelical theological categories and postures towards life in the world. That said, I will at the same time show

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 99.

²⁵⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Toward a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 9-10.

²⁵¹ Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962).

²⁵² Max Van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice: Meaning-Giving Methods in Phenomenological Research and Writing* (Walnut Grove: Left Coast Press, 2014), 128. Cf. Merleau-Ponty's fascinating example of a football player in *The Structure of Behaviour* (Boston: Beacon, 1976), 168-169.

²⁵³ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 47.

²⁵⁴ Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2002).

that the power of the imaginaries shaping their approach to work precludes theological reflection on work itself, and that their faith instead more naturally remains focused on aspects of personal spirituality. This ultimately means I will not be able to demonstrate from my empirical data that my participants have the ability to articulate or show evidence of having been formed by a rich theological vision of work.

Because practical theological studies aim at renewed praxis, my research goes beyond mere attentiveness to the experience of Christian workers, and involves a significant piece of action research that seeks to bring participants into an encounter with a developed and coherent theological vision of work. Whilst this might appear to move the research away from its phenomenological foundations, my aim in doing so is to determine whether that experience can be recast or reshaped in line with faithful practice.²⁵⁵ Thus the focus remains on the participants' experience and the meaning they make of work. I find both James K.A. Smith's and Christian Scharen's appropriation of the French phenomenological tradition particularly illuminating here, because they recognise that for discipleship, mere recognition of our *habitus* is insufficient; it is important to be attentive to the right orienting of our *habitus* as well. Scharen argues that sin presents an obstacle that disorients our *habitus*, and that to overcome that obstacle 'we need a *rupture* or *break* with our everyday blindness caused by sin's distorting power'.²⁵⁶ Our 'mode of being' in the world needs to be reoriented, and that is done through an encounter with Christ and his Gospel. To this end, I am sympathetic to Smith's work in his 'Cultural Liturgies' project, as he attempts to discover 'the shape of an alternative pedagogy of desire'²⁵⁷ that is deeply attentive to the primacy of desire in

²⁵⁵ My understanding of what might constitute 'faithful practice' here is articulated above in chapter two.

²⁵⁶ Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology*, 42 (emphasis his).

²⁵⁷ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 25. This is further unpacked in *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), and a yet to be released third volume.

the formation of humans persons.²⁵⁸ Smith argues for the key role of the church in offering that counter-formation, particularly through its liturgies. Worship, he contends, is the means by which disciples of Christ are formed to live faithfully in the world. This idea will play a significant role in shaping both my analysis of the empirical data and my suggestions for how the church might respond in its work of discipleship.

This particular appropriation of the French phenomenological tradition maintains the priority of theological truth, which is important for me, as with Swinton and Mowat I affirm that ‘theology is...the primary source of knowledge which guides and provides the hermeneutical framework within which Practical Theology carries out its task’.²⁵⁹ If Merleau-Ponty is right that our ‘being-in-the-world’, or our socialisation, is something in which we are unconsciously trained, then as Christians and disciples it is imperative that we are conscious of what orients our being-in-the-world. Scharen notes that our training establishes bounds of meaning that we learn within the contexts of our lives, and ‘this embodied knowing is what allows us to act easily and effortlessly’ in our daily lives.²⁶⁰ Christians in work are thus socialised by the contexts within which they work, and so their being-in-the-*workplace* will be established by the bounds of meaning recognised by those contexts. As it is, dominant theories of work in modern Western society are predominantly shaped by economic realities; as Catherine Casey argues, ‘work as we now typically understand it is a modern invention. It is a product of industrialization and is governed by the rules of economic reality’.²⁶¹ These theories of work will be predominant in establishing the bounds of meaning for workers unless

²⁵⁸ Something explicit in the title of his latest book, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

²⁵⁹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 7.

²⁶⁰ Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology*, 56.

²⁶¹ Casey, *Work, Self and Society*, 28. Despite writing over twenty years ago now, I find that Casey’s statement here remains true, and is a simple and helpful summary of the nature of work in the modern world. I have critiqued this paradigm in the previous chapter.

they engage with counter-formative visions of work. Being formed for the faithful practice of work therefore requires establishing new boundaries, attentive to and informed by theological visions of work that recapture God's design for work and enable Christian workers to reorient the practice of their work in line with his purposes.²⁶²

The dominant theories of Christian formation in evangelical contexts are, I would suggest, not duly attentive to the understanding of the human person articulated by the likes of Scharen and Smith. Evangelical theories of formation would find resonance with Edward Farley's argument for the Christian's 'interpretive way of existing in the world'²⁶³, which accounts for the emphasis on teaching and learning, and the 'disciplining of the interpretation ever going on in Christian existence'.²⁶⁴ Coming from an evangelical context myself, I do not deny Farley's assertion, though I would also echo Smith's concerns that instruction alone is insufficient for the formation of disciples. A 'liturgical anthropology', to use Smith's terminology,²⁶⁵ offers a particular challenge to these theories of formation, which prioritise the role of traditional methods of teaching and education, such as preaching, 'talks', and small group studies in forming disciples, and are predominantly concerned with right thinking and the absorption of right beliefs, ideas, and doctrines.²⁶⁶ Smith, however, is clear that he does not promote a sort of anti-intellectualism, and that he in no way discredits the importance of teaching and instruction, but that he wants to emphasise the priority of worship and liturgical formation.²⁶⁷ I will suggest in the final chapter that more

²⁶² I recognise that I am making a particular claim about theological normativity here, which I will address further below.

²⁶³ Edward Farley, *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 141.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

²⁶⁵ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 10.

²⁶⁶ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 17ff.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 17, n.2.

cerebrally-focused means of formation have an important place within the broader scope of a church's liturgical life.

That all said, however, for a number of reasons, my action research will engage participants with a theological vision of work through a dominant means of evangelical formation: the small group. In the first place, I do so very simply because my position as a researcher being invited into an existing parish church does not give me the liberty to engage in various kinds of liturgical experimentation, and I am required to work within given constraints. In the second place, the course I am using has been designed for and written within an evangelical context, and likewise assumes formation by means of the dissemination of ideas and information.²⁶⁸ Third, this will allow me to test and demonstrate my argument that my participants' attitudes towards and practices of work are a matter of deep social imaginaries, and that the cultivation of a theological vision of work is a substantial task that goes beyond what can be achieved through a temporary small group course, and will set the stage for my closing argument that a renewed vision of work will be the fruit of the long-term work of liturgical formation.

3.3.1 Reflections on normativity in practical theology

The question of normativity in practical theology is an oft-debated and highly contentious one. Insofar as practical theology is concerned with changing the world, it certainly can be said to have normative commitments; Andrew Root notes that 'to seek to change things is to make some normative assertion about the deficiency of the

²⁶⁸ That being said, as I found out in conversation with them in November 2015, LICC increasingly recognises the formative power of worship, and thus is currently working to develop resources for preachers, worship leaders, and others who participate in leading and facilitating corporate worship, that would create a worship culture in which a theology of work, if not explicitly communicated, would much more easily arise out of.

present and the new direction the future needs to take'.²⁶⁹ Who makes those normative assertions is what is contested among practical theologians, however. There is broad agreement in the field that traditional forms of doing theology that began with theory and then moved to practice, could no longer have normativity in the same way, because 'their first step, or first attention, was given to the unlived and abstract'.²⁷⁰ Root notes that the American practical theologian, Don Browning, was instrumental in recognising that if theology was truly going to be practical, it would need to move from practice to theory to practice.²⁷¹ Theology could speak normatively only if it emerged from and spoke directly to the concrete and real. Yet, whilst acknowledging the importance of Browning's insight, and the impact it has had on practical theology subsequently, one of Root's main arguments is that in this turn to the concrete, practical theology has often moved away from being distinctly theological. He notes that when 'wed to a hard social constructionism, practical theology runs the risk of avoiding the *theological* and succumbing to the human agent's social construction of God. Or more often, it simply stops talking of God and instead turns to religious phenomena'.²⁷² This critique is increasingly poignant as practical theology moves from being a more descriptive task, to something that is fundamentally action research, that is, 'a way of enabling new and transformative modes of action'.²⁷³

Practical theology's turn to the empirical, and thus its relationship with the social sciences, raises the question of normativity in particular ways. This relationship has generated one of the most substantial critiques of modern theology, from John Milbank, who argues that 'the pathos of modern theology is its false humility', in

²⁶⁹ Andrew Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 25-26.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 24 (emphasis his).

²⁷³ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 255.

surrendering its status as a metadiscourse and allowing secular discourses to take their place as fundamental narratives.²⁷⁴ Milbank suggests that theology has allowed itself to be confined by social theories, thus allowing the latter to dictate its place, and confining its scope.²⁷⁵ This is, of course, makes his critique of special relevance to the field of practical theology as a whole, as it actively seeks interaction with other disciplines. Milbank's particular concern that theology not 'borrow from elsewhere a fundamental account of society or history, and then...see what theological insights will cohere with it',²⁷⁶ speaks directly to practical theology, and most directly when it makes its empirical turn. Whilst that empirical focus is crucial to its very nature, Root argues that this turn to the empirical is often done more as science than as ministry, focusing near-exclusively on human action, thus surrendering its distinctly theological emphasis.²⁷⁷ What Root critiques here is in many ways symptomatic of Milbank's hypothesis.²⁷⁸

Yet even if we concede Milbank's point, which I am largely inclined to do, we are still left with the question of how normativity functions in the practice-theory-practice relationship. What determines faithful practice? My own view, which I have made some comments on in part in my discussion of methodology above, involves a fairly traditional and evangelical approach to theology and Scripture. For that reason, I find myself sceptical of the assertion so prominent in many accounts of practical theology that traditional theology is not concerned with practice, or at least, is only concerned with it as secondary matter. Similarly, with Swinton and Mowat, I am concerned to avoid approaches to practical theology that move towards granting human

²⁷⁴ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1990), 1.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 380.

²⁷⁷ Root, *Christopraxis*, 40.

²⁷⁸ See also James K.A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 123-127 for a critique of correlationist models of theology. Smith argues that models of theology that grant 'neutral' status to the human sciences always end up privileging the culture.

experience the status of revelation.²⁷⁹ As demonstrated in the previous chapter, my approach to the theology of work ascribes a high place to the creational foundation of work, thus granting theological visions of work a primary place in determining faithful practice. In relation to my empirical research, that will have been made evident above in chapter two in the way I treated the material in *Transforming Work*, and will be seen further in the way I evaluate the data collected during the research phase. However, a phenomenological approach means that a key concern of mine is also taking the reality of the lived experience of workers into account, and I will be drawing from sociological and anthropological insights to make sense of these experiences. I will also bring a theology of work in dialogue with those experiences, allowing those experiences both to shape and be shaped by the theology, which will be evident in the analyses of my empirical data and in my discussions of how the church might respond to my findings. I indicated in the prior chapter that this is where, for instance, romantic theological visions of work fall short, by proposing ideals that do not adequately address faithful practice in the present context, something Reformed approaches take much more seriously. As further befits a Reformed approach, the tradition's emphasis on common grace recognises and affirms divine action in places where faith is not professed,²⁸⁰ while its emphasis on redemption, and particularly structural redemption, calls for divine action, through the work of the people of God, to engage further in transformative action.

This approach, I believe, mitigates the general concern of practical theology that abstract theory not dictate practice, while at the same time addressing concerns like that of Milbank that theology end up subservient to secular discourses.

²⁷⁹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 5.

²⁸⁰ See, for instance, Lee Hardy's extensive discussion of the positive developments in management theory in his book, *The Fabric of this World*, 124ff.

3.3.2 Reflexivity

One of the primary concerns in practical theological research, insofar as it incorporates qualitative and ethnographic approaches, is the place of the researcher. The findings of a practical theological research project depend on the researcher's ability to be self-aware, to engage in a 'process of critical self-reflection...throughout the research process that enables her to monitor and respond to her contribution to the proceedings'.²⁸¹ Swinton and Mowat argue that reflexivity is 'perhaps *the* most crucial dimension of the qualitative research project'.²⁸² Willig urges researchers to be aware both of personal and epistemological reflexivity: the former involving attention to the ways 'in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research'; the latter encouraging them 'to reflect upon the assumptions (about the world and the nature of knowledge) that we have made in the course of the research' and how that might impact the research findings.²⁸³ This is what Osmer calls a 'metatheoretical perspective', the presuppositions and 'network of beliefs and values [that] justifies why researchers work the way they do on a particular project'.²⁸⁴ Historically, there was a demand for ethnographic and qualitative research to be purely objective, but developments in understandings of reflexivity now recognise objectivity as both impossible, and undesirable. Indeed, as Pete Ward says, 'practical theology grows out of a particular personal history, social context, and theological tradition. Adopting reflexivity...is an acknowledgement that the commitments of the writer are a part of the academic process. In fact, they are a vital and creative aspect of any practical theology'.²⁸⁵

²⁸¹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 59.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁸³ C. Willig, *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology: A Practical Guide to Theory and Method, Third Ed.* (Buckingham: Open University Press), 10.

²⁸⁴ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 58.

²⁸⁵ Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, 4.

Reflexivity pertains to phenomenological research in a particular way, because the task of understanding a phenomenon requires ‘bridling’, which is both about restraining the influence of pre-understandings so as not to limit openness to the experiences of others, and about ‘continually [tending] to the understanding of the phenomenon as a whole throughout the study’.²⁸⁶ As I articulated in the first chapter, a number of particular factors shape my approach to this research, and come to bear upon the matter of reflexivity. The first is my longstanding interest in the theology of work, and thus on an epistemological level, I recognise that I began the research having previously spent a fair amount of time thinking through the theology of work itself. Whilst the process of working through a literature review has expanded my conception of the theology of work, my own experience of work and my theological background inclines me in certain directions, and I do not think I have departed significantly from my earlier views. I recognise the need to bridle that understanding here. The second is my own experience of work, and the need to allow my participants’ experience to speak for itself, rather than allowing my own experiences to shape my understanding of their experiences. Third, prior to even conceiving of this project, I had thought about how I might integrate a theology of work into a church’s discipleship programme. This comes, as I wrote in the first chapter, from having spent a number of years in full-time ministry prior to commencing my research, and dealing with Christians in work who found themselves unable to find meaning and significance in that work, a problem exacerbated by a church context that effectively denied the possibility of work having any meaning beyond being an individual’s main forum for engaging in evangelism. Therefore, I come to this research with a pastoral heart as well, and a deep desire to see Christians

²⁸⁶ Vagle, *Crafting Phenomenological Research*, 67. ‘Bridling’ is a term originally coined by Karin Dahlberg in order to give a fuller and more forward-looking idea of what ‘bracketing’ entails. Cf. K. Dahlberg, H. Dahlberg, and M. Nyström, *Reflective Lifeworld Research* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2008).

discovering new possibilities both in what their work means, and in what they might achieve through their work. That said, my understanding of discipleship and formation has shifted considerably in recent years, and that is certainly reflected in my evaluation and analysis of my research findings, and my suggestions for renewed praxis. I recognise the need for reflexivity here in not bringing my prior ideas to bear upon my conclusions without first letting fresh conclusions emerge out of what I have discovered in the course of conducting this research.

3.4 Notes on method

Swinton and Mowat note that methodology and method are often confused, and in particular, the tendency for the terms to be used interchangeably. In actual fact, methods are the tools by which qualitative research is carried out, and are employed ‘within a particular set of methodological assumptions’.²⁸⁷ Bonnie Miller-McLemore notes that the use of methods to analyse the dynamics of theology and faith in practice, whilst not unique to practical theology, is of significant interest to practical theologians, who see ‘their development and use as a means to connect theory and practice in academy, church, and society. These methods provide a way to understand the practice or experience of faith and to affect its transformation.’²⁸⁸ They are not merely an academic exercise, however, but are eminently useful for ministry, and ‘for understanding and shaping theology and faith’.²⁸⁹ The point of employing methods in practical theology ‘is to have a transforming influence on religious faith in congregations and society’.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 74.

²⁸⁸ Miller-McLemore, ‘The Contributions of Practical Theology’, 10.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

It is incumbent on researchers, then, to determine which methods best suit their particular study. John Swinton notes that the choice of method is significant, and ‘not value-neutral’ because it ‘reflects the way in which the researcher understands the world’.²⁹¹ Given my methodological assumptions about the formation of Christian workers and the need both to attend closely to their experience of work and to the possibilities of reshaping that experience, I determined that this would best be explored by means of a case study method, with the inclusion of a piece of action research. Daniel Schipani notes that the case study method serves a number of different purposes, including ‘critical and constructive reflection on ecclesial and ministry practice; [and] study, analysis, and evaluation of different forms of faith experience, formation, and transformation’.²⁹² The case study, as a strategy, Richard Osmer says, ‘focuses on a single case or a limited number of cases, studied in depth for a specific period of time. Often a single individual, program, relationship, or practice within a community is studied intensively’.²⁹³ This intensive focus gives the case study method a number of advantages. First, ‘cases help to bridge the gap between experience and practice...and reflection and theory’.²⁹⁴ Secondly, case studies give considerable attention to ‘contextualised real life situations’, and thus ‘present the tension between particular reality and generalization in mutually challenging ways’.²⁹⁵

Schipani suggests that a case study includes a number of dimensions: a background and description of a ministry event, analysis, evaluation, and projection.²⁹⁶ In some ways, then, it mirrors the classic pastoral cycle, one of the most common

²⁹¹ John Swinton, “‘Where is Your Church?’ Moving Toward a Hospitable and Sanctified Ethnography”, in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 75-76.

²⁹² Daniel Schipani, ‘Case Study Method’, in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 91.

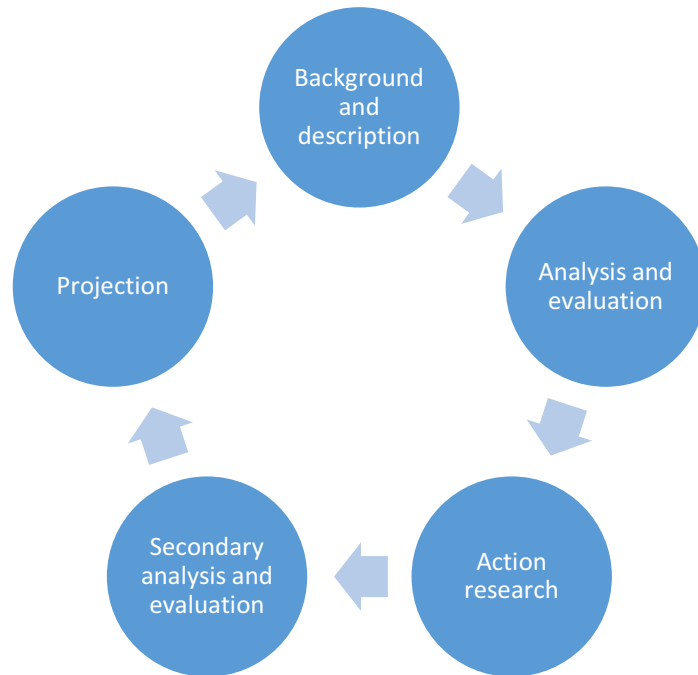
²⁹³ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 51.

²⁹⁴ Schipani, ‘Case Study Method’, 99.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

²⁹⁶ Schipani, ‘Case Study Method’, 98.

methods employed in practical theological research. If those dimensions constitute a standard case study, it could be said that my study then employs a modified case study, as it includes an additional element of action research. Using Schipani's categories, then, this study could be diagrammed as follows:



To elaborate, after giving an introduction and background to the study and setting the necessary theological and methodological foundations in the first three chapters, I begin in chapter four by attending to the experiences of my research participants by interviewing them about their work and the ways the ministry of St Nic's has addressed and shaped them as working persons, followed by an evaluation of these initial findings, with particular attention to implicit and/or explicit theological perspectives, both of work and more generally, that emerge from the participants' reflections. This, then, is followed in chapter five by a piece of action research, in which I conduct the *Transforming Work* course, thereby inputting and engaging participants with a coherent

and robust theological vision of work.²⁹⁷ A secondary analysis follows, in which I conduct a set of follow-up interviews to ascertain whether an encounter with a theological vision of work in a setting like a small-group course would enable participants to reimagine the significance and meaning of their work and to reorient how they practice their work. Finally, in chapter six, the lessons learned from the study offer projections and suggestions for renewed praxis, and in particular, how the church should engage with the theology of work in its discipleship.

I engage in the case study method recognising its limitations. As Schipani notes, ‘one obvious disadvantage or limitation of the method is the difficulty of generalizing from one case to another’.²⁹⁸ Certainly, I appreciate the fact that I am working with a specific group of people coming from a particular church in a particular context, and that therefore the possibility exists that my findings or results might not be replicated or mirrored in a different context. That said, I believe there is a more general culture shaping evangelical Anglican churches that transcends specific contexts, which makes a case study of this sort viable, and its findings applicable to other churches. Schipani also highlights ‘the risk of distortions introduced into the material through the researcher’s selective memory or perception, or through the biased views of the persons or documents from which the case is crafted’.²⁹⁹ I have sought to mitigate the former concern by means of recording and transcribing interviews and recording the group sessions. With respect to the latter, I think that my use of a range of participants, from different backgrounds, occupations, ages, and length of involvement with St Nic’s,

²⁹⁷ In an interview with LICC’s head of theology, Antony Billington, in November, he suggested that *Transforming Work* should not be considered a coherent theology of work. Whilst part of what he was saying was that it is not designed to function as a systematic exposition of a theology of work, I do think that there is a clear theology of work that emerges from it that finds strong resonances with that of the Reformed tradition. And certainly, Antony, who oversaw production of and had significant theological input into the course, is very well-read in the literature surrounding the theology of work.

²⁹⁸ Schipani, ‘Case Study Method’, 99.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

provides a diverse enough group to prevent any particular bias.³⁰⁰ This is further prevented by bringing them together on a regular basis to interact with one another. A case study method allows me to give the necessary attention to each of my participants, analysing and evaluating each of their experiences and assessments of their work, as well as analysing and evaluating how each responds both to the theological vision of work they are presented with, and to the experiences and insights of each other.

Practical theology's emphasis on method has led to the development of a huge array of methods,³⁰¹ some of which can be extraordinarily complex. In terms of my own research, however, I feel that the case study method retains a simplicity and linearity that allows for a robust investigation of the phenomena, and more, because in this instance I am analysing a multiplicity of cases, allows for more grounded proposals for renewed praxis.

3.4.1 Qualitative research methods employed

Data for my case studies are collected in two primary ways: through two sets of semi-structured interviews with each participant, and through a piece of action research. Interviews are frequently employed as one of the primary tools in qualitative research, because they are 'concentrated human encounters...between the researcher who is seeking knowledge and the research participant who is willing to share their experience and knowledge'.³⁰² Indeed, as Steinar Kvale simply remarks, 'If you want to know how people understand their world and life, why not talk to them?'³⁰³ This is particularly

³⁰⁰ I do realise that most of my participants' occupations are broadly considered 'professional', but this was inevitable due to the demographics of the church and the city of Durham more broadly.

³⁰¹ *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, for example, has seventeen chapters devoted to method.

³⁰² Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 63.

³⁰³ Steinar Kvale, *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), 1.

important for a phenomenological inquiry, because access to the phenomenon lies with the participant, and the goal ‘is to learn as much as possible from those who have experienced the phenomenon’.³⁰⁴ However, at the same time it is crucial to recognise that one of the difficulties of a phenomenological inquiry is the fact that no pre-reflective experience can be captured in words. ‘Experiential accounts or lived-experience descriptions are never truly identical to the pre-reflective lived experiences themselves’,³⁰⁵ for once someone begins to describe their experience, it immediately becomes an interpreted experience. Max van Manan states that ‘it is much easier to get a person to tell *about* an experience than to tell an experience as lived through. Generally it is much easier for an interviewee to share his or her views, interpretations, or opinions about something than to give a detailed experiential account of an event or moment’.³⁰⁶ That being said, an interview still functions as the most helpful way to gain access to a person’s lived experience, and asking the right questions can enable insight into the phenomenon. However, phenomenological interviews cannot be fully structured interviews. Instead, as Clark Moustakas notes, ‘the phenomenological interview involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions’,³⁰⁷ enabling the interviewees to tell their stories. The researcher seeks to cultivate a dialogue that addresses the phenomenon as deeply and thoroughly as possible, with the end result being a fuller understanding of the phenomenon by both the researcher and participant.³⁰⁸ Van Manen emphasises further the importance in particular of gathering material in the form of stories, anecdotes, and examples of experiences as means of studying the phenomenon in question,³⁰⁹ and to this end, I

³⁰⁴ Vagle, *Crafting Phenomenological Research*, 83.

³⁰⁵ Van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*, 313.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 315.

³⁰⁷ Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (London: SAGE Publications, 1994), 114.

³⁰⁸ Dahlberg, et. al., *Reflective Lifeworld Research*, 185-187.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 316-317.

sought as far as possible to draw out narratives from my participants to illuminate their experiences of work.

A key part of my research is employing a piece of action research, which takes the form of a small-group course. Swinton and Mowat describe action research as ‘a way of enabling new and transformative modes of action. The action researcher does not simply seek to observe and understand the world...[but] to change it. These two goals are carried out simultaneously in the process of participative research practices’.³¹⁰ Action research is often a characteristic method of practical theology amongst marginalised groups that helps them to reflect on their situations and contexts, and ‘must specifically name the injustices that need to be addressed and...create a plan for liberation’.³¹¹ In my case, I do not use it for the means of ‘liberating’ my participants from their work, but action research’s intention of making people and communities aware of the broader and systemic factors shaping contexts, and how people respond to and live within those realities, is an important part of the phenomenological theory of formation I work with. Whilst not an economic or political objective, the goal of my action research can be said to be a sort of liberation, insofar as my participants can be formed to faithfully practice their work in line with God’s creative and redemptive purposes, and thus ‘be enabled to remain faithful to God and to participate fully in God’s continuing mission to the world’.³¹² This happens as, over eight sessions, spaced roughly a month apart, my participants come together as a group to encounter a theology of work through the course resources, and to share stories, experiences, and questions arising from their own work. For myself as researcher, this invites me both to have a deeper look into the phenomenon, and to consider how churches might

³¹⁰ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 255.

³¹¹ Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, ‘Participatory Action Research’, in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 235.

³¹² Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 257.

contribute to facilitating a process of change, as the material attempts to expand my participants' horizons, to reimagine the meaning and significance of their work, and to more faithfully practice their work. The action research also intends to facilitate change and faithful practice in the church, as I consider, using the data I collect, how churches can help form and enable their parishioners to faithfully practice their work. Finally, as my participants encounter a theology of work, the action research enables a process of change as their questions and experiences are reflected back on the theology, calling for further nuance and new developments.

3.4.2 Coding

To work through the data collected during the research phase, I employed a process of coding in order to carry out a thematic analysis. A key concern for qualitative research is validity, and 'the extent to which conclusions drawn from research provide an accurate description of what happened or a correct explanation of what happens and why'.³¹³ Whilst data analysis is in many ways a subjective enterprise, 'this does not mean that the qualitative researcher has a free reign to analyse in any manner that they choose',³¹⁴ and there are simple techniques allowing for transparency that lend credibility to the research.

One such technique is coding, which groups relevant data together thematically for the purpose of analysis. Following Jamie Harding, I understand that by using 'thematic analysis, the researcher is seeking to achieve three aims: examining commonality, examining differences and examining relationships'.³¹⁵ In my case, the

³¹³ Victor Jupp, 'Validity', in *The Sage Dictionary of Social Research*, ed. Victor Jupp (London: Sage, 2006), 311.

³¹⁴ Jamie Harding, *Qualitative Data Analysis from Start to Finish* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2013), 5.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

process of coding began by first transcribing each interview word for word, which, for the sake of immersing myself in the data, I attempted to do as soon as possible after the interview. I then began to make summaries of the interviews, as ‘an initial step which facilitates further analysis. Reducing an interview to key points can enable the researcher to see through the mass of detail and repetition to the points that are most relevant to the research question(s) or objectives’.³¹⁶ Further, as I have chosen to use a case study method, the process of making summaries facilitates the ability to more easily compare cases. To make the summaries, I read through each transcript multiple times, seeking not only to immerse myself in the data, but more crucially, in line with my phenomenological approach, to immerse myself in my participants’ experiences as far as possible, all the while notating summaries in the margins of each transcript. Recognising that ‘one of the great strengths of qualitative data, but one of the factors that makes it difficult to analyse, is the complexity that it can capture and record’,³¹⁷ I then moved into coding the material in order to make further sense of the data, using Harding’s four-step process:

- 1 identifying initial categories based on the reading of the transcripts;
- 2 writing codes alongside the transcripts;
- 3 reviewing the list of codes, revising the list of categories and deciding which codes should appear in which category;
- 4 looking for themes and findings in each category.³¹⁸

The coding process is invaluable for exploring the depths of the gathered data, and enables the researcher to pay close attention to the detail of what emerges in each case. As mentioned above, I decided that a thematic analysis would best suit this research, and the coding process helpfully brought out the significant themes from the data. The

³¹⁶ Ibid., 56.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 70.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 83.

contours of the data emerged clearly, and illuminated the research questions I was seeking to answer.

Though it is a fairly common practice in qualitative research, I decided not to further reduce the coding to word frequency, given that my participants all do different jobs, and thus speak about their work in different ways. Further, I opted to code the data manually instead of using software such as *nVivo*, simply because of time constraints. I felt the time that would have been required to be invested in learning to use new software was better spent working through the data itself.

A full list of the categories and codes I drew out from the data can be found in Appendix A.

3.5 Ethical considerations

All research with human subjects demands ethical considerations. Practically, this means that all data collected during the research phase is kept confidential, and that participants' identities remain anonymous. As it pertains to this thesis, I have ensured the latter by assigning pseudonyms to each participants, and only using those names below. Additionally, I have sought to adhere to the principle that 'as far as possible sociological research should be based on the freely given informed consent of those studied'.³¹⁹ Thus, when I first recruited participants, I was as open as possible about the nature and scope of my research, and the role they would play in the project, and I continued throughout the year to remind them of the shape of the project as a whole. Following Charlotte Aull Davies' guidance, I provided the information to 'enable people to assess the likely effects of the research on them and to make an informed

³¹⁹ British Sociological Association, 'Statement of Ethical Practice', 2017, https://www.britisoc.co.uk/media/24310/bsa_statement_of_ethical_practice.pdf, 5. The consent form I used in the recruiting of participants can be found in Appendix C.

decision about whether or not they are willing to participate'.³²⁰ This, on the one hand, required openness about the considerable time commitment I was asking of each participant, including two interviews of 45-60 minutes each, attendance at eight two-hour sessions, and some personal time spent in preparation for each session. However, I also recognised that the research would demand something of them in terms of their discipleship, such as a willingness to bring their experience and practice of work into focus, and to assess it in light of the theological vision of work they would encounter. With all my participants coming from an evangelical background, a tradition that emphasises the need for continued growth in faith and spiritual maturity, I expected no hesitation from participants in agreeing to participate. Yet I was also aware that they would have to confront challenges, particularly as they journeyed through *Transforming Work*, to how they thought about and practiced their work, and that this could have quite a strong effect on them. My approach here involved thoroughly embracing the role of facilitator in the action research phase in order to help them work through those challenges, instead of being the one who put these challenges to them. In this way I sought to protect them from harm, while at the same time seeking to allow the course to progress as its authors intended it to.

Ethnographic research demands an engagement with 'the ambivalent reality of the human condition that is only fully experienced by entering into people's lives'.³²¹ In my case, this entering into people's lives presented an interesting dynamic as many of my participants engaged with me in what was quite obviously a pastoral relationship. This became especially evident in interview, as participants quite willingly opened their lives to me, making themselves vulnerable and demonstrating a great deal of trust in

³²⁰ Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others* (London: Routledge, 1999), 48.

³²¹ Elizabeth Phillips, 'Charting the "Ethnographic Turn"', in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 105.

me, and occasionally even seeking direct spiritual guidance. I did not approach this research as a pastoral figure, although I did come with a desire to see each participant grow as they encountered a theological vision of work, but I suspect that because of my involvement with the church as both an ordinand and researcher, they assigned this additional role to me.³²² This foisted additional responsibilities on me, and I found myself navigating the relationship between researcher and leader, the latter faced with ‘the task of providing appropriate measures of support, encouragement, and confrontation’.³²³ I made an effort to tread this line carefully, aware that pastoral responsibility for these parishioners remained with the leaders of St Nic’s, whilst recognising that the whole issue of work was at the same time a pastoral matter.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the methodological foundations of my research. I began by discussing the value of practical theology and ethnographic research, demonstrating the need to attend to practice in order for the church to consider how it might support its parishioners in cultivating a theological vision of work and enabling the faithful practice of work. I then discussed my decision to employ a phenomenological approach, for the purpose of giving considerable attention to my participants’ experience of work. I argued that because their experience of work is shaped by their formation in cultural habits and practices of work, they will struggle both to make meaning of their work theologically, and to faithfully practice their work. I have demonstrated that I use a case study method to work with this phenomenological approach, and have discussed the specific qualitative research methods used to obtain

³²² I would emphasise that *most* of the participants assigned this additional role to me. One treated me as an equal, whilst another maintained a faint air of what I can only describe as bemused condescension towards me, although this was only exhibited when I was talking about work.

³²³ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 25.

and analyse the data, including two sets of interviews and a piece of action research. Additionally, I have shown concern for issues of reflexivity and the ethical issues at play in this research. In the following chapters, then, I turn to the practical outworkings of this chapter, and to the analysis and evaluation of the data collected during the research phase.

4. Results and findings, part 1: An analysis and evaluation of the initial interviews

4.1 Introduction

In chapter two, I set out a theological vision of work, and argued that this vision should animate the way Christians think about and practice their work. I discussed further how this theological vision of work finds deep resonance with the vision of work communicated by the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity in its course, *Transforming Work*. At the same time, I contended in chapter three that because of the way we are formed unconsciously by the cultural habits and practices of work, my participants would largely be unable to demonstrate the presence of an operative theological vision of work, and further, that an encounter with a theological vision of work through the means of a small-group course would be insufficient to enable them to reimagine the meaning and significance of their work, and reorient how they practiced their work.

This chapter now deals with the findings that emerged from my empirical data. As stated in chapter three, the objective with this research was twofold: first, to investigate how my participants experienced and made meaning of their work; and second, to explore how an encounter with a theological vision of work reshaped the way the participants both thought about and practiced their work. To do this, I conducted a round of initial interviews, following which I took the participants through *Transforming Work*, before interviewing them a second time. Accordingly, in what follows, I deal with the data in two stages, initially analysing the data collected prior to the commencement of the course, and then, in chapter five, looking at the data collected

during and after the course. I will first report on the findings, before moving into an analysis and discussion of the reasons these findings may have emerged.

4.2 Introducing the participants

Ten³²⁴ participants were involved in my research.³²⁵ They are varied in their backgrounds, working experience, age, and involvement with St Nic's. Before undertaking a detailed analysis of the data collected from the participants, I begin by introducing them. Note that all references to time, such as how long each has attended St Nic's, are as of autumn 2015, when they were initially recruited as participants.

Barbara is in her early 50s and works as a teaching manager in a computer science department of a large university, and has done so for seventeen years. She manages the day-to-day operations of the department, acting as a liaison between the students and academic faculty, as well as line-managing a team of administrative assistants. She has attended St Nic's for nearly twenty years.

Mike is in his mid-30s and is a religious education teacher at a Church of England secondary school, a position he has held for three years, although he has been teaching for nearly ten years. He has been attending St Nic's for about six years.

Catherine is in her mid-30s and works as a researcher in the geography department of a university, specialising in cartography. She is relatively new to the job, having begun only six months prior to agreeing to participate in my research, though she has worked in the field for over ten years. Having recently moved to Durham, she likewise has only attended St Nic's for a short period of time.

³²⁴ I initially recruited eleven, but one dropped out after the second session of *Transforming Work* due, ironically, to the pressures of their work schedule.

³²⁵ As befits the conventions of researching human subjects (discussed further in chapter three above), all names used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

Fred is in his late 50s and is the managing director for a large multinational manufacturing company, and is responsible for their operations in the United Kingdom. He was 'headhunted' for this role, and oversees about 150 employees. Though only working for this company for seven months prior to the start of my research, he has worked in managing roles in manufacturing and engineering companies for his whole career. He has attended St Nic's for six months.

Ruth is a self-employed photographer in her late 40s, and has been working as a photographer for nearly twenty years. Having trained as a photographer following a career in a factory, she initially owned her own shop, but now works primarily with nurseries and schools in a freelance capacity. She has attended St Nic's for about ten years.

Deborah is in her late 20s and currently works as a research officer at a university. Her role consists largely in helping academics apply for research grants, and supporting them in setting up research projects. She has been in the role for three years, and, having grown up in Durham, has attended St Nic's for most of her life.

Sam, in his mid-50s, works as a physiotherapist, a career he trained for twenty years ago after working in a factory as a machine operator. After a period of time being posted at different surgeries throughout the county, he is now based in a local hospital. He has attended St Nic's for over ten years.

Ted is in his mid-50s and works as a chartered surveyor for a local authority. As part of his work, he looks after all the council's properties, as well as overseeing regeneration projects. He has attended St Nic's for over thirty years.

Grace is in her early 50s and has worked as a primary school teacher for nearly thirty years. She has held her current position, teaching in the reception stage, for over fifteen years, and has been a member of St Nic's for ten years.

Harriet is in her early 40s and works as a peripatetic music teacher. She has done so for ten years, holding various teaching positions for quite a few years prior to that, and has been involved in St Nic's for eight years. Due to unforeseen circumstances, Harriet was unable to complete the follow-up interview with me, though she did participate in the course, and made a few small comments to me on a number of Sundays following the course about her experiences. As a result, my references to her thoughts and comments, particularly in chapter five, are more limited.

4.3 Findings emerging from the initial interviews

The initial interviews with my participants focused on their experiences of work, exploring how they chose their occupations, how they experience their work from day to day, and whether their perspectives on work are animated by any theological vision. Following the process of coding outlined above in chapter three, I separated the data collected from the interviews into two main categories: experience and meaning. Under the category of experience, I drew out four themes: choice of occupation, reasons for liking work, reasons for disliking work, and the impact of work on life. Under the category of meaning, I drew out three themes: significance and purpose of work, relationship of Christians and work, and the role of St Nic's in helping connect faith and work. Following Harding's suggestions on coding, I have chosen, for the most part, to disregard codes that only appear once. A full list of categories, themes and codes can be found in Appendix A.

4.3.1 Participants' experience of work

The interviews with my participants began by focusing on their experiences of work, before asking them to explore how they made meaning of their work. The

phenomenological approach I have employed makes analysis of experience key. Below, I discuss the findings and themes that emerged under this category.

4.3.1a Choice of occupation

All my participants were asked how they chose their current occupations. Unlike earlier societies, where work was often passed down from one generation to the next, modern society is characterised by the tendency to choose an occupation. Nonetheless, the majority of my participants spoke of ‘falling into’ their current occupations. A number of them provided detailed occupational histories, demonstrating an unpredictable and meandering journey that led them into their current occupations, meaning that the choice of occupation was less active and more circumstantial. For those who described ‘falling into’ their occupations, a number of reasons were given. Grace, a primary school teacher, spoke of taking up her occupation because it fit with the circumstances of life:

I didn't [choose my occupation], really. My husband was a police officer in Durham and I needed to have a job that would keep me in Durham as well... I did an English degree, and so I just thought I would do a PGCE and see where that took me, and I liked the idea of teaching infants...and there didn't seem to be a lot else around at the time.³²⁶

Barbara did a degree in languages, but found that the qualification did not open many doors for employment. Finding herself in a job as a careers information officer, she ran across ‘a couple of books, a couple of little leaflets, one was called “Not a Desk Job” and the other one was called “University Administration”, and I thought, hmm, not quite sure about that, but maybe they're the kind of things I'm more interested in than

³²⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all citations in this chapter are direct quotations from participants recorded during the interviews and small-group sessions.

anything else'. That seemed to push her in a slightly different direction, and after taking on a couple of administrative jobs, she found the job she currently has:

This job came up in a department that friends of mine had studied in, you know, when I was a student, and it was all about teaching, and no finance and no budgets, which sounded like a nice change from what I'd done. And so I took this on, and it just felt like the right place to be and the right job for me to do at the time.

Fred spoke about the fact that he 'kind of stumbled into' his work as well, although for him it was less circumstantial. Coming out of university with an engineering degree, he found his way into the manufacturing sector, in companies that were 'big enough to keep moving'. For Fred, the choice of occupation is more about 'opportunities just [happening]', and he later reached the point where companies began approaching him about jobs, including his most recent job. 'Certainly, I've let things happen, and have decided, is this something I want to do or not?' he says. Fred describes himself as someone who is unable to sit still, and thus actively keeps his eyes open for new opportunities.

In a number of cases, the choice of occupation emerged out of seeing something of interest. Sam grew up in a working class family and worked in a factory after leaving school, something he expected to spend his life doing. However, things changed when he started dating the woman who would become his wife:

I got a job in a factory, and I worked there for eight years, on the shop floor, just machine-operating, and we made cable. And in that time, I met [my wife], and when we were first going out together, she was at university doing teacher training... And she shared a house with three physios. And when I went to visit them, and I talked to these physio students, and I thought, that sounds quite interesting. So...I packed my job at the factory in, I had to do a year of...it's called an access course...designed for older people who want to get into something. So I did that for a year...and I also...volunteered at the hospital as a physio assistant, just to get some experience. And then I applied to universities, and I got one interview, and one offer, which was all I needed. So I got that, and that was now twenty years ago, so I've been a physio for twenty years now.

Similarly for Ted, it was a matter of being confronted by something that seemed interesting that propelled him into his current career:

I didn't really have any clear idea about what I wanted to do as a career. But I went to a careers talk by somebody who worked at the valuation office, and I thought, well, that sounds quite interesting and stuff. So I applied, and got in, and went from there... So that's what I've pursued ever since.

Ruth began her working life as a machinist in a factory, coming from a background where that was the norm. However, she considered art a hobby, and when she was first married, her husband suggested she go to college to pursue an A-level in art, which then led into photography. In her case, pursuing an interest as a career was not on the radar until it was suggested to her.

4.3.1b Reasons for enjoying work

Similar to the previous theme, this theme revealed a lot of consensus between participants. Surprisingly, the work itself did not feature prominently in the reasons my participants gave for why they enjoyed their work, and was mentioned by fewer than half of them. The vast majority, however, spoke of interacting and dealing with people as the thing they most enjoyed about their work. Sam said, 'I like the interaction with people, and I love working with my colleagues.' He noted further that the clinical aspect of his work as a physiotherapist interested him less and less over time – 'After you've seen your tenth knee of the day, it loses its polish a little bit' – and emphasised enjoying the interaction with the variety of people he met throughout the day. Grace, a primary school teacher, enthused about her students:

I love being with the children. I love being with the children. You get so much from them, they're so optimistic, and even when, you know, you're having a bad day, they can be upbeat. They have this amazing capacity, the little ones, to forget the day before. Each day is a new day. They don't carry things on. And it's lovely...you do get this enormous

satisfaction from helping them to develop as little people, you know, and to...to feel worthy.

She went on to say of her colleagues, that 'the girls I work with, the staff, they're fab'.

Positive comments about colleagues were expressed by almost every participant.

Catherine remarked, 'I had a lot of interaction with different people, and I really liked that...yeah, got to know loads of people.' Ted said, 'I have some great colleagues, most of the people I work with are really nice.' Fred added, 'I enjoy being with people...I like to get out and see customers whenever I can.' Deborah expressed that she likes 'working as part of a team', while Mike, a secondary school teacher, said, 'I like having the interaction with the children when they're more engaged.' Barbara noted, 'Maybe I'm a people person, but I do like dealing with people.' With the exception of Grace, none of the participants added any further comment, they simply expressed their enjoyment of regularly working with and interacting with other people.

The second most popular code had to do with creativity and agency, being entrusted with responsibility and freedom in their work. This was expressed in a number of different ways. Deborah spoke of the pleasure she found in putting things into order: 'I really enjoy organising, it makes me really happy, doing anything that involves making things tidy and correct.' Mike, an RE teacher, was given responsibility to make adjustments to the curriculum, and said, 'I like the creative side, making things the way that I like it, rather than being told, you have to do it this way.' He also talked about having a lot of freedom in his job, comparing it to 'working in a factory where it's very mundane and you're doing the exact same thing every day'.³²⁷ Nearly everything Fred, a managing director, said about why he enjoyed his work reflected this responsibility and freedom:

³²⁷ This is an interesting comment, as Mike has never worked in a factory. It is instead an evaluate statement based on observing others, including family members, who did factory work.

I enjoy organising things, I enjoy thinking about where we want to go, I enjoy working with people, problem solving, do a lot of that, like getting involved in engineering-type issues, the application, I love seeing a company being successful, you know, actually sort of moving forward, trying to influence that and move things forward.

Sam spoke about how the responsibility of getting his patients to do what they needed to do was a challenge he enjoyed. He observed,

Physio's all about the compliance. If the patient knows...thinks you know what you're talking about, then they're more likely to do what you do...or what you're asking them to do. So, if they do what you ask them to do, they tend to get better. If they get better, they believe what you do. So it reinforces...it's a self-reinforcing thing. If they don't believe what you're saying, they're not going to comply with you, so they're not going to get better, so that reinforces the fact that you don't know what you're talking about. So credibility in that environment is massive. So the skill...the skills to get your point across, and to pitch it at the right intellectual level as well, you know...you've got someone who's a retired GP, you pitch it at a completely different level to the person who's a factory worker, you know. Not that one's better than the other, but they're different, you know, their priorities are different, their understanding of technical terms. So, you know, you've got to get good at pitching things. So that...the complexities of that interest me more than the actual joints themselves. Because a joint's a joint, you know.

I noted above that less than half of the participants spoke of enjoying their actual work. Those who did, however, spoke of the satisfaction they found in their work.

Deborah, in her support role, said that she liked 'feeling like I've been of use to people'.

After describing his work, Ted noted, 'I kind of feel like I'm, you know, doing something that matters.' He added that his work with the local authority's estates and regeneration work was important because he felt that 'some version of good government and public services matters', and conceived of his work as contributing to 'the good of the people of [the city]'. In her work with young children, Grace spoke of getting 'enormous satisfaction from helping them to develop as little people'.

4.3.1c Reasons for disliking work

Interestingly, whilst participants largely shared similar perspectives on why they enjoyed work, their reasons for disliking work were far more divergent. Of the ten codes that appeared under this theme, only two were identified by more than two of the participants. The first had to do with the burden of expectations. Unsurprising to me, both of my participants who are teachers identified this. Mike said,

I think the difficult things at work is mostly just the sheer workload. Just...there's always...I've had a week off today, and I've worked every day, apart from, like, a couple of days. Not, like, solidly, but I can't just switch off. So I think that's the hardest thing.

Similarly, Grace said she disliked 'the workload. The unrelenting workload... It's a long day, and I have work to do at night as well... It takes over your headspace, because you just spend so much time there that you find it very, very difficult to switch off'.

Ted, who works for a local authority, noted the burden of expectations as well, although the pressure in his workplace came primarily from finances:

There's just too much pressure at the moment... The big worry is that there's so much pressure on council finances, everything is really, really pressured, and it's really difficult, and it's like, where's the money going to come from for this, and it's always like we've just spent loads of money, and we haven't got any, and that's the worry.

Sam felt the burden of expectations from patients who wanted him to cure them:

If people come in because they want to get better, or they want some advice, most of those people, really, they don't need a great deal of input. All they need is some advice... But there are people who just want to come in and you get your magic wand out and cure them, which doesn't happen... That frustrates me a lot because people think they know so much more, that kind of thing... People, as they get older, well, as I say, think that they're never going to get any pain, or think that the pain they get is curable. So...I've got some pain in my back, yeah, you've got a massive amount of degeneration in your back, or whatever. And there's nothing anybody's going to do about it. Oh, there's got to be something! No, there isn't! If I told you that you had terminal cancer, you wouldn't go, there's got to be something done about it, you know, so why do you think that just because it's a non-life threatening condition do you think that you're going to be able to get better from

everything? I mean, lots of people are great... But there's a percentage of people who are just very frustrating. And that group seems to be growing and more demanding.

Deborah, working in research administration in a university, felt frustrated by the demands placed upon her due to her department being understaffed:

I really don't like not being on top of things, not being sure of where I am with everything, I don't like disappointing people I'm working with, not being able to support them to the level they'd like, don't like constantly being, like, complained and yelled at by angry people, don't like it when academics assume that because you're working in central services, you're an idiot.

The only other code under this theme that was mentioned by more than two participants was the repetitiveness and routine of work. Barbara said very simply, 'Some of the time it feels like I'm doing the same old thing over and over again.' Mike, after recounting an average day at work, concluded, 'So, yeah. It's quite...it's quite repetitive.' When discussing what he enjoyed about work, Fred emphasised the freedom and ability to be creative in his role, so it was no surprise to hear him say, 'I don't like routine.'

Beyond this, however, responses were quite varied. Mike and Grace mentioned that they had difficult managers, while Fred and Catherine disliked having to sit behind a desk. Barbara, who works in an administrative role, wondered whether some of her work was pointless: 'Sometimes we get asked to fill in a form about X or Y, and you just think, what's the point of that? Who is ever going to read this thing? ... There are times when you think, why am I doing this?' Catherine works in a scientific field, and disliked the fact that sometimes 'it's a bit like a game', a 'sort of competitiveness' with research and writing papers. Deborah expressed frustration over constant restructures in her research department, which had already seen two in the past two years, and was set for another.

4.3.1d How work changes and affects the participants

Reflecting on how their work had changed or affected them, most of my participants spoke in terms of how their work had affected their character, both positively and negatively. Half of them suggested that work had played a role in building their confidence. Mike said that his work had made him ‘more confident when I’ve got to speak’. Deborah said that in the years she has worked since completing university, she has gained ‘confidence that I was good at something, and I could do something’, as well as being ‘more confident...interacting with people’. Sam noted a big change in confidence moving from a factory into his physiotherapy career:

Going from a manual work environment to a professional environment has changed us enormously. I’m not the same person I was...from a sort of ability to do things point of view. You know, my ability to make decisions, and to think, and to interact with people is massively different to what it was when I first started. Because when I worked at the factory, you used to put your earmuffs on and sit and push buttons. That was it. That was all you did... Now I’ve got to make, on a regular basis, decisions that affect people’s health. And I do it obviously quite well because I’ve never had any significant complaints. So I think that I am a different person.

Ruth, who also left factory work, found herself as an entrepreneur, and noted how that had changed her:

I suppose owning me own business has [changed me]. But...because it’s kind of given me a feeling like, hey, I’ve achieved something... So then I started thinking, like, I can do this. I can do this. So having me own business, and God...God even making it a better business, has made me feel like...I’m like...I’ve done something, instead of just working in a factory. And it’s given me a nice feeling inside.

Barbara mentioned how her work, and in particular her regular interaction with all kinds of people had enabled her to be more tolerant of others:

I think I’ve learned to be more tolerant of other people... You don’t know whether that other person has been having a bad day or whatever when they come into your office. But also, I think, learning to read other people’s characters. So if they come into your office shouting, “Hey, have you read that email!” and you just think, “Yeah, that’s just you,

because you have a bad temper and you just need to...let off steam.” Because I’m used to them and I’ve had that before, I just kind of sit there and let them let off steam and try and make what I feel would be, you know, a helpful comment, or, “Why don’t...have we thought about solving it this way?” or whatever it is, then that might be quite useful. So I think, I hope I’ve...yeah, perhaps more tolerant of other people and their situations.

Fred likewise spoke of becoming more tolerant, but this was less in relation to being understanding of other people and their situations and more about resilience, saying, ‘I can cope with a lot more maybe than when I first started, you know, you get thrown lots of things and you manage it and you deal with it.’ Catherine struggled to articulate how work had changed her, but did mention that after a difficult period of work, ‘people were saying that I was good at perseverance’.

However, not all participants found their characters being shaped in positive ways. Fred found that being in the world of senior management had given him a more cynical perspective:

I think there are times when I’ve become more cynical about things, you know. You have this sort of rose-tinted view of the altruistic nature of directors and senior managers, *et cetera*, and you realise that a lot of them are just out there for themselves... I’ve never been interested in business politics and playing games, *et cetera*, I’ve always just been a straight sort of person, take me or leave me, I don’t care what you do, in that sense. And there are a lot of people who play the politics, and that gets me...it doesn’t madden me, doesn’t irritate me, it’s just depressing, really, that people feel they need to do that.

Mike similarly found himself becoming more irritable and suspicious:

I think [work] has made me more irritable. It’s made me more suspicious of people. I don’t take people at face value anymore... I always think there’s a motive... Like, if someone started being nice to me in the corridor, I’d think there’s something there, because...in my experience it’s been...they’re going to start asking you to do something, or, you know, if someone says they’re there to help, they’re not really there to help. Little things like that, they try to soften you up because they’re trying to get something out of you.

Grace has spent twenty-eight years as a primary school teacher, and reflected on how being in a career she did not really ever plan to be in has changed her. She noted both resentment and a lack of confidence:

[Work] takes proportionally a bigger place in my life than I'd want it to. And therefore I have less time for other people, and I don't feel good about that, you know. I feel that it's taken time away from my family over the years, especially when my children were little, and I resent that.

I think in some ways it has made me feel less confident as a person, because quite often I do feel that I'm in...I'm not in the right place, that there are people who would be far better equipped to teach than I am, people who are practical and organised, and I'm neither of those things, really. And if I had been brave, and more confident as a young person, I could've gone on ahead and sought more qualifications and pursued a different kind of career.

A second factor noted by the majority of my participants was that work imposed on them some form of stress. Deborah noted simply, 'I'm a stressed person. Like, a couple of years ago, I was definitely less stressed. And like the tiredness, and feeling on edge.' She added that the stress had a detrimental effect on how she felt about herself, saying, 'You feel like you're failing at your job, even if you kind of in one way know it's not about yourself, it just makes you feel rubbish about yourself... It's quite demoralising.' Mike observed that 'I can't just switch off', and said that his work shapes his life because it takes up so much time:

It does kind of control a lot of how I live...like, previously, we could've gone away for this [half-term] week. But now, I'm tied here, and if I don't work this afternoon, then it means I'll have to do it on Sunday afternoon. So it's all kind of controlling, I do kind of feel like a big, like, weight...like, weighed down by work... But you can't not do it, because then...if I didn't do the work this week, then it means next week I'll be having to work 'til like midnight or whatever, just to kind of keep up. So it takes over a lot of time. So I guess...it does affect me in a big way, really.

A number of those who experienced stress at work talked about being able to leave it behind when they went home. Fred said, 'I actually think I'm fairly good at leaving it at the door when I come in, I think [my wife] would say that. But yeah, there are times

when you're probably more highly stressed than others, when the problems of work are more considerable, and they can be quite tough.' He suggested that part of the reason he was able to leave the stress at the door was because of a 'firm foundation at home'. Ted similarly discussed the idea of leaving his work behind when he went home, saying, 'I try not to think too much about work, or really, once work is finished, I kind of want to leave it behind.' One of the things that has helped him to do that is cycling to and from work, which he said was a way for him to unwind.³²⁸

Interestingly, none of my participants commented on how their work had affected them spiritually until I asked them. Here again there were a mix of reactions. Mike said, 'I have to pray more.' He also suggested that the difficulties in work drove him to a deeper dependence on God: 'A lot of...bad things happen at work. God seems to solve a lot of...all the problems. So I have to trust in God.' Barbara also noted a deepening prayer life during times of difficulty and stress, and said that when a difficult situation presented itself, 'sometimes just taking a couple of minutes to yourself to kind of calm yourself down, and maybe a quick prayer, you know... That's quite helpful'. This idea was carried through by Harriet as well, who said, 'When times are difficult, or challenging, I always have thrown myself on [God]... And I've always relied on him to uphold me and support me.' Grace articulated in the most depth how the trials of work had deepened her spiritual life:

I know that I wouldn't have got through the last...well fifteen years, really, have been really, really tough at home and at work, and in all that, I'd say my faith has developed, and that I have leaned on God far more than I ever did before. And...yeah, that I need God to get through the work day and to try and make me into the kind of person that I feel I need to be to face the challenges of the day... It's edged me, pushed me closer to God. Yeah.

³²⁸ This was mentioned to me in a separate informal conversation that I did not record.

A couple of the participants noted that work had the opposite effect on their spirituality, however. Deborah initially could not identify how work had changed her spiritually, but then went on to suggest that in stressful times, she became less prayerful. Fred too noted work having detrimental effect on his faith, saying, 'I mean, you're just so deep in it, because it's all day, every day, and you're working, working, working, and then home, family, and what have you. So I think that probably did have a slightly detrimental effect.' He added that in his new position, he expected to be less busy, though, and thus could find more time to try 'to do a bit of reconnecting'.

A final code in this theme had to do with work as a source of motivation, something articulated by two of my participants. Sam noted that work 'gets us up in the morning, keeps us motivated'. He added further,

I think I enjoy getting into work. It keeps...it keeps your brain going, it keeps you motivated. Because you've got to be thinking. As soon as you stop working, your capacity, your physical and mental capacity, slow down. Because you haven't got the day to day decision-making events that make our brain function.

Ted spoke of how work 'gives me something to do' and 'definitely gives me focus'. He added later that 'in a way, [work] does give me a sense of purpose'.

4.3.2 How the participants make meaning of work

My interviews focused both on how my participants experienced their work, and how they made meaning of their work. Having discussed their reflections on their experience of work, I now to turn to look at how they made meaning of their work. Here four themes emerged, as they discussed, first, how they understood the significance and purpose of work, and secondly, what they understood more specifically to be distinctive about Christians in work. Third, they explored how they related their faith and work,

before finally looking at what role the ministry at St Nic's had played in helping them make meaning of their work.

4.3.2a The significance and purpose of work

Participants were asked initially to reflect on the significance and purpose of work. This question elicited a great deal of agreement between the participants. All of them identified an economic purpose to work, the majority of them defining an economic purpose as primary. Mike said, 'From my point of view, [work] is about having money for things, isn't it? You couldn't live in a house, you couldn't have a family, you couldn't have a car, you couldn't have all those things.' Catherine stated, 'I guess the basic thing is to earn money to keep yourself going, so that that's pretty much why we all work, really.' Ruth used the language of provision, and said that work is meant 'to provide for our families', while Deborah very simply said, 'Money', and Ted remarked, 'It's to put bread on the table.' For Sam, the purpose of work was 'primarily to pay me mortgage. That's the reason I go out to work.' He added later, 'We work to earn money. That's why everybody would say...that's what everybody says why they go out to work, to earn money.' Both Grace and Harriet spoke of an economic purpose as well, using the language of independence. Grace said that work 'helps you to feel economically viable, independent', while Harriet said, work is 'to earn money, in order to survive, in order to pay your way, and be independent, and live a free life'.

A second dominant code shared by most of my participants had to do with how work functioned in society, providing a service and accomplishing things that kept society operational. Sam said that in work, 'we develop skills, we provide a service...the webs that we've all weaved mean that, you know, we do one little bit of it,

and somebody else does one little bit of it, and somebody else does another little bit of it'. Deborah chuckled as she said that we worked

in order to make the world – that sounds so stupid! – make the world? If none of us did anything, then nothing would work! We wouldn't have any food or medicine or all the other things that we need in life. You know, it's in order to...yeah, make the world function.

Catherine remarked that people work 'to try and contribute something'. Ruth added that work was about 'doing things to make things better. Because whatever we do, it's to make something better, isn't it? It's...whether you're making parts for cars, it's to build something so that someone can drive it, it's doing in the economy good, it's doing the world good.' For Fred, work is 'there to provide a service, and I think work is about enabling life, enabling life for others... There's obviously basic needs that need to be met, and it doesn't make sense for everybody to do the same thing as everyone else.' Mike likened work to a computer game, saying that it is 'like *The Sims*, and they all have these different jobs for it all to kind of work. Like, if I'm watching TV, then I need to have somebody working in the power station, need to have someone working in the telecommunications office or whatever.' When Barbara talked about the purpose of work, she said succinctly, 'I think in general, we need to get things done.'

A number of the participants talked about work as something we were made to do. Mike discussed the idea that work was something natural, saying,

We seem by nature to have...like, skills for doing things... Yeah, I think we're made to work. And if you look in Genesis it talks about humans gardening, looking after things, so I think it is natural. And like, if you...like, if I did the garden, you have a sense of achievement. When you decorate the lounge, or whatever, you think, "Oh, I did a really good job there." And you kind of look around the corner and see what you've done. So I think...yeah, I think...it does seem to be a natural thing.

Sam mentioned that 'from a biblical perspective, work is what we're made to do.

That's...from the time of the Fall, we're...made to work.' Ruth articulated it as a sort of

command, saying, 'God says in the Bible, you have to work.' From Catherine's perspective, 'I...believe in God and that he gives you gifts and he's put you here to do work in this world... In general, I think...yeah, God doesn't...he wants us to work, that's what I would understand.' Unlike the others, Fred made no reference to God or anything biblical, but said quite simply, 'There's never been a world without work.'

Another code that emerged from the interviews was that work had a communal and relational aspect. Mike raised this idea, although somewhat unclearly, 'I think the idea about community is a God thing, and so if we weren't working, and you were sitting in your house all day doing nothing, then I don't think that's what God wants.' Grace suggested that work 'offers us new dimensions in relationships', while Sam mentioned that 'we go out to work and we interact with other people, we develop a social circle to some degree'. Ruth did not say directly that relationships and community were one of the purposes of work, but she constantly emphasised the way her work brought her into contact with all kinds of people, and evidently found that a significant and meaningful part of her work.

A small number of participants discussed the fact that work had a purpose in relation to God. Grace said, 'I think God wants us to...the God that we read about in the Bible sees work as opportunities for...you know, giving us opportunities to grow, opportunities to be fruitful for him, and to contribute in ways that he wants us to, for the good of others, and for ourselves, you know, and to bring him glory.' After musing on a few ideas about the purpose of work, Ted eventually concluded,

I don't know...the grander purpose of work should be to give glory to God, shouldn't it? But it's quite hard to see how that works out in...in even the most interesting type of job, if it's not something that's...yeah, directly working for the church or in Christian work, or something. That's the clear kind of purpose where you can say, I'm ministering to the people of this parish, or I'm a missionary...there's a clear purpose to spread the gospel. And you can go to the Bible and say, Jesus said do this, and I'm doing it.

But where Ted and Grace theorised about the idea of working for God, Ruth embraced it as her own purpose:

Me purpose has become much bigger now. Me purpose is now...when I go out to work...when I went to do that passport for the lady, it's not the money I'm going down for. Because passports, you don't really make much money off. But if I've touched that lady's heart with Jesus, and give her a hope that she's not sitting there alone, that's me main purpose now. Me business now is...is a purpose for God, do you know what I mean? Lord, you can use this, you use it wherever you please.

A final code that emerged under this category was that work gave a sense of meaning and purpose. Grace said,

We operate better when we have a purpose to our existence, whether we're working in little groups, whether that be in the voluntary sector, or the paid sector, or in whatever sort of area of the planet we are embarking on enterprises together, on joint enterprises, that there...you know, we're engaged in purposeful activity, and that work, to a certain extent, shapes our lives, gives meaning to our lives.

Ted suggested work provided meaning as well, but was less confident about that being a positive thing. He remarked, 'In our society, [work] gives you identity. Whether that's a good thing, I don't know. You know, if somebody says to you, "What do you do?", they mean, "What kind of work do you do?"'

4.3.2b The uniqueness of Christian workers

Participants were asked to reflect on what was unique about Christians in work, and in particular whether they would construe the purpose of work any differently. Four different codes emerged in this category, with broad agreement amongst a majority of participants.

A first code that emerged was attitude and character. Asked what was different about Christian workers, Barbara immediately said, 'Attitude.' Mike remarked, 'Yeah, I think the difference...I think there's a difference because it's your ethos... You might

find a Christian hopefully wouldn't be whinging and complaining about people as much... Yeah, and like back-stabbing and stealing stuff. A Christian shouldn't be doing that sort of thing.' Catherine added that 'you'd hope [a Christian] would be...just have a different attitude, maybe, to things... There's just lots of things, and usually it's just lots of little things, you can tell if someone's a Christian...yeah, don't join in with unkind things or gossip in coffee time, or have different sort of things they like talking about.'

Ted told a story of a woman who had an extremely difficult boss, and yet stayed in her position for three years, and remarked, 'People have said, "Oh yeah, she's fantastic", and how she coped with it, you know, and sort of how that situation helped her to show a kind of godly character, you know, patience and forbearance and things like that.' He used the phrase 'godly character' again later as a marker of what set Christians workers apart. Ruth identified attitude and character as unique as well, noting both how Christians speak differently, and how 'Christians don't get into a strop as easy' because 'when you're living by the fruit of the Spirit, you have patience, you have long-suffering, you have all of those things'. She told a story of her experience as a factory worker prior to becoming a Christian:

Before I was a Christian...our factory went on strike. And because I had a mortgage for [my house], I couldn't go on strike. So they were calling me a scab, and different things. And they were throwing things at me head. So I got [my husband] to train me up boxing, and on the night, I got the girl who was really causing the trouble, and I punched her and blacked her eyes. Now, I wouldn't do that as a Christian! I'd turn the other cheek, and I'd pray about it. I'd let God sort me enemies, you know? *[laughter]* ...So yeah, I've changed a lot since then. So there is a difference, you see? There is a massive difference. *[laughter]*

A second code that was shared by a majority of participants was witness. More than half saw the purpose of a Christian in work to be a witness in both word and example to those with whom work brought them into contact. Ted employed traditional

Christian language when he said, ‘Maybe the role of a Christian in the secular workplace is to be salt and light.’ Sam employed the same language, saying,

[Work] is an avenue to set an example, to be the salt, to be the light, which, as a non-Christian, you don’t have that aspect to your thought-processes... You don’t come into contact with half as many people not working as you do when you do work. So, yeah...and I think it’s a good environment because it’s an environment where you can stand out because you’ve always got that rubbing off on people.

Ruth also used some traditional evangelical language, when she noted, ‘You want it to shine...you want to shine through [your work]...I do hope I shine through, because I do everything as if I was doing it for God.’ Catherine was not certain a Christian would necessarily work differently, but the difference would be seen in other ways:

In terms of the work itself, I’m not sure [you would see a difference], because obviously you have to get on with the work, so in terms of sitting at a computer working, then you’re not going to see much difference in Christians and non-Christians. But when you start mixing, talking stuff through...there’s ways in which you can do it that’s better, that’s more pleasing to God, in a way that non-Christians maybe don’t...wouldn’t...I mean...hmm. I’m getting myself in a muddle now. Hmm. There’s just lots of things, and usually it’s lots of little things, you can tell if someone’s a Christian...yeah, don’t join in with unkind gossip in coffee time, or have different sort of things they like talking about. Yeah...I don’t know.

Grace, again using some more traditional Christian language, said that Christians in work see themselves ‘working as God’s hands and feet, his representatives here on earth’. She suggested further that ‘in an ideal world, the Christian [worker] would be spreading love, joy, peace, gentleness, self-control, all the rest of it’. The idea of witnessing at work was not limited to an example, but a couple participants also stressed the idea of a verbal witness. Sam noted that ‘[work is] an avenue to spread the gospel’ because of the number of people it regularly brought you into contact with.

Mike expressed that ‘God wants me in there to affect other people, so it’s looking for

those little things. So I might pray for...I might pray for having conversations about faith with people...opportunities to talk about my faith with other people.'

A third code emerged as the majority of participants also spoke of work as a means by which to glorify and serve God. When asked what set Christian workers apart from others, Mike commented, 'I think...it's to do with your outlook on life. Like, for non-Christian workers, you're working for you only. Whereas for a Christian, you're looking at making God happy.' Catherine suggested that while there might not be a difference in the basic purpose of work between a Christian and someone else, 'it's just that in addition, when you're a Christian, you have the faith, so that you know that God is there, he sees what you're doing, he knows you inside out, so he knows...so you want to be doing something that is pleasing to God'. Deborah also talked about how the idea of working for God was something additional to work's basic purpose:

Everything that we're doing is supposed to be something that we're doing for God. So, like, our work is supposed...like, we're supposed to be thinking that what we're doing is partly because we're doing it for God as well as for its specific, like, more...you know, I don't know what the word is...basic purpose. Yeah, so, like, I feel like, at least the purpose of trying to do a good job is partly because of that, trying to do whatever you do for God.

Ted mused, with some uncertainty, 'I don't know...the grander purpose of work should be to give glory to God, shouldn't it?' whilst Fred, though acknowledging that some Christians might want to perceive of work in terms of its relation to God, seemed to want to distance himself from that idea:

I say work is work... A Christian might have quite a different view of the purpose of it, I don't know...it might be slightly less monetary... Work is there to keep the society going, to sort of work to provide for your family, all the rest of it. I mean, you can follow the whole sort of, I'm working for the glory of God, so to speak, and you can interpret that in the way you approach your work, but that may in outcome be no different to somebody who's not a Christian... Because it's about an inner fulfilment, I think, and a sense of, yeah, I do want to give my best, whether because I feel that's my Christian duty, or because I just want to

do that. That's more to do with your makeup than anything else, that's kind of what I think.

Half of my participants also spoke of integrity and good work as a defining aspect of Christian workers. Barbara remarked,

I think for me being a Christian and doing a job, to me, I want to do the best job that I can do, with, if you like...with integrity, is a word I think I'd use. That...so, because if you say...if you go into your workplace and say, "I'm a Christian", and then you do a shoddy job, and then if that's the only view that other people would have of a Christian, then that's not really doing much good for yourself, or God, or other Christians. So I think being...you know, doing the best job that you can do...I think that's really important.

Mike, who earlier noted that one of the purposes of work for a Christian was to make God happy, said, 'You make God happy through...I think you can worship God through doing the best job that you can.' Likewise for Ruth, Christian workers 'do [their work] with a bit of quality...to the best standard'. Deborah used the word 'integrity', and said, 'I think integrity is a big part of it... Always doing the best I can at my job.' Sam preferred to use the word 'ethical', but echoed a similar sentiment:

Ethical is what I would describe it as, you know. Never taking liberties, never being dishonest, never being, you know, selfish...those kind of things. Never...trying not to be judgemental, not gossiping...make sure I'm dealing with people in a respectful and honourable way, doing the work I'm paid to do, go the extra mile if it's needed...that kind of thing... For people to be able to say, "Oh, Sam, yeah, he's a man you can trust. He's a man who you can say, 'Do such and such', and yeah, he'll do that, and not complain about it"...and just get on and do what you say you'll do... You know, I would hate to think that anybody thought I didn't pull my weight, or do what was expected of us... I think the one thing that people who are not Christians will spot is fakery. It's you saying one thing and doing another. And this sort of calling yourself a Christian, "Hmm, call yourself a Christian, eh? And you're doing this?" is probably the worst thing that can be thrown at you as a Christian in a work environment. You be a man of your word.

4.3.2c On relating faith and work

Interestingly, where broad consensus was found between participants under the previous theme, that was not at all the case when they were asked about how they personally related their faith and their work. One code that emerged from a majority of the participants was that somehow relating faith and work had to do with ‘living out’ faith in the workplace. This phrase was used by Catherine, who simply said, ‘I would like to be living out my faith while doing [my work].’ However, whilst more than half of my participants discussed the idea of ‘living out’ faith, there were differing opinions on what that might actually mean. For Grace, that meant careful attention to how she lived, because ‘people know that I’m a Christian at work... And that, you know, I really need to be aware of how I represent God to them.’ This was true for Mike as well, who tried to be conscious of how he lived because ‘God wants me in there to affect other people’. Others suggested that faith shaping the practice of work did not necessarily require a conscious focus on connecting those two things. To be a Christian in work, Sam said, ‘be a Christian as a person. What you do is what you do. If you’re a Christian in every other realm of your life, then you’re a Christian [at work].’ This was Fred’s perspective as well:

I like to think, as I said earlier, that the values, that the things I believe are underpinning the way I treat people, the way I treat business...do I want to try and do work and be seen as straight, as somebody who delivers on their promises? Yeah. All of that, I think, is very much integral to the way I would work.

Yet, he went on to say that he did not actively connect his Christian values and beliefs with his practice. He told a story of dealing with an employee who had an altercation with another employee, and how Fred chose to mentor the instigator rather than make him redundant. He commented, ‘I think he deserved a second chance in what he did,’ but then immediately added, ‘I probably don’t think, oh, it is my Christian duty, I must

do this.’ Catherine likewise, after talking about wanting to live out her faith at work, said, ‘I think I haven’t gone into this with the role of...I’m setting out to do this job because I’m a Christian, or because I see that it serves a Christian purpose.’

A second dominant code under this theme was sharing faith. Participants largely articulated that being a Christian in the workplace involved the practice of evangelism. Ruth constantly blurred the line between whether her job was actually photography, or whether it was sharing her testimony and telling people about Jesus. At one point, she owned a studio, and said she would regularly pray,

Lord, bring me business in, because obviously I need the money to survive, and you’re the provider! ...But also give me opportunities and make me be ready... And he just said, “All I want you to do when you’re in the studio, Ruth, is just be ready. Be ready to share my love, be ready to share me, because all you have to do is be ready, and then when the people come in, I’ll bring the right people in, I’ll have prepared their hearts, their ground, and all I’ll do, is I’ll blow, and I’ll blow the seeds into the right parts that’ll get planted, and you won’t even know half the ones that are getting planted into. But that’s what’ll happen.” So, I just used to always say, “Lord, you says who comes in here, they’re your people, and you just make me ready to answer.”

Throughout the interview she gave a number of examples of where she actually engaged in evangelism with those she came into contact with through her work. However, despite most of the participants identifying evangelism as one of the ways to be a Christian at work, the majority either spoke of it as an inappropriate activity in the workplace, or one they hesitated to engage in. Barbara’s perspective was shared by a number of others:

I find it difficult to go into work and say that I’m a Christian, not because I don’t want to say that I’m a Christian, but just because I deal with so many people... Because I think you have to be sensitive to other people, and the workplace is the workplace, and ultimately my employer says to me, “You’ve got a job to get on with and that’s your main priority, and if you want to do other stuff, chat on your own time.” Well, that’s maybe okay, but I think I need to be careful, particularly as a line manager, that I’m not shoving it down people’s throats either.

Fred, also in a management position, likewise said, 'I don't think that's appropriate in my position and responsibility', adding that his faith was 'not something I outwardly advertise too much'. Deborah talked about it not being 'very professional trying to drive [conversations about faith]', adding later,

You're aware of the fact that you're in a situation where there are lots of different...no doubt lots of different religious beliefs, and whilst I think it's totally fine to be open about who you are and what you think, I think to try and...in a sort of workplace, to try and then specifically...I don't know how...evangelise? ...it seems unprofessional to me... I mean, I wouldn't be offended if someone was trying to tell me about their religion, or persuade me to that point of view, I wouldn't be offended, but I would think it'd be a little bit out of place at work.

Others suggested that they would talk about faith if someone else raised the issue.

Catherine, who works in the scientific world, said that in that environment, 'I find it very hard to talk to non-Christians about my faith', and cited some previous examples of encountering hostility and mockery. She added, though, that she wanted to be 'open about it, if people want to talk about it, rather than being more proactive'.

Professionalism was important to Sam too, who said, 'I tend not to, just from a professional point of view, unless it is brought up by somebody else, or it comes up in conversation, to say things [about my faith] to patients.' He did note, however, that when speaking with colleagues about things like the weekend, he would make a point about telling them that he went to church, because it was 'an opportunity to open up an avenue of conversation'.

Participants spoke of relating their faith and their work by prayer, a third code that was brought up by half of them. Some, such as Barbara, spoke of prayer becoming important in more difficult circumstances. Prayer featured more regularly for others, like Mike, who said that 'I usually pray for the day and work, and pray for things that are happening, colleagues'. Grace also spoke of the need to begin each day with prayer:

Before I start the day, I do talk to God about, you know, the kind of challenges, and trying to keep patience, and also bringing before him sometimes those little ones who've got problems, or had some difficulties the day before, or whatever, praying that they will, you know...that God will give me the right things to say to them as well.

Catherine noted the importance of prayer, saying, 'I don't find it difficult to pray. So I do pray a lot, and I do pray through the day.' Harriet spoke a lot of prayer as well, and in particular how a long commute gave her a lot of time to pray.

A number of participants suggested that relating faith and work also had to do with working hard and ethically, or doing good work. Deborah said that as a Christian, she had to be concerned with 'trying to help people the best we can, and not just what is more fun and easier for me'. Part of that meant trying to be 'quite aware of ethics and making sure we're doing things ethically'. She added, 'Sometimes there are issues which seem to me to be ethically dodgy... And I try to stand up for the right thing in those situations where I possibly can.' As a managing director, Fred stated that 'being Christian in the workplace, being a managing director, is fundamentally about being a good managing director'. Although Ted said he found it difficult to think about how he related his faith and work, he did recognise that in his position, 'you do kind of hold a lot of power, which you...which you could use kind of in a bad way to disadvantage other people... So I suppose in those situations, you know...once or twice I've said, well, that will just be wrong to do that.' Both Sam and Deborah talked about the need to 'do the job to the best of your ability', and Ruth mentioned that as a Christian, 'you want to do [your work] to the best standard'.

Finally, two participants mentioned patience as a way their faith informed their work. Deborah said,

One thing is I try really hard not to get annoyed with people, and I try to be forgiving, like...and that's...sometimes it's better than other times. We get some unfair treatment sometimes from academics. But I try to be

forgiving about it and not be angry with them forevermore. I try to be understanding and not just be really annoyed, where I possibly can.

Patience was key for Grace as well, who said that ‘in my job, you need oodles of patience’. She talked about reaching breaking points:

Sometimes you can actually be stretched very, very thinly and it can get to a point in the day when they’re all tired and they all need you at the same time, all twenty children, but you’ve got to impose structure and all the rest of it. But then something goes wrong, somebody’s lost a tooth and at the same time somebody’s hit somebody, somebody else has fallen into the whiteboard and it’s breaking, and you think, “Aaah!” And it’s those moments, like, you know, you find yourself saying a prayer for patience.

4.3.2d How the ministry of St Nic’s shapes perspectives on faith and work

Finally, in an effort to understand how my participants made meaning of their work, I enquired into the role the ministry of St Nic’s up to this point had played in shaping their perspectives on faith and work. Again, I found responses to be quite varied. Unsurprisingly, given that this is an evangelical church, I found a majority of participants mentioned that the preaching and teaching ministry had played a role here. Barbara made a number of comments about this, saying first, ‘I guess occasionally the preaching might be helpful, you know, talking about a particular issue...but obviously that would depend on what it was. And don’t ask me to remember sermons!’ Later, she praised a sermon she had heard once that gave her an idea from someone else’s experience of how to remember God in the midst of a busy work day, and added, ‘You know, theological sermons are all very well and good, but it’s practical when it all comes down to it, isn’t it?’ However, she also then said that this practical idea was ‘not something I managed to replicate for myself’. A few others commented generally on the preaching as well, like Grace, who said that ‘in the vast majority of the teaching...there are things that you can take and hang on to and you can apply to yourself personally,

you know...my antennae pick up on things that I would use more in my personal life or my work life'. Deborah noted that she didn't find that the teaching addressed things 'in a specific kind of way, more in a general kind of way. Because generally, it's applicable to all of life.' Fred responded most enthusiastically when talking about how the teaching at the church shaped his faith and work, even though he was unable to provide any particular examples:

Many times I listen to a sermon and I filter it in a sense of, well what does that...well, you're often talking about things that Jesus would've done or how his approach would've been, or what have you, and you think, you know...I do often think, how does that apply in a management scenario? Because you could argue that Jesus is not a bad manager. A particular strategy, and delivering, and what have you. So I kind of do that sort of a lot, I do look at those parallels, and...it's fascinating, because you do look at some management books and you do look at some theories and you look at the Bible, and there are a lot of parallels.

Though most of the comments on the teaching ministry at St Nic's focused on preaching, a number of people mentioned the teaching material in the church's house groups as well, particularly as they had just finished working through a study called *Fruitfulness on the Frontline*, produced by the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity.³²⁹ Here Deborah was able to point to a number of particular things she found helpful:

[*Fruitfulness on the Frontline*] was really good, really interesting. I liked lots of the things. And we all found...different bits of it we all found really helpful. I think we all found, like, the idea of remembering that what we're doing, even if it's, like, really mundane things, we're doing it for God, really helpful, because, like, the days when you feel unmotivated, a bit miserable and all that, that's like a positive thing to think, and, like, no matter what's going wrong, that's still why we're doing it.

³²⁹ The material in Mark Greene's book, *Fruitfulness on the Frontline*, acts in many ways as the foundation for *Transforming Work*.

Despite having been a life-long member of St Nic's, she later added that with this particular house group study, it was 'the first time I've ever felt like I really specifically thought about work'. However, she was the only one who made specific comments about the material; others again merely spoke of its general helpfulness.

Contrary to this, a number of the participants stated that they did not find the teaching ministry at St Nic's helpful in making connections between faith and work. In Catherine's case, the factor was time, as she remarked, 'I don't feel it has yet, but that's probably just because I've not...I haven't been very many times.' However, her expectation of how the ministry at St Nic's might play a role in that part of her discipleship had nothing to do with the teaching ministry: 'I would hope that through knowing people and getting to know other Christians, it will hopefully help.' Sam likewise had not felt the ministry at the church had helped him with his work, but for a different reason. He said,

I would say, directly, not particularly, no, if I'm honest. I would say St Nic's is a particularly academic church... I think part of the problem is that it's an academic church, that's geared towards catering for the students, there are lots of people in very senior, really quite powerful positions, and you know, in business, and in the world of academia and that kind of stuff... No, I wouldn't say there's been anything specific that I say, oh yeah, that really helped me in me work... Yeah, no.

Ruth also said that she did not feel helped by the ministry, but for her, it was 'because I was doing that well before I was at St Nic's... I feel God had already shown me, so it's more like just an encouragement to say, yeah, Ruth, you're on the right track... It hasn't learned me anything more.' A couple of others felt that a more prescriptive teaching ministry was the wrong approach. Mike suggested that connecting faith and work in a meaningful way had 'more to do with your own spiritual path and your own journey with God...rather than some sort of prescriptive thing that everyone has to go through'.

Grace, reflecting on the house group material, felt that just going through a study was not helpful:

I don't feel like it was very helpful in opening things out, where in our small group, we don't have any problem talking and sharing, and quite mature Christians who reflect quite deeply on things, and don't need to have it hammered over their head with a sledgehammer sort of thing.

Sam commented that things were often too abstract to make help make those practical connections.

The idea that the house groups provided support for Christians in work was raised by a number of participants. Harriet said that being part of a house group meant you knew 'people on a more personal level, so that you feel that if you did have issues or problems you could go to them. I think that's the key thing.' Barbara went so far as to say that, in terms of relating her faith and work, 'the biggest help to me has been my house group'. She continued,

My house group are a brilliant lot. We seem to be able to talk about just about everything. So if you are having a problem, or you want to talk about something...so, for example, we might say, "Oh, I've got a really difficult situation at work, can you just pray for X or Y", and people will pray for it, and they'll take an interest in us without being too nosy or what have you. And that's really good just to have people...people who kind of are interested in you and want to pray for you, that's really nice.

Grace also identified the support of her house group as the primary thing that helped her think about what it meant to be a Christian at work, saying, 'They have been very, very supportive. We've grown quite close over the years, the members of that group have helped me through some tough times at work.'

A final code had to do with 'This Time Tomorrow', an occasional five-minute slot in the main Sunday service where individuals were invited to the front to talk about what they would be doing at that same time tomorrow, and to reflect on the challenges

they would face as Christians, and how they would be prayed for.³³⁰ The previous vicar, Stephen Bellamy, had introduced this slot as a very specific way to bring daily work into focus as an area of discipleship. Despite this, the majority of my participants only suggested they found this ‘interesting’. Sam’s perspective summed up how most thought: ‘[“This Time Tomorrow”] is a really interesting bit, I enjoy listening to other people talk about their work, and it’s quite interesting how they do it. But I wouldn’t say that it really enhanced my experience with how I work.’ Only Ted and Grace suggested there was some value in these interviews. Ted reflected:

I think [the interviews are] really good, actually. So that’s...that’s...that has helped me think, because it’s a very kind of applied thing... The church is acknowledging that, you know, most people, you know, who are there on a Sunday, go off on Monday and do different jobs, be it whether that’s full-time unpaid voluntary work, or whatever. And I think that’s good, listening to...you know, how would I answer that question? ...I think I’ve had those thoughts, “Oh, that’s interesting. I should really think about that”, you know.

Grace added that what she gleaned from ‘This Time Tomorrow’ depended on who was interviewed and ‘how much that particular person who’s being interviewed is prepared to offer up’.

4.4 Evaluation of the findings from the initial interviews

Having presented in detail the results of the initial interviews with my participants, I now turn to a detailed evaluation of the material. Again, I approach this according to the themes of experience and meaning that I emphasised above, first making some evaluative comments about what emerged from the interviews, before assessing these initial findings in terms of my original hypotheses.

³³⁰ ‘This Time Tomorrow’ is a resource originally created by LICC. It has been adopted by quite a few churches across the country. More information about it can be found here: <https://www.licc.org.uk/resources/this-time-tomorrow/>.

4.4.1 *Insights from management theory into the experience of work*

My conversations with my participants focused initially on their experiences of work, exploring how they chose their occupations, what they liked and disliked about their work, and how they felt their work affected them. A number of interesting and significant things emerged here. In the first place, it is significant that, when talking about why they enjoyed their work, less than half of my participants mentioned their actual work as something they enjoyed. Even those like Sam who had gone on to choose a very specific career said that more enjoyment came from other factors besides the actual work. This is not altogether surprising, given that the idea of choosing a career or occupation is a relatively modern idea, and even with that ability to choose available, many people, as my participants illustrate, still end up finding their way into various jobs they never planned to have.

This is one of the reasons management theory has played a significant role in the shaping of work. Management theory is essentially the task of organising work based on assumptions about ‘what makes human beings work, and what makes their work productive’.³³¹ It is a relatively new discipline because the idea of employment itself on the scale we see it today is fairly recent. Early attempts at constructing management theories were ‘characterised by the attempt to make human work productive by eliminating the employees’ responsibility from their own work and concentrating it in the hands of a science-based managerial elite’.³³² This was the approach, for instance, of Frederick Taylor, well-known for his thorough study and systematic overhaul of industrial steelworks in the United States in the early 20th century.³³³ The demand for industrial productivity generated by events like the First World War, as well as the

³³¹ Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 127.

³³² *Ibid.*, 128.

³³³ Cf. Frederick W. Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1911).

dramatic rise in prosperity in this period, initially made Taylor's ideas spread quite rapidly. However, studies began to emerge that focused on what Taylor largely ignored, namely, the human element in work. Various studies were carried out demonstrating that 'the secret to increased productivity was not found in the method...nor in the changes in the working conditions. Rather it was the change in human relations between management and workers'.³³⁴ When work was designed with the social and psychological needs of the workers in mind, most significantly by giving them a participatory role in the design, people simply became better workers.³³⁵ This new human relations approach, the discovery that 'the key to productivity is in the social integration of the work force',³³⁶ has played a profound roll in subsequent management theory. As Hardy summarises,

People come to the workplace not only with economic needs – the only needs Taylor officially recognised – but with psychological needs as well: needs for social acceptance, self-esteem, and a sense of control and autonomy. When the human relations at work are adjusted to meet those needs, people will find personal fulfilment at work and put forth greater effort, resulting in higher productivity.³³⁷

This is especially true in a context where the majority of people do not choose specific careers, but end up, like my participants, finding themselves in various different jobs.

There is a danger here, however, in the appeal to the psychological factors of work, because in instances where there are problems with work, management tends to perceive the fault being with the employees, rather than the organisational structure, and thus exercise some degree of psychological manipulation over their employees in an effort to increase their productivity.³³⁸ Whilst appealing to the humanity of their

³³⁴ Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 144.

³³⁵ Cf. the 'Hawthorne Experiment' of 1927-1932, which experimented with changes in working conditions amongst electrical workers in Chicago, as detailed in Elton Mayo, *The Human Problem of an Industrial Civilization* (Boston: Harvard Business School, 1933).

³³⁶ Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 144.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 148-149. Cf. Chris Argyris, *Personality and Organization* (New York: Harper, 1957).

employees, managers are nonetheless concerned with exercising control over these employees in a way that, in the end, benefits the company and its goals. Peter Drucker calls this ‘enlightened psychological despotism’.³³⁹ Industrial psychologists, he says, ‘use terms like “self-fulfillment”, “creativity”, and the “whole man”. But what they talk and write about is control through psychological manipulation’.³⁴⁰ Drucker, whose thought is highly influential in current management theory, argues instead that workers must be made responsible for their own work, using their ‘knowledge and experience in the one area where [*they*] are the expert’.³⁴¹ Hardy summarises Drucker’s point:

[Workers] must be involved in designing their own jobs. Not because such involvement will satisfy their ego need for control, making them happier and thus more productive – although it might – but because the workers possess a significant pool of knowledge and expertise in matters pertaining to their own jobs. They are often in the best position to determine exactly how their components of work are best carried out.³⁴²

The key is responsibility, and redesigning organisations to allow each employee to exercise a great deal of responsibility. Drucker would see organisations

in which every man sees himself as a “manager” and accepts for himself the full burden of what is basically managerial responsibility: responsibility for his own job and work group, for his contribution to the performance and results of the entire organisation, and for the social task of the work community.³⁴³

This means that the disconnect between planning and doing, so central to scientific analyses of work, must be eradicated. ‘Planner and doer’, Drucker writes, ‘need to be united in the same person. They cannot be divorced – or else planning will cease to be effective and will indeed become a threat to performance’.³⁴⁴

³³⁹ Peter F. Drucker, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 243.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 243.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 267, 273.

³⁴² Hardy *The Fabric of This World*, 164.

³⁴³ Drucker, *Management*, 284.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 271.

Clearly, much more could be said about this, but my point is that these insights from management theory shed light on some of the experiences of my participants. Those few participants who said that they enjoyed their specific work were the ones who were overall given more responsibility and freedom in their jobs, and a chance to exercise their creativity. With the exception of Ruth, who is self-employed, that demonstrates that these participants work in contexts that are shaped less by historic management theories emphasising control and efficiency, and increasingly by more human-centred theories. However, the disclosures of what my participants disliked about their work reveals that this is not entirely the case yet. The majority spoke of feeling burdened by expectations, in large part imposed by the need for increased efficiency with less resources. In this time of austerity, it was unsurprising to hear Deborah and Ted, working for a university and a local authority, respectively, express this most clearly, as they regularly dealt with budget cuts. Deborah, additionally, had been subject to two restructures in less than two years, as the department attempted to increase its efficiency, but at no point was she invited to participate in the organisational restructure. She simply threw up her hands and remarked, ‘I don’t know what’s going to happen’, going on to say that she was considering leaving her job. The element of managerial control was expressed most clearly by the participants who were teachers. Both talked about having difficult managers, and both were regularly overwhelmed with their workload. The burden placed on teachers is regularly in the news, and more and more teachers are leaving the profession for this reason. If anything, this demonstrates a regression in management theory, as the government continually imposes more control in an effort to meet the demands of an economic society for human utility.³⁴⁵ It was

³⁴⁵ Cf. e.g., Zoe Williams, ‘The entire schools inspection culture is the problem’, *The Guardian* online, 19 Oct 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/19/schools-inspection-ofsted-rachel-de-souza>.

particularly interesting to hear Fred discuss management theory, as a managing director. He stressed leaving a previous job and taking up his current position because he was drawn to a company that was more ‘people-centred’, yet asserted quite strongly in a number of instances that his primary responsibility was to the company, and seeking its profitability and growth, which helpfully illustrates that tension in shifting management theories.

That leads me to the second interesting thing that emerged, which is that the majority of my participants suggested that what they liked most about work was the interaction it gave them with other people, and particularly with colleagues. The work itself, the working environment, and other such factors were secondary to this, suggesting that the most important element in my participants’ work was the social element. Sociological studies of work have researched the significance of workplace relationships, and have found, according to Randy Hodson, that ‘there is substantial evidence that co-worker relations are crucial for the quality of work life’.³⁴⁶ Of particular importance is the element of solidarity amongst colleagues that arises from shared experiences at work,³⁴⁷ each of which binds them together more closely, or alienates them in the case of conflict between employees. Hodson conducted an ethnographic study to assess the impact of co-worker relationships on good work, and found that ‘the effects of co-worker relations on job satisfaction and on good relations with management are substantial, often equalling or exceeding in magnitude those of job characteristics’.³⁴⁸ Very simply, many of the trials and ills of work can be compensated for by working alongside people you get along with. As Hodson notes,

³⁴⁶ Randy Hodson, ‘Group Relations at Work: Solidarity, Conflict, and Relations with Management’, *Work and Occupations* 24/4 (November 1997): 431.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 430.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 448.

significantly, this ‘solidarity also can help mitigate feelings of alienation that arise from meaningless work’.³⁴⁹ I will return to this point in the following section.

Third, my participants tended to convey the idea that they enjoyed more about their work more than they disliked about it, but I want to argue that the reality here about whether they had a positive experience of work is more complicated. I suggest this for two reasons: first, because as noted above, the dominant reason my participants gave for enjoying their work was the social element of work; second, because in discussions of how their work affected them, my participants by and large suggested that work affected them negatively, with discussions of the stress and pressures of work being given primacy in their reflections on work’s effect on their lives. This is what makes the analysis of my participants’ experience of work valuable, as it reveals things they either might not communicate, or might not even be aware of. I will go on to suggest below that the overall less positive experience of work that I believe emerges from my analysis above shapes the meaning they ascribe to their work.

4.4.2 The separation of sacred and secular and the meaning of work

I have demonstrated above that whilst there are aspects of the working experience my participants enjoyed, it would be more complicated to say that their overall experience of work was positive. At best, I think the evidence suggests a more general ambivalence towards work, with one or two exceptions. I want to argue that these experiences shape the way they make meaning of their work, which is the focus I now turn to.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 430. It is worth noting that while colleagues can help mitigate some of the fallen nature of work, they can also contribute to it, and certainly some of the experiences of my participants illustrate that, even if they are generally positive about collegiality in the workplace.

Living as we do in a society dominated by a market economy, it was not surprising to find all the participants articulating an economic perspective on the meaning of work. Whatever other meanings different participants would ascribe to work, all of them identified that one of the main purposes of work was to earn a living. On its own, this seems natural and logical. However, given what I have noted above about the more generally ambivalent feelings about work articulated by my participants, and that my participants largely *theorised* about the purpose of work, I suggest that this presents something more significant. In the 1970s, Jacques Ellul powerfully argued that work in modern society largely has no meaning. He wrote,

Our age is characterised by non-meaning. All psycho-sociologists agree ultimately that the work we do is marked by this fault. It makes no sense. It has no obvious value of its own. We have on the one side the dividing up of tasks, monotony, and the production of articles of no evident utility, while on the other side we find a break with matter, then with the machine, then a break between the function of thought and that of execution, the growth of an enormous labour organisation and bureaucracy, a mass of paperwork, often with no recognisable content, for every conceivable function, and finally the wastage of giving complex and highly advanced training to men who are then entrusted with jobs far below their competence. These things, and many others, contribute to the fact that work has no meaning in modern society.³⁵⁰

Whilst Ellul might be overstating the case, this does then raise a question: do my participants actually believe there is meaning to their work, or are they simply conditioned by cultural perspectives on work to almost unconsciously articulate a particular understanding of the meaning of work? I think this is a difficult question to answer. Certainly in the case of the two teachers, Mike and Grace, they believe quite strongly that their work has meaning, insofar as they are shaping – a word they both used – the children they teach. That said, it is significant that they both said they also see a sharp distinction between what *they* perceive their work to be for, and what the

³⁵⁰ Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 461.

government perceives the purpose of their work to be. Others such as Barbara were far less certain about what their work was actually for; whilst aware her work provided a service of some sort, she said a number of times that she felt she was occasionally doing things that had no purpose. Catherine almost deliberately rejected the meaning of her work, stating a number of times that she did it merely because it interested her. So for my participants to all suggest that the purpose of work is to make money or ‘pay my mortgage’, as Sam said, I think betrays a deep sense of the lack of meaning in work. There is a resonance here with the cultural perception of work that being remunerated for the tasks one performs helps to mitigate the pain of being required to work for survival.³⁵¹

One of the fundamental critiques of modern work, articulated in part by Ellul above, is that the worker is profoundly disconnected from the end result of their work. This, of course, was Marx’s critique, as discussed above in chapter two. Whilst working conditions have changed dramatically since industrial times, it remains the case that, no matter how much progress has been made in terms of management theory, Western society remains thoroughly capitalistic and devoted to progress, in particular, economically. Amongst other things, this means work is still characterised by a division of labour and a concern for efficiency. That these remain primary concerns of work in modern society is evidenced, I believe, by what my participants said about their work. Many of them talked about work providing a service for broader society, but were unable to give an examples of how that purpose worked out practically, indicating that there is a cultural narrative in play about the nature of work that they have adopted.

³⁵¹ Though, of course, it has been demonstrated that job satisfaction cannot be easily linked to salary. See, for instance, Mark Easton, ‘Vicar or publican – which jobs make you happy?’, *BBC News*, 20 March 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-26671221>. Easton discusses a report by the Legatum Institute which ranks various jobs in order of reported satisfaction, the results demonstrating very clearly that salary cannot be used as a measure of job satisfaction. Interestingly, only one of my participants complained about their pay.

Thus, there remains a prevailing sense of alienation from work for most of my participants,³⁵² and perhaps the efforts of modern management theory to reshape work can only provide a partial relief from that alienation.

The general absence of meaning in work would perhaps indicate that Christians would have an openness to a theological vision of work. But as I said in the previous chapter, I expected instead that participants would be unable to articulate any particular theological perspective on work, and in discussing the significance and purpose of work, this became clear. A couple of participants suggested that God wanted us to work, but could not substantiate that claim. Similarly, a number of participants stated that bringing glory to God was one of the purposes of work, but again, could not say any further what that actually meant. It was noted too that a couple of my participants connected the origins of work with the Fall.³⁵³ It is significant that most of the participants did not reflect theologically on work until I asked them directly, and even then, their reflections were predominantly theoretical, and largely did not contain any examples from their own practice of work, with the exception of a number of them saying they sometimes pray for their work.

At the beginning of *Transforming Work*, Mark Greene argues that Christianity (and evangelical Christianity in particular) is marked by a sharp distinction between sacred and secular. That is, life is broadly divided into elements of private, spiritual life, and public life,³⁵⁴ and that faith often fails to inform or give shape to the latter. It is this

³⁵² I would argue that this is not true of Ruth, because she oversees the process of photography from beginning to end. Additionally, her work is not essential for the economic well-being of her family, but provides a supplementary income to her husband's wage. I would suggest that Fred is something of exception here too, because of his senior position. Not only does this give him a considerable amount of freedom, but he also oversees an entire production process. Further, whilst not disclosing his salary, it is clear that his income is quite substantial, and thus he does not feel the financial necessity of work as acutely as others.

³⁵³ It is significant that in some modern, secular discussions of work, reference is sometimes made to the curse in Genesis 3 as the origin of work. See, for instance, 'Imagine...a world without work', *New Humanist*, 5 January 2015, <https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/4810/imagine-a-world-without-work>.

³⁵⁴ 'The Great Divide'.

division that *Transforming Work* seeks to address and redress in the world of work; Greene laments the way the church in particular has failed to engage the working lives of its parishioners. This diagnosis of the separation between secular and sacred is hardly new, of course, and theologians have recognised the dualistic nature of Protestantism for a long time. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's insight here was trenchant, as he recognised in ethical thought the underlying conception 'of a juxtaposition and conflict of two spheres, the one divine, holy, supernatural and Christian, and the other worldly, profane, natural, and un-Christian'.³⁵⁵ He continued:

The division of total reality into a sacred and a profane sphere, a Christian and a secular sphere, creates the possibility of existence in a single one of these spheres, a spiritual existence which has no part in secular existence, and a secular existence which can claim autonomy for itself and can exercise this right of autonomy in its dealings with the spiritual sphere... So long as Christ and the world are conceived as two opposing and mutually repellent spheres, man will be left in the following dilemma: he abandons reality as a whole, and places himself in one or other of the two spheres. He seeks Christ without the world, or he seeks the world without Christ. In either case he is deceiving himself. Or else he tries to stand in both spaces at once and thereby becomes the man of eternal conflict.³⁵⁶

The renowned missiologist, Lesslie Newbigin, returning to England after decades in India as a missionary, likewise recognised the profoundly individualistic shape of Western Christianity. Indeed, he argued, the whole question of how the gospel related to culture reflected this:

The question... is sometimes discussed as though it were a matter of the meeting of two quite separate things: a disembodied message and a historically conditioned pattern of social life. And the reason why this dualism is present is, one must suggest, that in fact the gospel has been reduced to a matter of individual belief and conduct as though this could be separated from the shared life of society.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 196.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 196-197.

³⁵⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 188.

Evangelicalism in today's secular society continues to have a complicated relationship with public life, and there remain areas of life and society upon which faith and theology are not naturally or typically brought to bear, even if a strong social conscience has begun to emerge within the movement in recent decades. Historically, evangelicals played a significant role in social reform, being at the forefront of overturning the slave trade, bettering conditions in factories and mines, and improving schools, work that was led by groups like the Clapham Sect and Shaftesbury Society.³⁵⁸ Yet by the early 20th century, 'it had [become] a big temptation for English evangelicals to focus on their own holiness rather than social righteousness', and they operated with the conviction that 'what God really cared about was hearts and souls, not bodies'.³⁵⁹ This individualistic focus was cultivated in reaction to Christianity's increasing marginalisation in Britain, but also in reaction to liberalism and Anglo-Catholicism. Evangelicals saw the former more concerned with fighting 'the social ills of their day', which they viewed as just 'a watered down version of the true, heaven-and-hell gospel...more palatable than preaching sin and salvation',³⁶⁰ and were concerned with the way the latter 'supported collectivist solutions to social problems'.³⁶¹ This began to reshape evangelical approaches to life in the world to the point where the only thing that mattered was evangelism, because 'the ship of society was sinking, and the Christian's task was to rescue people, not fix the ship'.³⁶² The question of the church's role in engaging social issues and the world more generally is a tension that in many ways still besets evangelicalism today. More conservative evangelicals continue to be

³⁵⁸ Martin, *Gospel People*, 136.

³⁵⁹ Alister Chapman, *Godly Ambition: John Stott and the Evangelical Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 114.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁶¹ Martin, *Gospel People*, 137.

³⁶² Chapman, *Godly Ambition*, 115.

uncomfortable with any notion of mission that does not prioritise evangelism,³⁶³ and retain a general ambivalence towards any other forms of engagement with the world.³⁶⁴ At the same time, there is a movement, particularly in the last seventy years, of evangelicals who have been involved in the creation of projects that address issues like poverty and social inequality, a new vision that ‘[blurs] the distinction between evangelism and social outreach’.³⁶⁵ These new social concerns have emerged particularly among more open evangelicals, which has resulted in some quarters in a gradual move away from evangelism as an aspect of mission, at least in practice.

John Stott has, for a long time, stood as a unique figure amongst evangelicals in this country in regard to his views on engagement with the world. Initially, he represented a challenge to these two approaches, calling for social action and evangelism to function as a sort of partnership, and articulating a more holistic vision of mission.³⁶⁶ More significantly, however, Stott would later expand his view of mission to include ‘the intersection of gospel and society, the question of how to relate Christianity to the modern world’, taking an arguably pioneering approach (or indeed, leading the recovery of such an approach) to discipleship in all areas of life that, to date, has not particularly grabbed the imaginations of evangelicals more generally.³⁶⁷ What makes Stott’s vision fairly unique amongst evangelicals, particularly in the United Kingdom, is

³⁶³ Cf. John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 25-26, where he discusses the relationship between social justice initiatives and evangelism. This was addressed more recently by Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert in their book, *What is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011). Though written by American authors, the book made quite an impact here, particularly in more conservative evangelical circles here in the UK, and DeYoung was even invited to speak at a number of conferences on the subject.

³⁶⁴ Cf. chapter one, and my narrative of my experiences in a conservative evangelical church, which reflects this mentality.

³⁶⁵ Mathew Guest, *Evangelical Identity and Contemporary Culture: A Congregational Study in Innovation* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 38.

³⁶⁶ Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 27-28.

³⁶⁷ Chapman, *Godly Ambition*, 113. This conviction is what led Stott to found the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity in 1982. It was interesting to note in conversation with LICC that they themselves felt this tension, and remarked that they were unsure of where exactly they fit as an organisation in the spectrum of evangelicalism.

the distinct theological underpinning that shapes this vision. Broadly, his approach is rooted in a more robust doctrine of creation³⁶⁸ that recognises Christ's lordship over all of life,³⁶⁹ and the role of human responsibility both in bearing witness to the created order and in seeking its redemption where sin has distorted that order.³⁷⁰ Gordon Spykman argues that 'in many wings of evangelical Christianity a heavy emphasis on second-article theology tends to crowd out serious reflection on the first article. In its passionate concern to proclaim Jesus Christ as Savior, it sidelines a fundamental concern with the work of God the Father in creation'.³⁷¹ This lack of attention to a doctrine of creation means that a focus on the 'normative environment for our life together in this world' that 'defines our manifold callings' is obscured,³⁷² thus affecting how we conceive of what faithfulness looks like in every area of life. This affects a theological approach to work in two important ways. In the first place, as I demonstrated in chapter two, so much of the theology of work has a protological foundation, and the various thinkers who have contributed to constructing a theology of work have recognised not only that work is something good that humanity was designed for, but that within the created order is also embedded a *structure* for good work. As a result, without this foundation, a vision for the faithful practice of work will be limited in its horizons. In the second place, a lack of attention to the created structure of work also blinds us to the ways in which sin has distorted work. Again, as I noted in chapter two, theologies of work have largely developed in response to the problem of work, and

³⁶⁸ Martin, *Gospel People*, 136.

³⁶⁹ Stott's thinking here, whether consciously or otherwise, has some resonance with the emphases of the Reformed tradition, and figures such as Abraham Kuyper, who I have given attention to in chapter two. Stott's heirs at LICC explicitly acknowledge their indebtedness to this tradition, as I noted above.

³⁷⁰ For a thorough treatment of how a robust doctrine of creation should give shape to Christian engagement with the world, see Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

³⁷¹ Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 176.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 178.

the Reformed tradition in particular emphasises that this a deeply rooted structural distortion. Without appropriating a robust doctrine of creation, we will not be able to see that structural distortion for what it is, and responses to the problem of work will only ever address the symptoms.

That the majority of evangelicals since Stott's time have become far more involved in social issues again is without doubt, and can be exemplified by the proliferation of charities attempting to address issues of poverty, social inequality, and environmentalism.³⁷³ However, these emphases largely spring from different theological bases, namely a focus on incarnation, which emphasises the idea of presence³⁷⁴ and prioritises the model of Jesus being with the poor and the oppressed, and kingdom, which emphasises the idea of progress towards an ideal society of justice.³⁷⁵ Whilst these projects and charities are certainly important and laudable efforts, they also more generally attend to particular symptoms of systemic problems. For my purposes here, I would suggest that, more significantly, these emphases mean that the focus of evangelical public witness remains narrower than someone like Stott envisioned. What's more, attending to works of justice and mercy enables the connection of faith and public life to be left 'out there', in a realm that is somewhat detached from the practices of daily life. Without a theological foundation rooted in

³⁷³ Guest, *Evangelical Identity*, 38-40. St Nic's itself operates a charity called the Gateway World Shop, which is described as 'a Christian alternative retailing company whose aim is to address poverty and injustice in the third world through its work as a fair trader.' Their stated aim is to 'act as a "gateway" between the market place and church, believing that God is particularly concerned about poverty and injustice, calling us to bring His love and justice to a needy world' ('Gateway World Shop: Trading for Justice', *St Nicholas' Church, Durham*, accessed 25 Sept 2017, http://www.stnics.org.uk/what_we_do/gateway/).

³⁷⁴ Cf. Alan Billings, *Making God Possible: The Task of Ordained Ministry Present and Future* (London: SPCK, 2010), 118-120. Billings discusses the emergence of this incarnational view of mission amongst liberal catholics, but 'incarnational ministry' has now become a very common way of speaking about mission across the spectrum of traditions in the Church of England. See, for instance, Graham Cray (ed.), *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

³⁷⁵ Guest, *Evangelical Identity*, 38-39.

creation, the scope of life that faith informs and gives shape to remains narrow, and further, where it does attempt to speak to public life, its engagement is more limited. The gap between sacred and secular continues to exist.

With regards to my participants, what I am arguing, based on the evidence presented above, is that they largely demonstrate this separation between sacred and secular, and that their faith remains predominantly concerned with their personal spirituality. That is, it seems more natural for them to consider God in relation to their inner life – dealing with stress and challenges, for example – and what their faith means for how they relate to their colleagues, than it does for them to consider how they might be called to challenge the accepted practices of their workplaces or the broader structures that shape work in the modern world. I think this evidences the ways in which they have been formed by the culture and practices of more traditional evangelicalism. This is demonstrated further by the fact that when I asked them about how they related their faith and their work, nearly all of them responded by suggesting that the relation of faith and work was primarily about evangelism in the workplace, as well as by the way a number of them stressed that Christians do not perform their actual work any differently to their colleagues who do not identify as Christians. I have mentioned above that St Nic's is somewhat unique in more traditional evangelical circles for its recent focus on 'all of life' discipleship, and whilst I believe this is a commendable effort, it must be noted that participants largely suggested that efforts to bring things like work into focus were merely 'interesting'. This again emphasises the power of practices in formation.³⁷⁶ Though it would require an empirical study in its own right, I believe it remains the case that, despite this intentional focus in some aspects of the ministry at St Nic's, the vast majority of the teaching and content at the main Sunday service, which I

³⁷⁶ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 83.

regularly attended for my three years in Durham, and which most of my participants regularly attend, still concentrates primarily on aspects of personal faith and spirituality, with occasional attention given to matters of justice, reflecting the pattern of traditional evangelicalism. This indicates an absence of some of the necessary theological underpinnings that would enable my participants to broaden the horizons of how faith might shape the practices of daily life. As it is, dominant emphases and practices embedded in the culture of the church continue to act as ‘rituals and routines that train our bodies, as it were, to react automatically in certain situations and environments’,³⁷⁷ and are so powerful that an occasional emphasis on something like work in a sermon or ‘This Time Tomorrow’ is insufficient to reshape the affective and unconscious, particularly when the liturgical life of the church is not intentionally countering the liturgical formation of the world of work. I will return to this in more detail in chapter six.

4.5 Conclusion

I have given considerable attention here to the data collected in the initial interviews with my participants, and through an analysis of their experience of work and their articulation of the meaning of work, have demonstrated that, whilst there are things they enjoy about their work, they are not particularly positive about work overall, and struggle to find meaning in their work. Further, they are unable to conceive of work in any theological sense, and largely consider the relationship of their faith and work to be limited to the embodiment of a certain type of character and the practice of evangelism in the workplace. This, I believe, confirms my argument in chapter three, that participants are formed for their work predominantly by the cultural habits and

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 82.

practices of work, and that at present, St Nic's, in its endeavours to disciple its parishioners for the faithful practice of work, must go further if it is to help provide the necessary counter-formation to these 'secular liturgies'.³⁷⁸ It now remains to demonstrate whether a resource like *Transforming Work* can play a significant role in reshaping the way Christians both think about and practice their work.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 88.

5. Results and findings, part 2: An analysis and evaluation of the action research and follow-up interviews

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter considered the data that was collected during the initial interviews, essentially concluding that my participants did not have an overly positive experience of work, and that as a result they struggled to find meaning in their work. I demonstrated further that most of the participants lacked any particular theological vision of work, and instead demonstrated quite a sharp divide between their personal spiritual lives and their public life.³⁷⁹ In what follows, I turn to analyse the data that emerged as participants encountered a developed theological vision of work. My goal, as stated above, was to assess how an encounter with a theological vision of work would reshape how my participants thought about and made meaning of their work, and reorient how they practiced their work, and in doing so, to consider the role of the church in facilitating this change. Therefore, my attention in what follows centres primarily on the data collected during the follow-up interviews, although where it provides clarification or further insights, I include references from the eight sessions of *Transforming Work*.

5.2 Participants' reflections on their experience of the course

Before I turn to analysing how my participants responded to an encounter with a theological vision of work, I first make some comments on their feedback on the experience of the course itself, doing so in order to set the stage for what follows. For

³⁷⁹ Although, indeed, this is quite a significant theological perspective in its own right.

the most part, I am not going to quote participants here, but merely point out their responses to the course. Quite a few general comments were made initially, with participants suggesting the course was inspiring, provided a lot to think and reflect on, and was something they ‘got a lot out of’. When asked what they liked about the course, every participant said they enjoyed the opportunity to share experiences and perspectives, and to hear from others about their respective work, and felt that this was the most valuable part of the course. A couple of participants also mentioned that they found the ‘6Ms’ framework to be helpful. Regarding what participants disliked about the course, half mentioned that they did not enjoy the video sessions, which featured the five authors of the course sitting around a table discussing various topics each week. Participants said these scripted sessions felt false, with one saying, ‘They seemed like very...like, really brilliant Christians, who are brilliant and doing amazing stuff, and they’re fantastic...I have this whole faith business totally sorted.’ Another of the participants suggested that the experiences of the ‘Southern, middle-class’ presenters were too far removed from his experiences of work, while another commented that the material was sometimes too idealised.

I will return to how my participants evaluated their experience of the course, because I think that this will help make sense of some of the findings that emerged in the follow-up interviews.

5.3 Findings emerging from the follow-up interviews

In what follows, I conduct an analysis of the follow-up interviews. My aim is to explore how an encounter with a theological vision of work reshapes how my participants think about and practice their work. Where relevant, I include data collected during the action research phase. I have grouped the material below into four categories

that emerged during the interviews: experience of work during the course, commitments to further change, the purpose of work, and how the church can support Christians in work. First, I report on the findings, and second, I turn to a detailed analysis and interpretation of those findings, before determining the relationship of the results with my initial hypotheses, and considering, in chapter six, how the church might respond and renew its work of discipleship amongst Christians in work.

5.3.1 Participants' experience of work during the course

Part of my interviews with the participants focused on how they experienced their work during the course, because my concern was to assess how an encounter with a theological vision of work reshaped that experience, and their understanding of their work. Three themes emerged clearly here. Participants suggested there were changes in action, and changes in perspective, or they suggested there was no particular change.

5.3.1a Changes in action

By its nature, *Transforming Work* is concerned to suggest a lot of different practical ways in which Christians can more faithfully practice their work, so it was unsurprising to hear participants suggest various actions they were attempting to put into practice at work. Five participants made general comments about changing how they lived whilst at work, reflecting one of the course's general emphasis on the Christian life being an embodied life of witness. Barbara came away recognising that, 'as a Christian, you know you are kind of God's representative in the workplace'.³⁸⁰ She employed more traditional Christian language when she added, 'that we are to be salt

³⁸⁰ As in the previous chapter, unless otherwise noted, all citations in this chapter are direct quotations from participants recorded during the interviews and small-group sessions.

and light'. Catherine noted that 'the whole point of the course is...to bring out...make you aware of how to...how to live as a Christian in the workplace in lots of different ways', and suggested that for her, that might include 'thinking a bit more carefully about how I say things, and what I say'. Ruth felt that the 6Ms framework mirrored the fruits of the Spirit, and said that the course for her 'rekindled remembering to use [the fruits of] the Spirit'. Wanting to help her focus on practicing modelling godly character, Deborah wrote down the fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 5, and put it on 'an electronic post-it note on my desktop at work. And that's really nice because it's always there, and sometimes I'm just like, right, remember to do these things.' Sam found his work situation change quite significantly midway through the course, and he began working in one location all week instead of moving between different locations each day. He discussed how that forced him to reconsider his conduct at work:

The thing there is that people see you on a more regular basis, they also see your foibles on a regular basis. So, you know, you set yourself up to be, you know...you sort of...when people know you're a Christian, you nail your colours to the mast, you have a bad day, and you're grumbling or you're complaining, or whatever, then everybody knows about it, you know. So, it's...I suppose they see you more realistically in a week than if they just see you once, you know, every time. But...yeah. So, you've got to be more thoughtful about what you do. But I try...you try not to be negative, but it's difficult when things are...when things get on your nerves. But that's prayer, you know, being a bit more conscious about who you are and what you represent when you're in the workplace.

For the most part, this mirrors the sort of things that emerged during the sessions as well. My participants generally responded well and enthusiastically to discussions about the attitude and character of Christians in the workplace, and in the first session, most spoke of learning to be more attentive to their character as Christians in the workplace as one the primary things they wanted to take from the course.

Prayer also was a focus of action for my participants. Mike, a teacher, said that as the course progressed, he had 'been doing things like praying for work more,

praying, like...in my classroom before people come in', and in session three, recounted an instance where he had prayed for peace in a classroom before the students came in, with the result that 'it was the most calm class ever'. He added, 'That's great that God is bothered to help me in that class just for an hour or so.' Grace likewise talked about the need to 'pray about situations and put them before God'. She continued:

I think it's made me realise that in the past couple of months, especially that were so stressful...I mean, before I always used to set aside my sort of quiet time with God at night, but it's that old adage, you know, it's often hung up in peoples' homes about rushing into the day, and I don't have time to pray and then it unravels, you know, and having the day hemmed in with prayer, that sort of thing. And now I do...I do know that if I don't sit down and set the day out before God in the morning, then quite often things will...will go wrong.

Dealing with a more difficult work context had driven her to pray more. Ted also suggested he had been praying more, and even said, 'I do think there have been little answers to prayer at work, which wouldn't have happened if I hadn't been praying about it.' He continued to see challenges that lay ahead in his work, noting that there were 'probably still a few unresolved things out there, you know, that probably need a bit more praying about'. During session one, after talking about being encouraged by the message 'that God does care about your work', he added that 'it makes sense to pray about all the detail of your work' instead of just the difficult parts. Barbara observed that she was 'maybe more ready to pray about things and issues than I did previously'. Sam, despite being in probably the most turbulent work context throughout the duration of the course, did not speak of praying for difficult situations, but instead wanted to be 'focusing on...on specific people, I think, sort of in prayer, particularly'.

A number of participants reflected on how the course had prompted them to commit to being more willing or likely to speak about their faith in the workplace. Deborah, who previously had felt that talking about faith in the workplace was unprofessional, said,

I would be more willing than I was before to try and attempt to have some type of [evangelistic] conversation with someone at work. To be honest, I still haven't actually done that in the sort of properly, full-on...but I do...I try to sort of talk about things that I'm doing, like, you know...like having people around for Bible study, without actually sort of delving into going further than that. But I really genuinely don't think I've ever seen a time when that would've been, like, a natural conversation to happen. But I would hope that if it did come up, if that opportunity happened, that I might be more willing to take it than I was before. I think it would still seem very...but, you know, I hope that maybe... Just tonight, my colleague was asking what I was doing, and I told them,³⁸¹ and they were like, "Oh, right, so do you, like, have a religion, then?" And it's like, "Well, yes." So it's nice that it just kind of, like, naturally happened.

This change in attitude was mirrored to some degree by Barbara, who previously felt her workplace was an inhospitable place for any sort of faith-based conversation, and who, during the course, suggested a number of additional reasons for why evangelism in her workplace would not be possible.³⁸² However, she had a small experience during the course that opened her up to begin thinking about being more willing to speak of her faith:

Some years ago I felt that I had to be careful what I said to certain individuals... There's one person who I thought he would be completely...because he's...he can be quite negative about certain things, and I thought he would be really negative if you mentioned anything about Christianity. But there was a conversation about church – Catholic churches or something like that – and it wasn't a totally negative conversation. So I feel that...I feel that things are much...kind of a more positive atmosphere, so that if I wanted to speak about faith, that I could do so. So I suppose it's making that...making known to other people that you don't mind talking about it, you know, encourage people to ask questions and things like that.

Sam spoke of 'trying to take the opportunities that present themselves', and mentioned a recent example of doing so:

The girl I get a lift with...lovely, really lovely girl, and trying...I do try and take the opportunities when...oh, I'll tell you, yeah, we had a conversation going into work just last week about how I ended up being

³⁸¹ She told her colleague that she had been taking part in *Transforming Work*.

³⁸² For instance, she suggested that the distance her work colleagues lived from Durham would make invitations to church 'ridiculous'.

a physio when I started life as a factory worker, you know, and how that came about. And I said, you know...I said, as a Christian, I think this was God's plan for me life... And she didn't respond, she didn't say, "Oh yeah, oh really"...or not, you know...but, at least I said that that was why I thought that was the case, you know, which was something that possibly in the past, you would've just not...not mentioned... Yeah, so, in that respect, I try and take the opportunities that are presented more.

Mike similarly spoke of a conversation with a work colleague, telling the colleague about something he had been doing at church, adding that 'perhaps I wouldn't have talked about that before. But if you look at the bigger picture about trying to help your friends find Jesus, these are the little things that you shouldn't really miss over, and you take the opportunities a bit better.' Rather than looking for opportunities, Catherine spoke of creating opportunities to share her faith. 'Some people,' she noted, 'are really good at evangelising to many people, where I prefer to build a relationship first and see if they're interested or want to ask things.' She spoke of current attempts to do this with the colleague she shared an office with.

Though somewhat more vague in what it might entail, a few participants spoke of the course prompting them to be more reflective in how they approach their work. Barbara, 'because of doing the course', felt she wanted 'to have more presence of mind about the fact that you're a Christian in the workplace'. She added,

Maybe that's something I haven't done of, or thought about too much, or just really because I have a job which is just so ridiculously busy that I'm running from one thing to another. So during my working day, I don't necessarily have a chance to think about those things. Maybe to reflect on them afterwards, or to think about what's happening during the week, or whatever. But I think it just makes me more mindful, maybe, of those things?

The idea of reflecting was raised by Fred as well, although what he said was rather unclear and emerged in a rather stream-of-consciousness manner. He talked about

stepping back and doing a little bit of a mental check...is, you know...I kind of know, I relate, but then trying to think, is the reality the same as

the sort of mental picture that I have of...you know...overlaying...a Christian overlay on to your work environment, and mentally work that through, and see kind of how...and then kind of step back and try to reflect on different steps in the week or the month and what have you, and was that really...I guess, the reality?

Catherine also spoke of having a more reflective approach to work, and felt that the course 'makes me think a lot more on a day to day basis while I'm at work, before doing little things, or...I'm just more conscious of things we picked up on the course and how to apply them'. In general, though, suggestions of becoming more 'reflective' or 'mindful' were not substantiated in any particular way.

5.3.1b Changes in perspective

The second theme raised by my participants as they reflected on their experience of work during the course was how perspectives of work had changed. Two things largely emerged here, the first being a new perspective on the relationship between God and their work. As noted above, Grace was making an effort to pray more, and could also say, 'I've become more conscious of God in my work life, and in the way I am and the way I prepare for work, and the way I am at work... I think [the course] made me realise that my work life matters very much to God.' This was Ted's view as well, who said it was good to be reminded 'that God is interested in work, what you do every day'. Mike came through the course thinking that 'working for God...was the big thing', and that made him think that it did not really matter what job he had, because 'it's like a bigger scheme', and Catherine mentioned that she was learning 'to look at work through God's eyes'. Whilst most articulated the relationship between God and work in this more general way, Deborah was more specific, suggesting that 'working for God' was linked with 'doing the best job that you can at work', and later added that 'it was nice to think of' something like supporting colleagues in her work 'as something that you're

doing for God as well'. She felt that she was learning to see 'God at work in positive things' in her workplace. In session two, the video segment discussed the connection of human work with God's work of bringing 'order out of chaos', an idea that Deborah said she 'loved', and that she could see herself doing as she looked at her own work. However, she did not return to this in the follow-up interviews.

In addition to speaking directly about God and work, a couple of the participants saw their perspective change by beginning to see work as part of a bigger picture. Ted said the course 'reminded me that there's a sort of bigger thing going on, which is perhaps hard to keep in your mind when you're actually at work, because you're always...you know, just absorbed in the work a lot of the time, aren't you?' Having gone through a difficult time with work, Ted noted that 'he tried to have a more positive attitude', and felt the course helped remind him 'that, you know, there are bigger things'. Whilst Ted was less clear on what that bigger picture might be, Mike understood this bigger picture to mean that 'if I wasn't [at work], there's a lot of people who wouldn't hear about Jesus'. He continued,

[I'm] just trying to see things from a different perspective. And sometimes when things have been going less well than other times, just sort of thinking more about a bigger picture... I think that God made...like, people to have a relationship with God. And I think that seems...that's like God's bigger plan with, like, life. And I think he uses... Maybe there was a bigger plan to it, and God uses...he definitely uses people, doesn't he, to tell people what he's going to do... Yeah, I think just...thinking more of that God uses everyone's situation that they're in... It's all the little things that we did in the sessions that made me think about work in a different way. Rather than as a negative curse, it's more like something you can be used in as a Christian.

At least amongst a few participants, then, some degree of change in perspective is evident here. That being said, one of the key elements of the course was a question that featured at the beginning of most sessions, where participants were asked to look back over the previous weeks and reflect on where they had 'seen God at work'. The

leader's guide to *Transforming Work* describes it as 'a time for people to share stories of how they have seen God work in and through them since the last session'.³⁸³ This proved to be one of the most difficult elements of the course for my participants. Initially, in the first few sessions, the question was met with long periods of silence, after which it started to become a chance for people to talk about the difficulties they were facing at work. Participants occasionally made comments such as, 'The day is so busy, that it's very hard to find any time to stop and think about God.' Some occasionally suggested they saw God at work in positive religious conversations with colleagues, something mentioned by both Barbara and Ted at the beginning of session five, for example, Barbara noting a positive 'conversation about churches and religious art in Italy', and Ted mentioning 'a conversation about church'. Only in one instance did someone engage with this question in more depth, and that was when Deborah, in session five, talked about an issue of injustice in her workplace over pay, and how she was able to address that issue as a Christian. For the most part, however, participants failed to engage with the question, and in the final interviews, no one discussed this portion of the course. I believe this is significant, as I will discuss below.

5.3.1c Unawareness of changes

Interestingly, a small number of participants also suggested that they were unsure or unaware of how their experience of work might have changed throughout the course. Catherine struggled to articulate her perspective:

Maybe I've not had quite the right attitude to the course, in that each...each one we've done I've found helpful, or I've tried to...or I've gained a lot from it, and...but as a whole, I'm not sure it changed my work as such. It's more that it has altogether helped, but...it's a really hard question to answer, actually.

³⁸³ *Leader's Pack*, 5.

She was eventually able to, as demonstrated above, suggest some ways in which her experience had changed. Fred likewise said, ‘I wouldn’t say [my experience of work] has changed a lot,’ though he conceded that he felt what he perceived to be the whole premise of the course³⁸⁴ was a false premise, stating in the first session that he was not impressed with the preamble, and ‘thought it missed the whole point’. As a result, he found himself resisting a lot of the material in the course. Fred continually returned to the idea of living according to ‘values’ and ‘beliefs’, yet at the same time, continually downplayed any way in which these things might be marked as distinctly Christian in a work environment. Again in the first session, he remarked,

I don’t think so much about why I am doing [something at work], but I try to think of who I am, and that informs what I do and how I do it. I don’t look at this specific meeting and think, “How do I do this for God?” I look at who I am, and try to be who I am, no matter where I am. And that’s the way I look at it.

Fred’s perspective was in many ways entirely the opposite to Ruth’s, who also suggested that her experience of work had not changed throughout the course. She said, ‘It does exactly the same as what I’ve been doing... As for making a difference, I don’t think it’s made any difference.’ Ruth came into the course convinced that she was already putting her faith into practice in significant ways every day, and the course simply helped her ‘to be aware of how much I’m already showing Christ in me workplace’. In fact, she regularly assumed the role of ‘teacher’ in the group discussion sessions, sharing her experiences and thoughts in the manner of giving advice to members of the group as they presented problems and challenges they faced in their workplaces.

³⁸⁴ He is here referring to Mark Greene’s initial article on the sacred-secular divide that was the set pre-reading for the first session of *Transforming Work*, referenced above as ‘The Great Divide’.

5.3.2 Commitments to further change

In addition to looking at the changes in how my participants experienced their work throughout the course, I asked them to consider what commitments to further change they felt they would like to continue to make to their work. Here again, their responses quite neatly fit into the themes of changes in action and changes in perspective, with a small number again articulating uncertainty about what might change as they looked forward.

5.3.2a Desired changes in action

The most significant action participants suggested they might want to take as they looked to the future in their work was to be more open about their faith and to engage in evangelistic conversations. Deborah expressed very clearly that ‘one day it would be really nice for an opportunity to come about for me to have a conversation – like, a proper, deep conversation about God – with a colleague at work, and for me to be able to, like, respond appropriately’. After the course, Mike said he was considering leaving his current teaching position for another closer to home, and said that if that were to happen, he would want to try ‘to get in there a bit earlier talking about my faith and making those friendships a bit closer’. He concluded, chuckling, ‘So I think if I was going to improve... Just try to find opportunities to name-drop Jesus a bit.’ Being in a management position, Barbara felt she needed a gentle but open approach, but wanted people to know where she stood, ‘and that if they want to come and talk to you, they can’. Sam, who earlier said he was making more of an effort to do things like tell people he had been to church on Sunday, said he would like to ‘develop that and to say, “Oh, I went to church and listened to a sermon about such and such”, if you get the opportunity. I think I would like to do more of that... I would love to see them have a

relationship with God.’ Ted wants more people to know he is a Christian, ‘and even to question me about it’. It was interesting to note the prominence of the desire expressed by my participants to be more open about their faith, because in session two when all were asked what one big question they hoped the course would address, almost all of them said they hoped to find out how to share their faith at work.

Throughout *Transforming Work*, the 6Ms framework is continually referred to, and is designed both as a tool by which participants can assess their work situation, and as a resource to point them to ways they might more faithfully practice their work. That said, only three of the participants identified one or more of the Ms as a point of action for them looking forward in their work. Grace, though struggling to actually remember the Ms without prompt, nonetheless spoke of the importance of becoming more conscious of modelling godly character, and also moulding culture. She spoke about her school having a ‘culture of fear’ largely due to poor management, and noted that ‘as far as the culture of the place goes, I am aware that...you know, I feel I should speak up and try to...I don’t know, try and find ways of being more positive about things’. When the Ms were first presented in session one, she identified quite strongly with this M as well. She also committed herself to the idea of making good work, ‘really trying to do my best for the children, as individuals...because obviously their little lives mattered to God as well’. Sam wanted to face up to the gossip that frequently happened in his workplace, and saw that as ‘being a mouthpiece for truth and justice. Just trying to be able to stand up when you see something happening.’ Though she also could not remember the specific wording, Deborah identified with the idea of ministering grace and love, and saw that working out as she committed herself to ‘[taking] care of people and [trying] and help them and support them... So every time I get an opportunity to do that...it’s nice to think of that as something that you’re for God as well.’ When talking

about the Ms, Ruth suggested she wanted to focus on ‘all of them. Because I always like to put everything into practice.’ However, when she mentioned one or two of the Ms, it was clear that she misunderstood them, such as when she discussed ‘making culture’, and said, ‘And even when people’s got culture, I’d...I just still bring Jesus into it, because Jesus is the main thing, whether they’ve got culture or not, do you know what I mean?’ In the end, it was evident that her dominant focus was on being a messenger of the gospel.

That the Ms weren’t mentioned more frequently is a bit surprising, given how participants generally responded positively to them during the course sessions. The Ms were introduced in session one, and following a short video discussing each of them individually, participants engaged in a good amount of discussion over which of the Ms they most resonated with, or felt most challenged by. They were then invited to use the Ms as a means by which to look at and reflect on their work each session, but for the most part, after their introduction, or the occasional prompting in later sessions, participants seemed to largely forget about the Ms in their reflections. However, a number of participants echoed Fred here, who said, ‘Do you know what? There were way too many Ms. I can’t remember...I can’t remember them. If there were three, I’d stand a chance.’

5.3.2b Desired changes in perspective

Most of my participants’ reflections on the future and the ways in which they wished to continue to work on relating their faith and work centred on the points of action above, but some of the participants also expressed a desire to continue changing their perspective of work. Deborah reflected for a moment, and then said, ‘I guess [I would like to be] aware of God more of the time. Like, I’m already aware more of the

time than I was before, but, like, more of the time...like, in everything, in all the things I'm doing.' Catherine remarked that she wanted to work on having more confidence, 'not just in myself, but in God, knowing that God will enable me to do things. I think I need to always remember that.' As for Ted, he found himself wrestling more deeply with the meaning of work. He mused:

I suppose...partly because of the course, I'm sort of developing ideas of...what is it all about for me, you know, what is the point of it all, kind of thing? And so I'd like, from that point of view, from what's going on inside my head and everything, I'd like to...you know, be much clearer about that, you know. Because I feel like I've kind of gone from, work is just, like...you just do it because you need the money...but I feel a bit more like...it's really got to mean something.

He went on to think out loud about starting up a prayer group at work with other colleagues who were Christians, and seemed to indicate that this might be one way of discovering deeper meaning to his work. Interestingly, despite his apparent search for meaning in his work, Ted demonstrated one of the most profound understandings of the purpose of work of the group when talking about the purpose of work in chapter four.

5.3.2c No further changes

Again, like above, a number of participants suggested they did not consider any changes they would want to make to their work as they looked forward. Reflecting on the Ms, Barbara said, 'I think they're useful reminders of the things that you either should be involved in or thinking about doing or what have you, but there wasn't one that kind of got hold of me and said, this is what you should be doing.' However, as demonstrated above, she did go on to say that she wanted to commit to being more openly a Christian. Similarly, Mike said, 'I don't know really', and then after a long pause, added, 'I don't...I don't think I would make any changes.' Yet he too then went on to suggest he wished to be more open about his faith. More complicated was Fred's

response; he did not say that he would not change anything, but he moved the discussion away from the course and faith to discuss a change in company policy he was working on with a committee. I will return to this element of uncertainty in due course.

5.3.3 *The purpose of work revisited*

One of the most significant and intriguing themes explored in the initial interviews was when participants discussed the purpose of work, allowing me insight into how they made meaning of their work. A fundamental concern of *Transforming Work* is to explore the question of the purpose of work, which is dealt with quite substantially in the first two sessions, and so I returned to the question in the follow-up interviews to see whether my participants' perspectives had been shaped by having this question addressed. Half of the participants returned to the idea that the purpose of work was to make money or earn a living, and asserted so quite matter-of-factly, although a number of them suggested they no longer felt this was the primary purpose of work. Barbara, reflecting on the initial interview, said she had probably said 'something like go out and support yourself, so to sustain yourself and earn money or something like that. But...I know I changed my mind halfway through,' although she then added that she was unable to remember how her mind had changed. Sam talked about the purpose of work for a moment before eventually adding, 'It pays your mortgage as well' as an afterthought.

Similarly, half of the participants returned to the idea of work being about providing a service, or making some sort of contribution to wider society. Grace commented that she had started to feel that her work had a higher 'status', adding, 'I think...possibly before, I tended to think of myself as, oh, I'm just a teacher...I just

teach little ones. Whereas now, I think, well, whatever you do, it's important, you know...because you're serving others, you know.' Barbara saw her own work as a service as well:

What many people do for work is to provide a service to other people, and certainly that's the kind of work that I've always been involved in, either providing a service, or providing advisory information, or providing something that other people need. So, I don't know, if people have got time to go and do...I don't know...to go and do that thing themselves, that you provide a service for them doing it, so that we don't...I don't know...we don't all have to go and grow our own food, or something like that, because the farmer grows the food so that other people can go do something else, I suppose...in our society at least. So yeah, I think we...I think work is mostly about providing things for other people.

Deborah returned to the idea of work as a service that kept the world functioning, saying that

if no one did anything, we'd all just...just kind of starve, wouldn't we? In order to exist, you have to work... We can't exist in doing nothing, as...yeah. I mean, everybody works. Like...yeah. Paid work is just, like, because, we're in a bit more of a global kind of thing, and some people do some things, and some people do other things, and we...yeah.

Ted suggested that one of the purposes of work was that, 'at its best, it can enable us to do something that's really good in the world', and saw in his own work with the local authority the ability to do something for 'the public good', and especially in their regeneration work, to be 'changing things for the better'.

Whilst those two responses mirrored the initial interviews in some ways, a more significant change was noted as half the participants connected God and work when discussing the purpose of work, without any prompt or direct question from me. How this connection was made varied. Mike simply said that he approached work now 'with the idea that you're working for God' and suggested that there might be 'more of a divine purpose to it than I first thought about'. Sam said that work is 'what God designed us to do', noting that 'when you're not working, when you're not busy, you're

frustrated, you know what I mean? It's what God made us to do.' As noted above, Grace saw work as service, but later added that this was also a means of being 'God's hands and feet'. A number of people drew a connection between working for God and evangelism. Deborah talked about work being 'an opportunity to really interact with other people and get to know other people, and...yeah...I guess being a witness to God in that situation'. Mike talked about beginning to see 'a bigger picture' that his work fit into:

I think that God has, like, a bigger picture on how the world all kind of links together, and he wants everyone to know that...that's he's there. And he uses the situations that we're in to kind of develop the web a little bit more, and...that's what I'm trying to say. It's like a bigger picture. And when we go to work, you don't really know what that picture is, but you trust that God's got a purpose for you, and you're going to do that, and then he provides opportunities if you pray for it, I think... If you think about God being in charged of it all, then [work] can be quite a rewarding thing to do.

Despite expressing some uncertainty about what God's 'bigger picture' might be, he went on to add,

If you look at, like, God's plan for my work, then I would say that it's me being in that situation, and the contact that I have with different people, and hopefully some of God will rub off from me onto them. So I've got to make sure I'm staying close to God so I've got that to rub off on... I think that would be the purpose of my work, really.

The idea of influencing and witnessing to people as a Christian in the workplace was part of Ted's understanding of the purpose of work as well. He noted that, 'as a Christian, [the workplace] is the most obvious mission field', and saw that 'part of [work's] purpose is just to get you out there and get you to meet people who you'd never otherwise meet... So in that sense, they're the people you know, and they're the people you can perhaps influence in various ways.' Sam largely saw this as the purpose of his work as well:

As a Christian, I think [the purpose of work] is to...it is to build relationship with people you normally wouldn't, who you normally wouldn't be thrown together with. And God puts people in your way, I think, and it's your responsibility as a Christian to take those opportunities, and to act on them... You meet such an enormous diversity of people, and you know, if you get the opportunity to just mention God to any of them in the course of your work, or just for people to go, "Oh, you know, I see something in you", that you get the opportunity to tell them why, then that's good.

In fact, this was so key to Sam's understanding of the purpose of work that he went so far as to suggest that 'how we interact with people and use that opportunity is...is whether we have a good experience of work or not'.

As noted in chapter two, the idea of work being a participation in God's work, both in terms of creation and redemption, is picked up on in *Transforming Work*, particularly in the first and second sessions, and as I argued in chapter two, this is a significant theme in the theology of work. However, in the final interviews, only a very small number of participants picked up on this theme, and even then only vaguely. Deborah suggested that, 'I guess, we're on the planet, and God kind of wants us to take care of and look after it, and, like, manage it, for want of a better word. So that involves work.' Ted suggested that work 'at its best...is working with God in his creation and in his world and for his people, in all kinds of ways'. Beyond this, however, the idea of work as a participation in God's creative and redemptive work was entirely absent in the final interviews. This, however, is reflective of how participants engaged with the material when encountering it in the sessions. Even when the videos for session one and two in particular emphasised the goodness of work, the role of work in bringing 'order out of chaos' and of being a means of 'reconciliation and restoration', as well as bringing 'flourishing' to others through work, participants largely returned to viewing work primarily in terms of how they acted at work and the relationships they had at work. In fact, Grace said in response to the first video, 'It's not in the content of your

work, it's in you and your relationships with other people.' Catherine's work with glaciers is particular critical in helping climate scientists understand the changes in sea levels, and in many ways could be seen as having the most direct redemptive purpose of the group, but she regularly resisted identifying her work as such, and suggested both in session two and in numerous places in my interviews with her that she was only doing it 'because I'm interested in glaciers'. In my role as facilitator, I occasionally attempted to prompt people to use some of the key words the course introduced, such as 'flourishing', but Barbara ended up interpreting that as personal flourishing, saying in session two, 'If you're in the right job, then you should be able to flourish with all the gifts you've been given.' For the most part, discussions would gravitate away from discussions of the goodness of work itself, something the course attempted to centre on, and to other purposes for which work was instrumental. This was made most clear in session three, when participants were asked how they would 'describe the job of a Christian at work', and most responded with either 'to be salt and light' or 'to represent Jesus by showing... Christian values'. Only two spoke of 'doing good work'.

Finally, a number of people suggested that work had personal purposes. Fred said that work was a means for us to 'enjoy our utility' and 'feel that you're actually able to do something'. Grace thought 'every human being intrinsically needs to feel needed', and that work helped fulfil that need, whilst Catherine suggested that to work was 'to do something that motivates you'. Mike added that being in work meant 'you get to spend time with people', and noted how he appreciated having that communal element in his life.

5.3.4 How the church can help people in work

The final theme emerging from the follow-up interviews was how the participants felt St Nic's could help them as Christians in the workplace to more faithfully practice their work. It was observed in the initial interviews that whilst my participants had not failed to notice the increased focus on work in the ministry of the church, most described it simply as 'interesting', and could not articulate any particular way in which it had helped them consider the connection between their faith and their work. So in our follow-up conversations, I asked them to consider how the church might better address the issue of work.

The majority of my participants suggested that the primary thing the church could do was to provide places to talk and pray about work. Barbara suggested something like 'a day or a half day where people could discuss issues about work... Or I suppose the other thing you might do is like a Saturday speaker or something, for people who are interested in those issues, and how you deal with it.' Mike noted that 'we don't really talk a lot about work' and likewise mentioned creating more opportunities to do so, even informally. Catherine said that 'it might be nice to have some sort of social group for people who are at work, just to have a relaxing environment that you can chat to other Christians who are – that sounds a bit weird – but, workers'. As a small business owner, Ruth thought that it would be worth having 'a group where, like, businesses can meet up like once a month and have a little chat, and say, should we pray for each other, is there anything that you need specifically prayer on this?' Space to talk about work was important for Deborah too:

I think, like, in church, it's very unusual to, like, talk to someone much about their job. Like, people I know quite well, I don't really know what their job is. Like, it's just not something that really comes up. So I think it'd be quite nice if just generally more in church we, like, talked more about what we do as a job... I just think it's just not a topic that people often talk about in a church setting, and so just in general, talking about

it more. Like, discussing with each other, and being able to pray for each other and things like that...those kinds of issues. Yeah...because, in not talking about it, I think you do kind of, like, end up with a sense of it being disconnected.

Ted used to be part of an informal group who would 'meet and have some curry and talk about work, pray about it. And that was...that was really good.' He added that 'more of that would be good'. Interestingly, during session three, and a discussion about how society tends to define people by their work, a number of participants complained, like Mike, that their 'non-Christian friends, all they talk about is work'.

As a means to getting more people talk about work, a number of my participants also suggested that more people in the church should take part in *Transforming Work*. Sam suggested that the course 'would be a worthwhile [thing] to do in small groups'. Mike also said that running the course more frequently for others in the church 'would probably be a good idea, wouldn't it? Because if everyone was thinking a bit more about their work and what the point of their life is...I know it helped me quite a lot, and I imagine it would help a lot of other people.' This idea was echoed by a couple of other participants as well.

Some participants also talked about having sermons that were more practical in focus, and that would address work in specific. Ted simply suggested that 'there's always a place for, you know, talking about [work] in sermons, and so on'. Grace said the same, but noted that St Nic's 'is a church packed with academics and the middle class section of society, and I don't feel that it's very good at reaching out to the normal folk, yeah. That...you know, unless you've got a degree, sometimes it's difficult to fathom what's going on on a Sunday morning', and said that a renewed focus on 'ordinary people from all walks of life' was important. Fred actually talked about sermons addressing practical things in work quite extensively, saying,

The preaching from the pulpit has to be practical, and it has to relate to the real world and real things that are going on, you know. And they shouldn't be scared to stand up and say, "Oh, Britain is in a recession. What does that mean for people?" ... And I think I'll lose a little bit of patience when a church is very introspective, and "Oh, look at ourselves, we must consider this", and it's all... you know, reflecting back, rather than very much, okay, hey, we're not perfect, we're doing our best, but actually, we're not doing anything unless we're out there helping people, and actually doing it. That then means you embrace, you know... what happens if you're facing redundancy, you know, how do you relate to that? What does God feel about that? You know, just asking questions that people come across in the workplace, you know. Just actually going through, "Hey, I'm bored to salt at work, where am I?" What's going wrong in this?

Interestingly, Fred remarked in the first session, in response to a video in which Mark Greene suggested that the church has largely failed to disciple people in work, that 'all the teaching I've had is exactly relevant to work'. Deborah had commented on how she enjoyed the 'Bible Through Workers' Eyes' portion of *Transforming Work*, and thought the church could do 'maybe a sermon series on, like, the Bible from workers' point of view, kind of thing, because I don't think that's something that gets talked about very much in sermons'.

A final way participants suggested the church could help connect faith and work was by finding ways to support people in work in practical ways. Ruth talked about this a fair bit:

I know there's also things where people... you could have even, like, helping each other... like, if you know somebody does do that, and someone can do that, you can like maybe even pass on, like, "Oh, I can do this for you if you... if you can do that for me", you know, if you have, like, a painter and decorator and things like that. I think even that's good for a whole church anyway, to be helping each other out where you sometimes, like... like, I've had the heating man here today, he is a friend and, like, he'll do it good, but sometimes if there was someone in church... not that you want to get it cheap... cheap where you're not paying, but there's sometimes where you could get it, like, where... you know... do you know... do you know what I mean?

The shared use of skills and knowledge was important for Ted as well. He said:

It would be good if we tried to make use of the skills that we have, skills and knowledge that we have as a congregation in...you know, in stuff that we need to do in Nic's. Because I do feel that a lot of stuff is just kind of...well, we just pay someone to do it... Now there's a place for that...but I also think there's a place for saying, "Does anyone here have this expertise?" You know, there's a whole range of people, you know, and whether it's just, you know, doing a bit of DIY-type work, or doing something that's a bit more...yeah, involves professional expertise, or whatever it might be, whatever skills, I do think we should try and use that. Because I think if you can use your skills in that way, that's a really encouraging thing... You probably feel like, "Hey, I'm using my skills, my knowledge...and I'm making this happen and I'm doing it...I'm doing it for God, rather than just to earn a living"... And it does, I think...so I think from that point of view it would be more of an affirmation of what we do.

5.4 Evaluation of the findings from the follow-up interviews

In chapter three, I suggested that my participants would be shaped dominantly by the cultural habits and practices of work, and that an encounter with a theological vision of work in the context of a small group setting would be insufficient to reshape the way they think about and practice their work. What I have demonstrated above I believe largely confirms this hypothesis, and though participants articulate some changes in thinking and practice, these are comparatively minor, and for the most part, only build on aspects of spirituality that are consistent with the emphases of traditional evangelicalism. There was some variance – participants with a greater degree of agency in their work and with more influence over their workplace context tended to be more resistant to the theological vision of work presented in the course. Similarly, those who seemed more satisfied with their work tended to be less open to the possibility of a new vision of work.³⁸⁵ On the whole, participants demonstrated an increased commitment to prayer, witness, and the cultivation of Christian character. Whilst these things were

³⁸⁵ I would suggest, as well, that there was some correlation between spiritual maturity and openness to the material. However, this correlation was not as clear as the others, and relies on a much more subjective evaluation and criteria.

emphasised in the course, they did not comprise the main foci of the course, even if evangelism and witness was the subject of one of the sessions. From the perspective of discipleship, these are indeed good things to celebrate, but they are not unique to a theological vision of work. That said, an increased commitment to prayer, particularly where it is not only concerned with trials and difficulties at work, could be seen as an important first step in bridging the gap between the ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’. That a couple of participants identified the idea of doing good work as part of being a Christian worker was also notable. Similarly, beginning to see that work matters to God was an important shift in perspective, one emphasised very strongly at the beginning of the course in the first session. Again, however, participants were unable to go into greater detail of *how* or *why* work mattered to God, and in the end, even a simple articulation of the theological significance of work remained absent from my participants’ reflections. Broadly, I suggest the lack of any significant shift in my participants’ vision of work is not a failure of the *Transforming Work* course; as I demonstrated in chapter two, the course presents a fairly robust and coherent theological vision of work. Rather, there are other factors contributing to the inability of my participants to reconceive of the meaning and significance of their work. In what follows, I look at the role of small groups, the way people make meaning of their worlds, and worship and liturgical formation, in order to help make some sense of the findings that emerged above.

5.4.1 Social dynamics and the role of small groups

One important thing that emerged from the course and the follow-up interviews was the significance participants ascribed to the small group sessions and the interaction with the other participants, as well as their suggestions that the church provide more opportunities for this kind of interaction in social settings. Roger Walton has done some

substantial research in recent years on the role of small groups in discipleship in churches, and some of his findings have relevance here. In the first place, he discusses the role of small of groups in providing support for members, noting that ‘belonging to a group where you are known, valued and accepted is a great source of strength. It gives you a sense of identity and a set of people you can turn to when you face problems’.³⁸⁶ Particularly when they are made up of people in similar situations and going through similar experiences, they often fill a gap and meet needs unique to those groups.³⁸⁷ It is interesting that when my participants spoke of the benefits of the group setting, they often talked about how it was good to be with and hear from people who also struggled at work,³⁸⁸ and when they suggested the church provide more spaces for people in work to meet together and talk, it was for the purpose of addressing issues and difficulties at work. That these social dynamics remain so key continues to signal the general feeling that work lacks meaning, and that in their solidarity, these groups then provide a sort of therapeutic relief from the ills of work. There is a link here too with what I discussed in the previous chapter about solidarity in work from a sociological perspective.

More interesting, however, is what Walton says about how learning functions in small groups. He argues that learning happens as groups pool information together, express different views and opinions, gain new insights, and observe different ways of thinking and reasoning.³⁸⁹ These various factors all help ‘in constructing your own ideas, views and making your own meaning... Each of us builds our own knowledge base through a process of dialogue between new information or experience and what we

³⁸⁶ Roger Walton, *Disciples Together: Discipleship, Learning and Small Groups* (London: SCM Press, 2014), 73.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁸⁸ Note again the emphasis on finding solidarity in the struggle of work, highlighting further that work is not as positive of an experience as my participants suggest it might be.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

know already'.³⁹⁰ However, the engagement with ideas is only one small part of the learning that goes on in a group. Walton continues:

Perhaps the majority of our learning will be social and emotional rather than intellectual as we interact with others. You can see this most acutely in newcomers. If we are newcomers to a group...we are joining an established community. It will have an existing pattern for the meeting and some ground rules about how people speak and act in the group... As we participate in a group we are absorbing the patterns of behaviour as well as the group norms, values and emotions...

Thus learning in groups is never just about ideas or views. In any situation our learning is related to our social relations and the cultures or subcultures that inform the context.³⁹¹

This is very interesting here, for a number of reasons. First, most of the participants came to the group with similar views of work, and similar ways of talking about work, and these were therefore continually reinforced by the group. It was interesting to note how sometimes when, in my role as facilitator, I raised questions or points of discussion suggested in the leader's guide, they were dealt with briefly before someone moved the discussion onto something else, which was then more eagerly seized on by the group. A clear example is the way the initial question about where participants 'had seen God at work' at the beginning of each session was answered. Participants regularly shifted the discussion away from the presented question to challenges they were facing at work. Despite being a new group, most of the group members had participated in other small groups in the church, meaning that group 'ground rules' transferred quite easily to this new group. Further, being people who largely worked in similar professional and managerial contexts, they had shared ways of speaking about work, which were often different to how work was spoken about in *Transforming Work*.³⁹² I believe this

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 78.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 78-79.

³⁹² One exception to this was Ruth, whose way of speaking about work stood out quite starkly from the rest of the group. As noted above, she often relayed stories of her engaging in evangelism at work, or spoke of her personal devotional life as key to how she practiced her work. However, group members

demonstrates not only Walton's comments about learning dynamics in groups, but also the power of cultural narratives about work and how deeply embedded those narratives are in my participants' imaginations.

Second, this made the interaction between the group of participants and the group on the video in the 'Table Talk' sessions of *Transforming Work* particularly interesting. The group members on the video were clearly an 'out group' of sorts. Though they were discussing the same issues, they were 'out there', in a different world,³⁹³ and thus their experiences and insights could not translate to the group sitting in my front room. In general, participants suggested that the group on video painted an unrealistic picture of work. For instance, after watching one of the videos in the first session, one of the participants responded, 'I think this is one of the challenges I have sometimes with all of this. It can be made to sound like you ought to be perfect,' and in the third session, someone said, 'I find these video things the most difficult bit of the course... It gets too close to prosperity gospel for me, and if God's with me, it's all going to be wonderful... And I just wish there'd be a little less bright and shiny, and a little more grounded.' These sorts of comments were echoed in the follow-up interviews, as noted above. Whether that is a fair and accurate evaluation of the video segments is debatable,³⁹⁴ but the point is that this highlights how the group on video was not just unable to contribute to the group's learning, it is that they were not *allowed* to.

largely accepted her contributions, because whilst not necessarily fitting with the ways they spoke of work, she emphasised things accepted by and encouraged within evangelical culture.

³⁹³ One of my participants who was raised in the North East referred to them multiple times as 'those Southern, middle-class people'.

³⁹⁴ I would suggest not, but perhaps my own perspective is biased in different ways.

5.4.2 Webs of meaning and social imaginaries

A second and related factor has to do with how people make meaning of their worlds. In his introductory volume to Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, James K.A. Smith suggests that we find ourselves in a culture where people 'have constructed webs of meaning that provide almost all the significance they need in their lives'.³⁹⁵ We have reached this point, Taylor argues, as Western society has undergone a thorough process of disenchantment, in which, he says, 'many people are happy living for goals which are purely immanent; they live in a way that takes no account of the transcendent'.³⁹⁶ Taylor's work traces the shift from a pre-modern social imaginary, where, as Smith summarises, we have moved from living 'in a *cosmos*, an ordered whole where the "natural" world hangs within its beyond',³⁹⁷ to a 'universe' which locates order and meaning within itself, 'autonomous, independent "meaning" that is unhooked from any sort of transcendent dependence'.³⁹⁸ As a result, we get what Taylor calls the 'buffered self', where 'the possibility exists of taking a distance from, disengaging from everything outside the mind. My ultimate purposes are those which arise within me, the crucial meanings of things are those defined in my responses to them'.³⁹⁹ Taylor says that he uses the term 'buffered' to indicate that 'this self can see itself as invulnerable, as master of the meanings of things for it'.⁴⁰⁰ So the individual becomes 'insulated and isolated'⁴⁰¹ from anything outside of itself, and gives 'its own autonomous order to its life'.⁴⁰² This opens up various possibilities for existing in the world. One such

³⁹⁵ James K.A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), vii.

³⁹⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 143.

³⁹⁷ Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, 34.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁹⁹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁰¹ Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, 30.

⁴⁰² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38-39.

possibility is a loss of the notion of ‘living socially’,⁴⁰³ where beliefs and actions have a communal impact. Smith argues that ‘once individuals become the locus of meaning, the social atomism that results means that disbelief no longer has social consequences’.⁴⁰⁴ The concept of life having a greater purpose, of the life of each individual being a part of a greater whole, is lost, and we are left with ‘a sort of “lowering of the bar” in how we envision the requirements of a life well lived’.⁴⁰⁵ Quite simply, what matters now is not what is good in the traditional sense, but what is good for us as individuals. Indeed, there are resonances here with Alisdair MacIntyre’s critique of emotivism, where in modernity we no longer have the ‘conception of a whole human life as the primary subject of objective and impersonal evaluation, of a type of evaluation which provides the content for judgement upon the particular actions or projects of a given individual’.⁴⁰⁶ What has happened, MacIntyre argues, is that ‘the emotivist self, in acquiring sovereignty in its own realm lost its traditional boundaries provided by a social identity and a view of human life as ordered to a given end’.⁴⁰⁷ This loss of traditional boundaries likewise resulted in a narrowing of the realm of life that had theological significance. So in work, for instance, an individual’s concern is increasingly only to fulfil their contractual obligations. The concept of that work relating in any direct way to the good of their cities, cultures and societies is obscured. Even more, the idea that work might be a calling in which God presses certain claims upon people is overlooked, if not inconceivable.

Taylor’s concept of the ‘immanent frame’ is important here, which he defines as a framework that ‘constitutes a “natural” order, to be contrasted to a “supernatural” one,

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁰⁴ Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, 31.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁰⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd Ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 34.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 34.

an “immanent” world, over against a possible “transcendent” one’.⁴⁰⁸ As Smith summarises, this frame ‘both boxes in *and* boxes out, encloses *and* focuses’,⁴⁰⁹ thus providing the bounds by which human beings make meaning of the world, regardless of whether or not we believe in transcendence.⁴¹⁰ Taylor is clear as well that the inhabiting of this frame is not conscious: ‘Not only is the immanent frame itself not usually, or even mainly a set of *beliefs* which we entertain about our predicament, however it may have started out; rather [the immanent frame] is the sensed context in which we develop our beliefs’.⁴¹¹ What’s more, Taylor argues, this ‘has usually sunk to the level of such an unchallenged framework, something we have trouble often thinking ourselves outside of, even as an imaginative exercise’.⁴¹² As Smith summarises, this frame ‘becomes part of the background that governs our being-in-the-world’.⁴¹³ The point is that the way we live is not governed so much by our thinking, because we are instead ‘more affective, embodied creatures who make our way in the world more by feeling our way around it’.⁴¹⁴ Rather, Smith argues, what ultimately shapes how we live is our loves; we are creatures ‘whose orientation and form of life is most primordially shaped by what one loves as ultimate, which constitutes an affective, gut-like orientation to the world that is prior to reflection and even eludes conceptual articulation’.⁴¹⁵ These ultimate loves are shaped primarily by the habits and practices we engage in every day, which train our hearts in certain directions, oriented towards ‘a specific vision of the good life, an implicit picture of what we think human flourishing looks like’.⁴¹⁶ Smith’s argument, insofar as it relates to discipleship, is that unless our hearts are trained and

⁴⁰⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 542.

⁴⁰⁹ Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, 92.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁴¹¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 549.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 549.

⁴¹³ Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, 94.

⁴¹⁴ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 47.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

oriented by a vision of the Kingdom of God, our loves and desires will be misdirected, compromising our faithfulness. This is no less true in our work than in any other area of life.

Taylor's argument in *A Secular Age* is, of course, significantly more complex and far-reaching than can be dealt with in a few short pages, but I believe that what I have highlighted both from his account and from Smith's summary helps to offer some clarity about what has emerged amongst my participants. I argued in chapter three that my participants largely engage in their work pre-reflectively, and I demonstrated in the previous chapter that their approaches to their work, both in practice and in the meaning they make of work, are predominantly shaped by the cultural habits and practices of work. What I believe the findings in this chapter further demonstrate is that these cultural habits and practices of work form something akin to what Taylor refers to as an 'unchallenged framework', the power of which prohibits them from even entertaining the viability of a theological vision of work such as they encountered through *Transforming Work*.⁴¹⁷ This accounts for some of the reactions to the material, whether it was strong opposition, or indifference and deferral, and why participants struggled so regularly to talk about 'where they had seen God at work' in the time between the sessions. If they are indeed inhabiting an imaginary that bears resemblances to Taylor's notion of the immanent frame, something which precludes conceiving of work in relation to God in any meaningful way – and I am arguing that this is the case – then this also goes some way towards explaining why participants often spoke of the idea of

⁴¹⁷ There is a fascinating scene in an episode of the American sitcom, *How I Met Your Mother* ('The Possibility', S04E14, directed by Pamela Fryman, written by Jonathan Groff [CBS, 2 February 2009]), where the character, Barney Stinson, is showing his friends a video CV he made. Using typical managerial language to talk about his strengths, one of his friends interrupts and remarks, 'Barney, I don't get it. You don't do a damn thing in any of these clips!' to which he responds, 'Exactly. Because that's who corporate America wants. People who seem like bold risk-takers, but never actually do anything. Actually doing things gets you fired.' There is something profoundly insightful here about the way a market economy encourages these pre-reflective and unconscious postures towards work.

having to ‘stop and think about God’. To fit God into their framework required making room, a conscious effort. Acknowledging the importance of Christian character and sharing faith with colleagues requires little alteration of my participants’ existing framework,⁴¹⁸ but to conceive of work as a means by which we participate in God’s creative and redemptive plans for the world requires a significant ‘retraining’ and re-envisioning of the whole of reality. In terms of discipleship, it must be emphasised how enormous of a task this is. As I have argued, enabling Christians to faithfully practice their work does not only require a cognitive shift, but a reshaping of the imaginary. This entails attentiveness to the sheer power of these imaginaries, as well as their captivity to distorted social structures, such as the economic and political structures that shape the nature and practice of work. More, as these structures are very much dependent on people participating uncritically in their erection and maintenance,⁴¹⁹ Christian workers, if they are to faithfully practice their work as creative and transformative agents, need to be enabled to see how their imaginaries shape their approach to and practice of work, including the ways they are complicit in the existing structures of work. The scope of this calling is immense, and as a result, to attend to discipleship in the workplace requires much more than a short, small-group course can expect to achieve, as I believe my findings demonstrate.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁸ Although it is worth noting that in session six, when discussing evangelism at work, my participants spent some time talking about how they found it ‘a challenge to...explain what it means to be saved’. Someone ended up concluding that the best approach to evangelism was to show how you depended on God as you ‘battled through the difficulties in your life’ and that this would ‘give people someone to turn to in those difficult times’. It is also worth noting that, in a discussion of the importance of building relationships with colleagues in session five, someone would note that, in the end, ‘you always have to put the company first’. So even these fairly standard evangelical emphases are being crowded out of their framework.

⁴¹⁹ With Bob Goudzwaard, I would argue that these structures have a fundamentally religious root (*Capitalism and Progress*, xxi), which means they make ultimate claims of some kind, and thus require an ultimate commitment from those who participate in the structures. This further complicates the

⁴²⁰ Whilst I am arguing that these frameworks are something we adopt largely unconsciously, there is something inherent in the frame that does not even permit us the space to consider the frame. What I mean is that part of the framework that shapes the world of work is that we must always be busy, and if we are to have a break or rest, its purpose is to be a period of unthinking activity that is entirely disconnected from work, so as to prepare us for more work. I think Josef Pieper offers something here in

It needs to be mentioned again that there was an interesting correlation between those who had both more agency in their work, and more overall satisfaction in their work, and an increased resistance to a theological vision of work. A greater degree of freedom and responsibility in work in this case seemed to make for a less malleable framework through which work is understood and practiced.⁴²¹ On the whole, however, shifts in perspective amongst all participants were minimal, and I think some of the insights Taylor's account above begin to help make some sense of this.

5.4.3 *The role of worship and the culture of the church in formation*

This brings me to the third factor, the role of worship and the culture of the church in forming disciples. Bruce Reed, in his book, *The Dynamics of Religion*, argues that religious life is defined by 'process' and 'movement'. The process is the alternation 'between the activities of everyday life and certain other activities which they interpret to themselves in the language and symbols of religious belief',⁴²² whilst the movement is the 'rationale or interpretation of the meaning of these activities'.⁴²³ Reed draws on psychological theories of attachment to make sense of this 'oscillation', where an

Leisure: The Basis of Culture (New York: Pantheon Books, 1952), as he argues for a return to a model of leisure that is contemplative.

⁴²¹ I am not entirely sure why this is the case. In part, I would want to suggest that there is something here to do with cost and sacrifice: to be in a position of power and seek to make changes to the cultures and structures of a workplace could bring negative ramifications, particularly where those changes might challenge key aspects of a capitalist system. Indeed, this is something J.H. Oldham clearly identified: 'What the Christian has to demand in regard to every form of work is that it should minister directly or indirectly to the satisfaction of a genuine human need and that it should not deny or frustrate the realization of a man or a woman's true manhood or womanhood as a person responsible to God and living in love and charity with his fellows. These demands may seem simple, but their honest acceptance would result...in far-reaching changes in existing forms of work... The one thing that a valid theological doctrine of work will not do is to tell the great mass of men that God wants them to go on doing for theological reasons what they are already doing for economic reasons. When a true Christian doctrine of work has been formulated, it will be something that many people will not care for at all' (*Work in Modern Society*, 60). However, as space does not allow of a fuller discussion of this correlation, and as it takes me somewhat beyond the scope of this research, I must let my speculation rest here.

⁴²² Bruce Reed, *The Dynamics of Religion: Process and Movement in Christian Churches* (London: Dartman, Longman & Todd, 1978), 9.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 9.

individual alternates ‘between periods of autonomous activity and periods of physical or symbolic contact with sources of renewal’.⁴²⁴ The former he refers to as the intra-dependent mode, whilst the latter is the extra-dependent mode. The place of religion in this process of oscillation is to provide ‘a focus for behaviour in the extra-dependent mode’ that is then ‘externalised in intra-dependence’.⁴²⁵ In other words, what they receive from their corporate religious practices is meant to enable their life in the world, and he will go on to argue that religious behaviour can be classified in terms of its effects on society.⁴²⁶ Reed, throughout the book, distinguishes between functional and dysfunctional religion, and says that the latter does not meet the needs of those who regress into extra-dependence; they are therefore ‘unready to face the outside world’.⁴²⁷ One of the ways this unfulfilled dependence may manifest itself is by individuals throwing themselves more heavily into church activities as a way ‘reassuring themselves’.⁴²⁸ Meanwhile, Reed notes, ‘they may passively accept the political and economic state of their society, and work diligently to earn their own living, but they do not fully engage with society at its depth because they cannot extricate themselves from a dependent frame of mind’.⁴²⁹

Whilst I would suggest that Reed’s argument is overly dependent on psychology and notions of ‘well-being’, and moves in the direction of making worship merely instrumental in a psychological process, I do think he makes an important point about the role of worship in equipping people (to use a common evangelical phrase) for life in the world. Reed addresses this primarily in terms of the ‘needs’ of dependency being

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 51.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 57.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 79.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 79.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 63.

met;⁴³⁰ as the individual comes to worship worn out from daily life and the efforts to live faithfully, they seek forgiveness and renewal in worship, and re-centre themselves on God, who is internalised⁴³¹ and thus able to give shape to their lives as they again go out into the world.⁴³² Reed suggests that when this oscillation process is incomplete, individuals will be left with a sense of mourning, either because the individual feels impotent, or because they feel the world is ‘resistant to their exhortations’ to change.⁴³³ One of the results is the embrace of secularism, which according to Reed is ‘the rationalisation of behaviour so as to avoid the failure of knowing how to depend on God’.⁴³⁴ This either drives people away from a worshipping community, or interestingly, leads them to become overly involved in church life, with a whole host of extra programmes and activities that fill up their time.⁴³⁵ These programmes hinder the oscillation process and ‘turns the church members in on themselves’ instead of allowing the church to be the place that ‘facilitates interaction with the environment’.⁴³⁶

Though the language is very different, this, I think, again finds some resonance with Taylor’s ‘immanent frame’: with the loss of a robust faith that gives shape to the whole of reality, and as the church turns in on itself,⁴³⁷ people begin to either turn away

⁴³⁰ Reed rather unapologetically asserts that the fullness of this oscillation process is embodied in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* Communion service.

⁴³¹ Quite literally, for Reed, in the act of receiving the Eucharist.

⁴³² Reed, *The Dynamics of Religion*, 74ff. However, Reed downplays the public nature of this faith: ‘[A person’s] Christian resources are interior and personal to himself, to be offered in the pursuit of the common goal. To the extent that he insists on a religious, Christian, or God label he has not made the transition to intra-dependent mode, and his autonomy is illusory’ (86). I would take issue with Reed on this point.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 83-84.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴³⁵ This is, of course, a persistent feature of evangelical churches, whether it is small groups, music groups, prayer groups, or various committees. In fact, on a Sunday morning at St Nic’s in August 2017, after a couple of months of people not volunteering to help with the coffee rota, children’s work, and AV desk, the service leader made a rather frustrated plea for people to sign up, saying, ‘Come on folks, get involved! It’s called *being church*.’

⁴³⁶ Reed, *The Dynamics of Religion*, 115.

⁴³⁷ Interestingly, Reed argues that this is a defensive mechanism of sorts: the church intends its activities to ‘preserve it against the assaults and erosions caused by forces originating from the environment’ (115). It also, however, erects a barrier against people outside the church.

from engaging reality, or they infuse reality with meaning absorbed from the secular liturgies they are embedded in every day. This, I think, is another weak point in Reed's thesis – he neglects to give due attention to the formative power of culture. The purpose of worship is not merely to meet the needs of the stages of dependency, but to be 'intentionally liturgical, formative, and pedagogical in order to *counter* [the] misformations and misdirections' of the liturgies of the culture around us.⁴³⁸ As it pertains to discipleship, this is one of the reasons I think Smith's work is so valuable. His 'exegesis' of culture employs the idea of 'liturgy' in order 'to raise the stakes of what's happening in a range of cultural practices and rituals. Insofar as they aim to shape our desire and specify our ultimate concern, they function as nothing less than liturgies'.⁴³⁹ As I have argued, I believe that this is what is going on with the practice of work. The practices my participants engage in each day are 'thick practices that are identity-forming and *telos*-laden', and with Smith, I want to 'recognise these thick practices as liturgical in order to appreciate their religious nature', so that we can see how they are 'capturing our imaginations...and [teaching] us to love something very different from the kingdom of God'.⁴⁴⁰ This is precisely why attention to the church's culture, and particularly its worship and liturgical formation is so key, because it is here that loves and desires can be re-ordered, and the webs of meaning that guide peoples' lives can be recast according to the vision of the Kingdom. In short, we need liturgical re-formation if we are to be faithfully formed to practice our work.

I will return to this in the following chapter, but for now, this is simply to say that, whilst St Nic's recent emphasis on work and all of life discipleship is laudable and indeed a missing element in many evangelical churches, I suggest, as I did in the

⁴³⁸ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 88 (emphasis his).

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

previous chapter, that it remains tangential to the dominant focus of the church's worship and teaching ministry,⁴⁴¹ which, in keeping with the patterns and emphases of traditional evangelicalism, primarily continue to give attention to personal and individual spirituality. As a result, eight two-hour sessions spent talking about a theological vision of work are insufficient to re-orient how my participants think about and practice their work, since it is not reinforced by the primary emphases of the worshipping life of the church.⁴⁴²

5.5 Conclusion

In chapter three, I suggested that because of how people are formed as disciples, an encounter with a theological vision of work in the form of a small group course would be insufficient to reorient the way Christians thought about and practiced their work. Though the findings discussed in this chapter indicated some small shifts in attitudes and perspectives, they have for the most part largely confirmed my earlier hypothesis, and I have suggested a number of reasons for why this might be the case, primarily focused on theories of formation and the way people make meaning of their worlds. It remains now to make some suggestions for how churches might respond to what I have discussed in the previous two chapters, and it is to this that I now turn.

⁴⁴¹ It is important to note that midway through my research, Stephen Bellamy, the previous incumbent, left for another parish, and as a result, the church's life became largely consumed with the transitional period between his departure and the arrival of the new incumbent. This played a noticeable role in reshaping the culture of the church for a time.

⁴⁴² This perhaps deserves a minor qualification. I recognise, first, that *Transforming Work* contains a lot of material, and that it may simply be too much to ask of people to take it all on board in the first instance. I also recognise, second, that things may have been embedded under the surface, and as a result, may not have emerged in the follow-up interviews, but could possibly resurface later, or be drawn on unconsciously. However, I do not think that undermines my argument here; indeed, it could be suggested that it reinforces it by pointing to the need for repetition and habitual formation.

6. Moving forward: How the church might contribute to enabling the faithful practice of work

6.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I analysed the data collected during the research phase of this project, concluding, first, that my participants did not have an overly positive experience of work, and that as a result, they struggled to find meaning in their work; and second, following *Transforming Work* and an encounter with a theological vision of work, that participants were largely unable to reimagine the meaning of their work and reorient how they practiced their work. However, because I argued in chapter two for the importance of a theological vision of work, and with Lesslie Newbigin, would suggest that ‘the primary action of the church in the world is the action of its members in their daily work’,⁴⁴³ I also remain convinced for the need for Christians to faithfully practice their work, and for the church to make work a key focus in its work of discipleship. As a result, on the back of the discoveries made in the previous two chapters, I turn in this final chapter to suggest some proposals for how churches might respond in their work of discipleship amongst parishioners in full-time work. I will make three proposals – that the churches should be intentional about giving its parishioners increased space to talk about work in a corporate context, that churches engage in actively commissioning and supporting parishioners for their daily work, and that renewed attention be given to worship and the liturgical formation.

⁴⁴³ Lesslie Newbigin, ‘Evangelism in the Context of Secularization’, in *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring A Missional Practice of the Church*, eds. Paul W. Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 51.

6.2 Allowing space to talk about work

One of the things that emerged during the course of my research, particularly in the follow-up interviews, was that my participants valued the space to talk about work with others in work, and all of them suggested that the church might offer more space for them to do this, whether it was informally, or in the form of something like a Saturday ‘workshop’ or ‘forum’ with different speakers brought in to address different topics. A number of them also suggested, and rightly so, that *Transforming Work* be run more regularly within the church as a means of raising the profile of work and getting more people talking about work. That they would suggest this is not at all surprising; as discussed in chapter four, there is a sociological element of solidarity here as participants share experiences and challenges. It goes without saying that this is a very simple thing to organise and would certainly achieve the aim of making work something that is talked about more regularly in churches. In his book, *Every Good Endeavour*, Timothy Keller mentions the emergence of ‘Vocation groups’ at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan. These groups are organised by fields, such as business, information technology, law, and meet monthly, sometimes with a special speaker, to ‘deepen their faith, and explore the challenges and opportunities of their field in light of the gospel’.⁴⁴⁴ This, I think, provides a helpful model that other churches could adopt and adapt to their respective contexts.

However, there is also the potential here for group dynamics such as I noted in the previous chapter to be at work here, thus limiting what such a group might actually achieve in terms of discipleship. This is not to mention, channelling Reed again, that taking time up *talking* about work takes away from time to *engage in the faithful practice* of work. Therefore, if more space is going to be allocated to talking about work

⁴⁴⁴ Keller, *Every Good Endeavour*, 249-250.

in this way, it needs to be done carefully. Also, given what I have suggested in the previous chapter about the role of the whole culture of a church in shaping how people think about and practice their work, offering more space to talk about work should be done in conjunction with what I discuss in the following sections.

6.3 Commissioning and supporting workers

A number of my participants noted that they saw value in ‘This Time Tomorrow’, the five-minute slot introduced occasionally in the morning service at St Nic’s to highlight what someone would be doing at that time on Monday. Despite the fact that most of them only saw the slot as something ‘interesting’ rather than making any contribution to how they thought about and practiced their work, nonetheless it seems to have had the effect of raising the profile of work amongst parishioners. This is an important step for the church to take. Mark Greene notes in an anecdote in the first session of *Transforming Work*, ‘As one teacher said to me, “I teach Sunday School forty-five minutes a week and they haul me up to the front of the church to pray for me. But I teach in a school forty hours a week and the church has never prayed for that part of my life”’.⁴⁴⁵ Indeed, whilst completing this thesis, a new warden and tutor were appointed at Cranmer Hall, the theological college I was attending at the time, and commissioned in a formal and quite powerful service. Charges were issued, prayers said, and blessings pronounced over them before they were sent out to do their work. It struck me during the service that there might be little else churches could do that would tangibly demonstrate the value of their parishioners’ work more than to commission them in a similar way.

⁴⁴⁵ *Transforming Work*, session 1, 02:26.

A few years ago, the Diocese of London launched an initiative where people were commissioned as ‘ambassadors’, set apart to serve God in their everyday lives.

The rationale behind the initiative was this:

For those of us who have formal church roles, or who go on mission overseas, we have moments where we are commissioned formally for these ministries. But how significant would it be if every single person in our congregations was prayed for and commissioned to live and work to Christ’s praise and glory each day where God has called them?⁴⁴⁶

When the programme was launched in 2012, over 2000 ambassadors were commissioned in a formal service at St Paul’s Cathedral by the former Bishop of London, Richard Chartres.⁴⁴⁷ The Diocese is now aiming to ‘equip and commission 100,000 ambassadors representing Jesus Christ in daily life’ by 2020.⁴⁴⁸ Even if the Diocese’s initiative, in my view, is still a bit too focused on traditional categories of evangelism and social action, this formal recognition of the role of daily work⁴⁴⁹ is nonetheless a powerful step in enabling parishioners to see their work as both of deep significance to God, and as part of the mission of the church, in which they play an integral part.⁴⁵⁰

In addition to commissioning workers, churches must then ensure they continue to support parishioners in work. In this respect, St Nic’s occasional ‘This Time

⁴⁴⁶ ‘Capital Vision 2020: Equip and commission 100,000 ambassadors representing Jesus Christ in daily life’, *Diocese of London*, accessed 14 Aug 2017, <https://www.london.anglican.org/mission/capital-vision-2020/equip-and-commission-100000-ambassadors-representing-jesus-christ-in-daily-life/>.

⁴⁴⁷ ‘London Challenge: the 2012 Ambassadors Initiative’, *Diocese of London*, accessed 14 Aug 2017, <https://www.london.anglican.org/about/london-challenge/the2012-ambassadors-initiative/>.

⁴⁴⁸ This is part of their ‘Capital Vision 2020’ campaign, about which more information can be found here: <https://www.london.anglican.org/mission/capital-vision-2020/>.

⁴⁴⁹ Though indeed, ‘everyday life’ encompasses much more than just work.

⁴⁵⁰ It goes without saying that equipping and commissioning people in this way would be a significant undertaking for any church, and would require substantial leadership development to facilitate such an initiative. In this regard, I commend JR Woodward’s model of polycentric leadership, as set out in his book, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012). Woodward, who has extensive experience in church planting and leadership, draws on the fivefold model of leadership from Ephesians 3 to present a helpful paradigm for how leaders in each of the five ‘offices’ might be set apart as ‘equippers’ to nurture members of the church so they might be faithful disciples for the good of their neighbourhoods and communities.

Tomorrow' feature is an encouraging step to bring the work of its parishioners into focus, and it would do well to make this a regular (such as monthly) feature in its Sunday worship.⁴⁵¹ Even if my participants only talked about this feature as being 'interesting', they recognised its value in raising the profile of work. Another simple means of support would be to regularly pray for people in work as part of the weekly intercessions. Interestingly, one of my participants regularly offered intercessions at St Nic's, and throughout the duration of the course, would often pray for workers as part of those intercessions.

A further significant means of support is the church's teaching ministry, and I would stress the importance of this particularly in an evangelical context where parishioners largely expect this to be the primary means of discipleship. A number of my participants suggested that sermons that occasionally focused on work would be helpful, and indeed, to show how Scripture remains relevant to the everyday life of many parishioners is a key part of supporting them in their work.⁴⁵² The theological shape of the church's teaching ministry is key here. I noted above in chapter four that a more robust doctrine of creation is essential for enabling the faithful practice of work, for it is only in understanding the structure of the created order, and the nature and place of work in that order, that we can fulfil our calling both to be participants in God's creative work, and to participate in God's redemption of that order from the misdirecting effects of sin. Given that work is woven into the fabric of creation, our efforts to enable the faithful practice of work will be hampered without this particular theological emphasis, and more, will hinder us from being able to resist participating

⁴⁵¹ St Nic's originally intended to do this monthly, but in the course of my research, it happened very sporadically.

⁴⁵² One of the exercises in *Transforming Work* is something called the 'Bible Through Workers' Eyes', which invites participants to reflect on a passage of Scripture from the viewpoint of a worker. Another useful resource is a recently published commentary by the Theology of Work Project, entitled, *Theology of Work Bible Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2016).

uncritically in the distorted structures of work. Therefore, ‘if we are concerned to read the Bible for all of life, then a robust doctrine of creation is certainly of fundamental importance’.⁴⁵³ Merely teaching about work now and then will achieve very little unless there is a coherent theological framework rooted in the scriptural story of creation, fall, and redemption underpinning the whole culture of the church.

One final means of support that could be exercised by leaders in the church is to visit workers in their workplaces. This is something of a novel idea (although it could be connected with the historic practice of a parson visiting their parishioners, even if the structure of society is different today), but one suggested in *Transforming Work*.⁴⁵⁴ It is also something that Timothy Keller, former pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, and co-founder of the Redeemer Center for Faith and Work, practiced during his ministry. In an interview with a prominent evangelical group in America, Keller responded to the following question:

You remark that people “long for their pastor to be interested in learning more about the situations they face on a daily basis.” How can pastors better empathize with, encourage, and equip their people in regard to their work?

At one point in my ministry here I regularly visited my members at their workplace – either eating lunch with them in their office or just going by to see them there. Usually these visits had to be brief – 20 to 30 minutes. But this made it possible to learn quite a lot about their work-issues and the environment in which they spent so much of their time.⁴⁵⁵

Keller, I believe, makes a valid and important point here. One of the themes that emerged with my participants, particularly in reaction to the video segments, as

⁴⁵³ Craig G. Bartholomew and Matthew Y. Emerson, ‘Theological Interpretation for All of Life’, in *A Manifesto for Theological Interpretation*, eds. Craig G. Bartholomew and Heath A. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 261.

⁴⁵⁴ *Transforming Work*, session 6, 14:02.

⁴⁵⁵ Matt Smethurst, ‘When the Gospel Invades Your Office: Tim Keller on Faith and Work’, *The Gospel Coalition*, 12 Nov 2012, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/when-the-gospel-invades-your-office-tim-keller-on-faith-and-work>. Keller has spoken more substantially about this elsewhere, but unfortunately, I am unable to locate the source at this time. The quote here, however, broadly summarises why he finds this a valuable practice.

discussed above, was that others were unaware of their work contexts, and thus unable to speak to them. This practice, however, would enable those responsible for guiding them in their discipleship to speak in meaningful and relevant ways to their situations. Interestingly, when this idea was suggested in *Transforming Work*, a couple of people seemed taken aback by the thought of their vicar visiting their workplace. One suggested that they didn't feel this would be possible in their workplace, while another said they just had 'no idea how that would work'. To be sure, this would be an unusual practice, and in some instances may not be feasible, although, particularly for those church leaders who wear clerical collars, doors continue to open in unexpected places. Further, for those Christians who feel hesitant to speak about their faith in the workplace, identifying themselves with someone like a vicar may serve to create opportunities to speak about faith. Some workplaces have chaplaincy programmes in place already, which may also help to bridge the gap between spiritual and daily life.

6.4 Worship and the culture of the church

In chapter three, I argued extensively for the need for attentiveness to liturgical formation, and in the previous chapter, argued that lack of attention to this dynamic went some way to explaining why my participants were unable to articulate a theological vision of work following their journey through *Transforming Work*. I return to this now as what I will suggest to be the most significant action churches can take in creating a culture that brings work to the forefront as an area of discipleship and mission.

I have noted above that we are by nature primarily affective rather than cognitive creatures, and that our 'being-in-the-world' is fundamentally oriented by what we love and desire as ultimate. We are participants in everyday liturgies that 'aim our

hearts to certain ends, which in turn draw us to them in a way that transforms our actions by inscribing in us habits or dispositions to act in certain ways'.⁴⁵⁶ The concept of the social imaginary presents significant challenges to models of discipleship that are primarily cognitive, and Smith suggests that an over-emphasis on 'doctrinal disquisitions' is 'precisely why secular liturgies trump our imaginations'.⁴⁵⁷ We are not taught how to think about work; our imaginations are captured by visions of work as we are trained in the dominant cultural habits and practices of work.

In the second volume of his 'Cultural Liturgies' project, Smith presents an argument for how worship 'works', and I want to give brief attention to that here to begin to move towards some suggestions for how the church might respond to what I have found in my research. In chapter three, I pointed to the theories of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu in order to argue for the idea that our orientation, or 'being-in-the-world', is largely something unconscious. Given this 'bodily attunement that so fundamentally governs our being-in-the-world',⁴⁵⁸ Smith urges us to consider the power of narrative in capturing our imaginations, and the role stories play in shaping what we love. This is because narratives have 'a certain teleological character',⁴⁵⁹ as Alastair MacIntyre says: 'We live out our lives, both individually and in our relationships with each other, in the light of certain conceptions of a possible shared future'.⁴⁶⁰ These stories are so key because 'I can only answer the question "What am I to do?" if I can answer the prior question "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?"'⁴⁶¹ These stories help us to inhabit the roles we have been assigned. However, it is important to recognise, with Smith, that these stories are not told occasionally, as if we 'sit at the proverbial

⁴⁵⁶ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 133.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁴⁵⁸ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 108.

⁴⁵⁹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 215.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 216.

librarian's feet for "story time", but rather 'these stories are more like dramas that are enacted and performed' and done so repeatedly.⁴⁶² This is crucial to Smith's argument for a liturgical anthropology, that these stories have such power because they are absorbed liturgically by 'those rituals and practices that constitute the embodied stories of a body politic'.⁴⁶³ It is our 'story-laden practices that are absorbed into our imaginative epicenter of action and behavior',⁴⁶⁴ and become 'inscribed in our body through that "pedagogy of insignificance" noted by Bourdieu – all the mundane little micropractices that nonetheless "carry" a big Story'.⁴⁶⁵ The more we are immersed in these micropractices, the more this story becomes the 'background narrative and aesthetic orientation that habitually shapes how we constitute our world'.⁴⁶⁶ These stories capture our imaginations and instil in us pictures of 'the good life' that then 'construes my obligations and responsibilities accordingly'.⁴⁶⁷ The connection with worship should become clear at this point; if we are shaped by story-laden practices, then the church in its worship must give attention to its story-laden practices as well. Part of Smith's argument in his 'Cultural Liturgies' project is simply that evangelical churches in particular have failed to appreciate this liturgical anthropology, and thus in their worship and work of discipleship, have failed to effectively counter the formation we undergo by our daily immersion in rival secular liturgies. Formation in the evangelical tradition, as argued throughout this thesis, has generally focused on reshaping the intellect, but in Smith's view, 'if we are going to recalibrate our attunement to the world, and hence feel pulled by a different *call*, it is not enough to

⁴⁶² Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 109.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

have a Christian “perspective” on the world; we need nothing less than a Christian imagination’.⁴⁶⁸ This is the purpose of the practices of Christian worship, for

if we are going to be agents of the coming kingdom, *acting* in ways that embody God’s desires for creation, then our imaginations need to be conscripted by God. It is not enough to convince our intellects; our imaginations need to be caught by – and caught up into – the Story of God’s restorative, reconciling grace for all of creation. It won’t be enough for us to be convinced; we need to be *moved*. Otherwise...we’ll be convinced but not transformed.⁴⁶⁹

I would argue that contemporary evangelicalism, in giving primary attention to efforts to reshape thinking, has not been attentive enough to the role of practices and imagination. Preaching and teaching, for all its value – and with Smith, I would certainly want to affirm how significant it is, and will argue that liturgical formation will fail without serious attention to this indispensable aspect of ministry – will be insufficient on its own to capture the imaginations that orient our ‘being-in-the-world’.

What I am arguing is that the *whole* worshipping culture of the church must be attuned to this shaping of the imagination. If Smith is right, and I think he is, that our daily enacting of story-laden rituals and practices fundamentally orients how we live, then we need practices that will help us to ‘learn the true Story “by heart”, at a gut level, and let it seep into our background in order to then shape our perception of the world’.⁴⁷⁰ Whilst for many evangelicals, this may sound like something novel, Smith instead is arguing that ‘historic Christian faith has always intuited this’ owing to its ‘robust theology of creation, an appreciation for the implications of the incarnation, and a sacramental ontology that saw the charged nature of matter that participated with

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 157 (emphasis his). There is no shortage of evangelical publications that purport to offer ‘A Christian perspective’ on just about everything. Work is not exempt here – a quick Google search yields thousands of articles addressing a ‘biblical perspective/view’ on work. I am also aware of the irony both of beginning this thesis with a discussion of theological perspectives on work, and of discussing the importance of the church enabling Christians to cultivate such a perspective.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 157 (emphasis his).

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 163.

God',⁴⁷¹ and thus he encourages a return to the holistic practices of historic Christian worship. It is often the case that modern evangelical worship is centred on the individual and his or her personal piety, and its practices reinforce this emphasis – long periods of sung worship with songs predominantly in the first person singular, the bulk of the service given to sermons focused on elements of personal faith, the absence of a weekly Eucharist. To be sure, the nurture of an individual's piety may result in the diffusion of that blessing to the people and places they encounter, but there is something richer in the fullness of the church's historic practices of worship, that, in all their bodily and material significance, recognise from the start that 'Christian liturgical practices and spiritual disciplines are not just means of personal renewal; they remake the world because they transform the perception of the people of God who not only inhabit the world differently but inhabit a different world, a world constituted as God's creation'.⁴⁷² We are formed as we participate in God's action in worship to be sent out to participate in God's action in the world.

It is important to emphasise at this point that liturgy does not work automatically, and indeed, this is sometimes a critique levelled against Smith's thesis: that to merely participate in or perform the liturgy is all that is required to be formed as disciples. He points to this himself in *Desiring the Kingdom*, when he says, 'I can think of a congregation gathering week in and week out for historic, intentional Christian worship that includes all the elements discussed here; and yet, from the perspective of *shalom*, some of its parishioners are unapologetic and public participants in some of the most egregious systemic injustices'.⁴⁷³ Asking if this invalidates his argument, Smith suggests not, but rather that 'we will need a more nuanced account of how some

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 165.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 167.

⁴⁷³ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 208n115. He picks this argument up in detail in his most recent book, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).

liturgies *trump* others'.⁴⁷⁴ Whilst I think Smith makes an important point here, and his call for a deeper investigation into the empirical realities of worship is important, I would want to push a bit further and draw attention to what Alexander Schmemmann calls 'liturgical piety'.⁴⁷⁵ Schmemmann suggests that the texts and practices the church has given us throughout the centuries are the objective forms of liturgy, but that there is always a liturgical piety at work that changes how people experience or perceive the liturgy. 'Liturgical piety', he writes, 'has the strange power of "transposing" texts or ceremonies, of attaching a meaning to them which is not their plain or original meaning'.⁴⁷⁶ Drawing on Charles Taylor, Alastair Roberts has written recently of the way modern liturgical piety has been shaped by secularism, as the buffered self, for instance, infuses liturgy with its own meaning, detached from its communal nature and intentions. Roberts notes that 'when we celebrate something such as the Eucharist as modern selves, we can perceive its meaning to occur in the privacy of our minds, rather than in the external socio-symbolic and objective realm that we share'.⁴⁷⁷ Thus the Eucharist becomes perhaps a time for an individual to experience a touch of transcendence, or to feel a need for inner peace satisfied after a busy week, instead of being the means by which we are collectively transformed into the likeness of Christ and sent out 'in the power of the Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory'.⁴⁷⁸

Mark Searle, a Roman Catholic liturgical theologian, has suggested that 'what is required is a new mystagogy of faith aimed at converting the way we see, listen, and act liturgically... A conversion of the imagination, a reawakening of the imagination as a

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 208n115 (emphasis his).

⁴⁷⁵ Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, trans. Asheleigh E. Moorhouse (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 97-98.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁷⁷ Alastair Roberts, 'Liturgical Piety', in *Our Secular Age: Ten Years of Reading and Applying Charles Taylor* (Deerfield: The Gospel Coalition, 2017), 66.

⁴⁷⁸ The Archbishops' Council, *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000), 182.

desire for the “Reality” mediated by the words, signs, and gestures of the rite’.⁴⁷⁹ This then illuminates some difficulties with Smith’s thesis – liturgy is meant to shape our imaginations, but at the same time we need to come to the liturgy with a certain imagination in order for it to ‘work’ at shaping our imaginations. There is undoubtedly something of a tension here, and one which is not easily resolved. Smith does briefly return to this point towards the end of *Imagining the Kingdom*, when he discusses the need for liturgical catechesis, which he says is about inviting ‘the people of God to a more conscious, intentional awareness of what we’re doing and why we’re doing it when we gather for worship’.⁴⁸⁰ This awareness, according to Smith, will ‘solidify as a conviction that then moves us to be committed to immersion in the practices’.⁴⁸¹ Yet Searle offers a caution here as well, that we don’t become preoccupied ‘with teaching people the meaning of things’, because this effectively empties the liturgy of its power.⁴⁸² Instead he suggests we follow the example of the fourth- and fifth-century Church Fathers, who ‘multiplied the associations evoked by the ritual and prayer, showing how the image opens on to a larger world of reality than meets our eye or ear’.⁴⁸³ The key thing for Searle, however, is in the approach to the liturgy, that we begin with ‘an attitude of attentive receptivity to everything that happens in the rite as it unfolds’ and that we learned to ‘trust the liturgy and the presence of the Spirit’.⁴⁸⁴ Smith too talks about the ‘angle of entry’ into the liturgy as ‘the determining factor in the formative power of worship’, and points to the need to come with expectancy and

⁴⁷⁹ Mark Searle, ‘Images and Worship’, in *Vision: The Scholarly Contributions of Mark Searle to Liturgical Renewal*, eds. Anne Y. Koester and Barbara Searle (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004), 130.

⁴⁸⁰ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 188.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁴⁸² Searle, ‘Images and Worship’, 134.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

openness to the Spirit's operations in and through the church's worship.⁴⁸⁵ This will be key if the liturgy is going to be the means of our re-formation and renewal.

I have moved away from talking about worship and work specifically because I wanted to emphasise that our approach to work is going to be shaped by our approach to reality in general. I have argued that this approach is shaped by the story we find ourselves in, and that we need to be shaped in particular by the story of the gospel, which is done as we immerse ourselves in the practices of Christian worship. That all said, I now move from the general to the specific and want to suggest that there are some distinct practices that are of especial value to those in work, and that to engage in them regularly will play a significant role in reshaping how they imagine the meaning and significance of their work. As J.H. Oldman has said,

It is the whole man, with all his concerns, that enters into, or ought to enter into, the act of worship. A larger place needs to be found in public worship for the matters which daily exercise the minds of most of the worshippers. If these are forgotten, the ordinary member of the congregation is in danger of looking on the activities of his daily business as lying outside the religious sphere and as of little significance in the eyes of God.⁴⁸⁶

To that end, I make the following suggestions.

First, Alan Richardson argues that 'our work should be dedicated or offered to God in our worship',⁴⁸⁷ and that one of the chief means of doing so is at the Eucharist, through the offertory prayer at the preparation of the table. This is a practice that has largely been lost in evangelical churches because of a Eucharistic theology that is very concerned to avoid any notion of sacrifice. However, understood properly, this is a practice that could be of deep significance to those in work. The language of a number

⁴⁸⁵ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 189.

⁴⁸⁶ Oldham, *Work in Modern Society*, 61-62.

⁴⁸⁷ Richardson, *The Biblical Doctrine of Work*, 62.

of the preparatory prayers in the Church of England's *Common Worship*, for instance, invoke work directly:

Generous God,
creator, redeemer, sustainer,
at your table we present this money,
symbol of the work you have given us to do;
use it, use us,
in the service of your world
to the glory your name.⁴⁸⁸

And:

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation:
through your goodness we have this bread to set before you,
which earth has given *and human hands have made*.
It will become for us the bread of life.
Blessed be God for ever.

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation:
through your goodness we have this wine to set before you,
fruit of the vine *and work of human hands*.
It will become for us the cup of salvation.
Blessed be God for ever.⁴⁸⁹

There is deep significance in parishioners seeing their work brought to the table, and even if we no longer live in a society where they might have had a direct hand in producing the elements, the symbolic weight of this practice is not lost. Richardson notes that churches that have recovered this practice 'can testify that its recognition has brought a new dimension of reality into the Eucharistic worship... They perceive that worship is relevant to their lives, when they come to understand that the bread and wine which they offer are the symbols of all their work'.⁴⁹⁰ He goes on to note that 'there must be significance in the fact that the sacramental elements in the Eucharist...are manufactured articles'.⁴⁹¹ Indeed, he is clear about the significance, and worth quoting at length:

⁴⁸⁸ *Common Worship*, 291 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 291 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁹⁰ Richardson, *The Biblical Doctrine of Work*, 67.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

Before God's sacramental gift of the Body and Blood of Christ can be received by the faithful, bread and wine, products of human labour, must be laid upon the altar or table... Without the offering of human hands there will be no sacrament. But equally, without the toil and skill of the farmer, without the labour of the bakers, the transport workers, the banks and offices, the shops and distributors – without, in fact, the toil of minds and shipyards and steel-works and so on – *this* loaf would not have been here to lay upon the altar this morning. In truth, the whole world of human work is involved in the manufacture of the bread and wine which we offer in the Eucharist, and which is given back to us as God's ineffable gift... Here is the perfect symbol of the unity of work and worship, the strange unbreakable link that exists between bread that is won in the sweat of man's face and the bread of life that is bought without money and without price.⁴⁹²

Interestingly, in the first session of *Transforming Work*, Mark Greene at one point places a laptop bag on the altar in a church while quoting from Colossians 3.17,⁴⁹³ and one of my participants mentioned how much they liked that, and how they 'thought that was effective'. Here is a practice laden with a story: the work we do is offered in thankfulness to the one who calls us to work.

Second, something like the ancient practice of 'beating the bounds' could be reintroduced. Historically, the church has observed Rogation Days, which were days set apart to seek God's blessing on the fields in rural communities, particularly when the seed was sown in spring, in anticipation of a good harvest. The practice of 'beating the bounds' involved a procession around the parish boundaries both for the civic purpose of ensuring the boundaries were still in place, but also for parishioners to pray for all those within their parish.⁴⁹⁴ Though predominantly a rural practice,⁴⁹⁵ it has seen something of a revival as a means to pray for God's blessings on communities. A

⁴⁹² Ibid., 67-68.

⁴⁹³ 'Whatever you do...do everything in the name of Jesus Christ' (NRSV). Greene strongly and repeatedly emphasises the word 'whatever' in the video.

⁴⁹⁴ Gill Ambrose, *Together for a Season: All-age Resources for Feasts and Festivals of the Christian Year* (London: Church House Publishing, 2009), 31.

⁴⁹⁵ Actually, I think it is worth considering what can be learned from the rural church more generally in regards to the integration of daily (or perhaps more specifically, annual) life with the rhythms of the church's worshipping life. It is intriguing to compare the way many other churches in less rural contexts find the rhythms of their life shaped by the school year.

related practice has emerged particularly in North America of engaging in ‘prayer walks’ through the communities in which local churches are situated.⁴⁹⁶ Again, although it must be recognised that parishioners in a particular church may no longer live and work in the same community, this is a symbolic practice that serves to cultivate the desire for all the people, organisations and institutions in our cities and communities, to experience God’s blessing, and to see ourselves as instrumental in bringing that about.⁴⁹⁷

Yet while these practices affirm the goodness and the possibilities of work, the church must also recognise the trials, challenges and limitations of work that result from its brokenness. Indeed, this is potentially the reality of work that many parishioners will encounter most often, as I think my empirical research helps demonstrate. Here, then, the church has a role in leading its parishioners in public lament. This lament enables Christians to recognise the ultimate cause of work’s brokenness, as well as to repent of their own complicity in that brokenness by their participation in the distorted structures of work. It thus also encourages them to turn away from unhelpful attempts to alleviate the pain of that brokenness and to instead see that it requires redressing: ‘It requires change that is systemic and social. It requires change in the cultures of industries and corporations, as well as nudges in law and policy... It should encourage a generation...willing to name these realities and call out the powers-that-be to change the very conditions of labour’.⁴⁹⁸ Thus corporate lament can become a catalyst to redemptive action.

⁴⁹⁶ Cf. ‘Neighborhood Prayer Walks’, *The Episcopal Church*, accessed 14 Aug 2017, https://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/documents/neighborhood_prayer_walks_tec.pdf.

⁴⁹⁷ I note here that these two practices are traditionally more characteristic of Anglo-Catholic churches, and that this may present a problem in terms of their adaptation by evangelical churches. However, I maintain, very simply, that the formation of disciples in order to be sent out for mission is more important than maintaining the distinctiveness of the church’s traditions. Additionally, should evangelicals feel these practices have been misused and infused with unhelpful meaning, I would urge them to recall an important theological principle: *abusus non tollit usum*.

⁴⁹⁸ Smith, ‘The Beauty of Work’, 26.

In addition to these three practices, it is of course important for the other elements of worship to bring work into focus as well. I have already alluded to the importance of the church's communal intercessions above. The act of commissioning workers mentioned above could also be seen as a deeply formative liturgical act. Particularly in line with more traditional evangelical means of formation, I would suggest again that the continued use of resources like *Transforming Work*, when connected with a broader attention to liturgical formation, is of significant value. Likewise, in terms of the shaping of stories, I would return again to emphasise, as above, the need for a rich teaching and preaching ministry rooted in a theological framework that finds its grounding in the scriptural story of creation-fall-redemption. This is particularly true in evangelical churches, which, as I noted above in chapter four, often lack a robust doctrine of creation, situating their fundamental theological emphases elsewhere.⁴⁹⁹ Finally, there are even songs and hymns that can be used in worship that reflect on work. A contemporary example is 'Before You I Kneel (A Worker's Prayer)' by Keith and Kristyn Getty, and a selection of older hymns, such as John Ellerton's 'Behold us, Lord, a little space', Edward Turney's 'I'll go in the strength of the Lord', and Jan Berry's 'Creating God, we bring our song of praise'.⁵⁰⁰

In short, there are a number of small yet significant elements of worship that can be introduced and practiced to begin to enable parishioners to see their work through the lenses of the gospel.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ Cf. again Wolters, *Creation Regained*, for an excellent critique and corrective of this paradigm.

⁵⁰⁰ All texts for these songs and hymns can be found online. I am grateful to Anne Harrison for compiling a list of songs and hymns that are of relevance to daily work.

⁵⁰¹ For an example of a church that has sought to place vocational discipleship at the heart of its ministry, and a detailed analysis of how it has done so, see Cory Willson's account of Redemption Church Tempe, in the American state of Arizona, in his recent PhD thesis ('Shaping the Lenses on Everyday Work: A Neo-Calvinist Understanding of the Poetics of Work and Vocational Discipleship', PhD diss., Free University of Amsterdam, 2014: 207-220). Willson describes the way they have very consciously shaped a culture in the church emphasising that 'all of life is all for Jesus'. Through his empirical research, he goes on to demonstrate how this has enabled people largely from traditional evangelical backgrounds to begin to reimagine the meaning and significance of their work, which has involved the church giving

6.5 Further avenues of exploration for the theology of work

I noted in chapter two that the field of the theology of work is a relatively recent development, and continues to be an emerging field. Further, I suggested in chapter three that the findings emerging from this research would raise important questions to be addressed by future explorations of the theology of work. It remains now for me to discuss briefly what those questions might be.

In chapter two, I argued that one of the most significant ideas in the theology of work is the notion that our work is a participation or cooperation in God's creative work, and through Christ, his redemptive work. This is an idea that is picked up in *Transforming Work* at various points. However, I also noted in chapter five that none of my participants were able to talk about their work in this way. As I argued later in the same chapter, I do not believe this was a failure of the course, and I want to suggest here that neither does it render this idea null and void. What I would suggest, though, is that this is an idea that needs to be developed and enriched by those who will continue to develop the theology of work. I mentioned in chapter two, for instance, that Oliver O'Donovan discusses the way creation's flourishing is dependent on human beings fulfilling their calling to rule and order creation,⁵⁰² and this I think is an area of enquiry that could benefit from some more attention, especially given the way my participants felt some of these more distinctly theological ideas were too idealised. This could help ground the theology in a richer way.

Secondly, more work needs to be done on the brokenness of work and the effects of sin on labour. Interestingly, whilst most of the theology of work emerges in response to the problems of work identified by certain economic and sociological

significant attention both to the role of teaching and liturgy in formation. In many ways, Redemption Church Tempe could offer a model that is worth emulating and/or adapting, particularly if combined with the liturgical attentiveness I am calling for here.

⁵⁰² O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 38.

thinkers, rarely are those problems considered from a theological standpoint. I think this is another reason the idea of work as a participation in God's work often encounters criticism, and why my participants sometimes found a more positive, transformative vision of work too idealistic. A fuller attentiveness to sin's distorting effects on work would demonstrate a more grounded theology of work, and enable Christians in work to more fully grasp the possibilities of work as they become agents of God's ongoing work of redemption in the world.

6.6 Conclusion

This thesis has considered the question of how the experiences of Christians in work can be reshaped by an encounter with a theological vision of work in the context of a church's discipleship programme. I began in chapter two by discussing the history of work, paying attention to how the nature of work has changed over the centuries, and showing that work in the modern world is dominantly shaped by economic realities. Tracing the changing shape of work also illuminated the reason for the development of the theology of work, as theologians began to respond to the problem of work in the modern age. I discussed how a number of approaches to the theology of work have emerged from different Christian traditions, and argued that the approach of the Reformed tradition, with its emphasis on work as a participation in God's work, its recognition of the distorting effects of sin on work, and the possibilities of work's transformation in the light of Christ's redemption, offer the most tangible theology of work for Christians seeking to reimagine the meaning and significance of their work.

Yet despite the rich contributions of the theology of work, as well as the extensive literature the Reformed tradition in particular has produced for a popular level, I also noted in chapter three that the daily work of Christians is an area of their

lives that the church, in its work of discipleship, has largely left untouched, and I argued that because of this, Christians have not been supported in being enabled to faithfully practice their work. I then argued that an encounter with a theological vision of work was needed in the context of a local church's discipleship programme in order to help Christians in work reimagine the meaning and significance of what they do, and to reorient how they think about and practice their work. My proposal was to engage in a phenomenological study that examined the experiences of Christians in work, and to use a piece of action research as part of a case study designed to bring a number of Christians from a particular local church into dialogue with a theological vision of work. This was done by means of a small group course. I conducted a set of interviews prior to and after the action research in order to determine how their experiences had been reshaped.

Having gathered a group of participants from a local church, and working with them over the space of a year, chapters four and five then dealt with the findings from this ethnographic research. I found first, that my participants largely struggled to find meaning in their work, and that they exhibited a degree of discontent with their work. Second, their experiences and the meaning they made of their work were dominantly shaped by cultural attitudes, habits, and practices of work, and they were largely unable to conceive of work in a theological sense. Third, an encounter with a theological vision of work in the context of a small group course, though prompting some new perspectives and courses of action, was largely unsuccessful in reshaping the experiences or the meaning my participants made of their work, particularly theologically. I concluded both chapters by using sociological, philosophical, and liturgical-theological insights to explore the reasons for this.

Finally, in chapter six, I concluded by offering some suggestions for renewed praxis for the church as it seeks to engage Christians in work, and to form them as disciples in the workplace. I suggested, first, that churches offer more space in which to talk about work, and second, that churches be active both in commissioning parishioners for their daily work, and in continuing to support them in their work in practical and public ways. Finally, I suggested that the most significant element in renewing the work of discipleship amongst Christians in work was that churches give renewed attention to their liturgies, and the liturgical formation of their parishioners, incorporating elements into their worship that bring work directly into focus, and renewing the theological foundation that shapes the culture of the church in line with the scriptural story of creation, fall, and redemption. My primary contention throughout this thesis has been that the postures towards and practices of work are shaped by deeply rooted social imaginaries, and I have demonstrated that this is the case with my participants. Therefore, I have argued that churches must give sustained attention to liturgical formation to reshape these imaginaries in order to support its parishioners in enabling the faithful practice of work. To merely teach about work, which would be the default means of formation in an evangelical context, is insufficient to recalibrate the *habitus*, or ‘being-in-the-world’, of Christian workers, and to counter the secular liturgies of work that Christians in work are shaped by each day. The whole culture and worshipping life of a church, including its preaching and teaching ministry, must be renewed, both in its theological framework and in the practices it engages in, if it is to provide the formation and support necessary to enable Christians to faithfully practice their work.

At the beginning of this thesis, I noted Dorothy Sayers’ poignant question, ‘How can any one remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-

tenths of his life?’⁵⁰³ Likewise, I have affirmed Lesslie Newbigin’s comment, that ‘the primary action of the church in the world is the action of its members in their daily work’.⁵⁰⁴ It is my hope that this thesis goes some way in equipping churches to speak to that ‘nine-tenths’ of many of their parishioners’ lives, and that in doing so, the church will be released more fully in its work of making the Kingdom of God known in a world – and in each workplace – so desperately in need of redemption.

⁵⁰³ Sayers, ‘Why Work?’, 56.

⁵⁰⁴ Newbigin, ‘Evangelism in the Context of Secularization’, 51.

Appendix A: Codes

The following is a full list of codes collected from the interviews with my participants.

The follow-up interviews were generally shorter in duration, hence the shorter list of codes.

Initial interview codes

Category	Theme	Code	Frequency
Experience	Choice of occupation	Fell into it	5
		Saw something interesting	3
		Desired something, but planned wrong	2
	Reasons for enjoying work	Dealing/interacting with people	8
		Creativity	4
		The actual work	4
		Colleagues	3
		Doing something valuable	3
		Variety	1
		Reasons for disliking work	Burden of expectations
	Routine/repetitiveness		4
	Difficult manager		2
	Sitting at a desk		2
	Why am I doing this		1
	Difficult workplace		1
	Competitive		1
	Selfish people		1
	Constant restructures		1
	Insufficient pay		1
	How work changes/affects	Character	8
		Stress	6
		Spiritually	5
		Sense of purpose	2
Tiredness		1	
Meaning	Significance and purpose of work	Make money	10
		Provide a service/societal purpose	8
		Made to work	5
		Relationships/community	4
		Glorify God	3
		Gives meaning/identity	2
	Uniqueness of Christian workers	Attitude/character	6
		Be salt and light	6
		Glorify God	6
		Do good work	5
		Serving something greater	3
	Relating faith and work	Live out faith	7

		Share faith	6
		Pray	5
		Work hard/ethically	4
		Be patient	2
		Find it hard	2
	Impact of St Nic's ministry	Preaching/teaching	6
		Not helped	4
		Support from house group	3
		This Time Tomorrow	2
		Don't need prescriptive teaching	2
		Encouragement	2

Follow-up interview codes

Category	Theme	Code	Frequency
Experience of work during the course	New perspective	Connections between God and work	5
		More positive view/bigger picture	2
	New actions	More willing to speak of faith	5
		Be salt and light	5
		More prayerful (people)	5
		More prayerful (difficulties/situations)	4
	Be more reflective	3	
Unaware of changes	Unaware of changes	3	
Commitments to further change	Actions	More open about faith	6
		Put the Ms into practice	4
		Pray more	3
	Perspective	Be more aware of God	2
		Find more meaning in work	1
No changes	No changes	3	
Meaning of work	Purpose of work	Earn a living	5
		Work in society	5
		Connecting God and work	5
		Community purposes	3
		Personal purposes	3
	How the church can help	Provide space to talk about work	6
		More people do <i>TW</i>	4
		Sermons on work	3
		Supporting/sharing resources	3
		More emphasis on reaching out	1
		Be more focused on ordinary people	1
		'This Time Tomorrow' more frequently	1

Appendix B: Interview schedules

The following are the interview schedules from the two sets of interviews with my participants. Because the interviews were semi-structured, these questions were not strictly adhered to, but functioned instead as an aid in guiding the conversation.

Initial interview schedule

- What is your current occupation? Tell me how you chose that occupation, or how you found your way into it. What other kind of work have you done?
- Walk me through an average day at your work.
- What do you enjoy about your work? What do you dislike?
- What do you feel the purpose of your work is? (Can you give me specific examples that illustrate the purpose of your work?)
- How do you feel that your work affects you? How has it changed you? (Can you give me some examples?)
- What do you feel the purpose of work is?
- What is a worker? Is there anything substantially different about being a Christian worker?
- Tell me, using specific examples, how you relate your faith and your work.
- What does it mean to you to be a Christian (*insert interviewee's occupation here*)?
- Do you feel that the ministry at St Nic's has helped you figure out what it means to be a Christian in your work? If so, how?

Follow-up interview schedule

- Tell me about your experience of the course.
- What did you like about the course? What didn't you like?
- What do you feel you took away from the course?
- Tell me what kinds of discussions you had about work with others over the past year.
- How has your experience of work changed as we've thought about a biblical vision of work? (Can you give me some examples?)
- What changes have you made to your work in the past year? (Can you give me some examples?)
- What changes would you like to make to your work as you look forward?
- What do you pray about your work?
- What do you feel the purpose of work is?
- What questions do you have about relating your faith and work that the course didn't address?
- Besides a small group course like *Transforming Work*, what could the church do to help you further connect your faith and work?

Appendix C: Participant consent form



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

The theology of work in practice: Explorations in integrating a theology of work into the discipleship programme of a parish church

You have indicated your willingness to participate in a research project exploring how Christians think about and practice their work, and how churches can equip their members with a theological vision of work. Your involvement in this research includes participating in two interviews, and in an 8-session course exploring a theology of work.

The interviews will consist of the researcher asking a number of questions, and inviting the participant to answer those questions, as well as to supply whatever other information they feel is relevant to the topic. The interviews will last approximately 60-90 minutes, and will be recorded via audio. The data will be used in the completion of a dissertation, and will be destroyed at the end of the project.

Participation in the course requires attending each of the 8 sessions, as well as individual engagement with the material outside of the sessions, which amounts to a couple of hours per week.

Researcher: Jake Belder

Contact Information: j.*****@durham.ac.uk | 07760 *****

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 09 January 2016 for the above project	
2. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask any questions	
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason	
4. I understand that the interview/ focus group will be audio/video recorded and that the recordings will be stored securely and destroyed on completion	
5. I understand that my data will only be accessed by those working on the project	
6. I understand that my data will be anonymised prior to publication	
7. I agree to the publication of verbatim quotes	
8. I understand that my participation in this project ends with the successful completion of the researcher's degree programme	
9. I agree to take part in the above project	

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

THE 6MS FRUITFULNESS AT WORK

The 6M framework, which you may already be familiar with from the course 'Fruitfulness on the Frontline', helps expand the vision of what it means to be a fruitful Christian in the workplace. It goes beyond simply being a nice person and having evangelistic conversations to help you see where God is already at work through you and to spot other opportunities in your everyday work. Each of the Ms enhance one another and increase fruitfulness when lived together.

When have you already...

M1 MODELLED GODLY CHARACTER?

This is the fruit of the Spirit in action – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. When were these qualities particularly required? Or tested? Did you notice something different about your default response to situations?

M2 MADE GOOD WORK?

The work that you do matters in and of itself. Is your work on spec, on time, on budget? Giving your best is fundamental. But what does it mean to make good work with God? Are you conscious that you work for the Lord: in his image, in his strength, and to his glory?

M3 MINISTERED GRACE AND LOVE?

Here the attitudes of the heart and mind are brought to bear in specific situations and actions. How do you love someone who is feeling unwell or upset? How do you minister grace and love in more challenging situations? Or when a boss is unreasonable and fractious? In a redundancy situation when you have to 'pull the trigger'? Or when a colleague isn't pulling their weight?

M4 MADE CULTURE?

If culture is 'the way we do things around here', how do you influence the way that things are done in your workplace? How do the values behind the behaviours, attitudes and norms of our workplaces measure up to Christian values? How might Christian values lead to different practices? Remember you can affect culture even if you are not in a position of power.

M5 BEEN A MOUTHPIECE FOR TRUTH AND JUSTICE?

There will be times when being a Christian at work means speaking up against things that are unfair, unhealthy or untruthful and speaking for things that are true and just and good whether it's about challenging major policy decisions or snuffing out gossip. This can be for your own benefit, or indeed on someone else's behalf (Philippians 2:3).

M6 BEEN A MESSENGER OF THE GOSPEL?

God loves your colleagues and wants them to know him better. As you pray for them and build relationships of trust, are you prepared to explain why you follow Jesus in a way they can appreciate? This may be through sharing a biblical perspective on a workplace issue, testifying to the way God has helped you in your work or, when the opportunity arises, engaging sensitively in a direct conversation about your beliefs.

⁵⁰⁵ Taken from the *Transforming Work* leader's guide.

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