FOREWORD BY KELLY M. KAPIC

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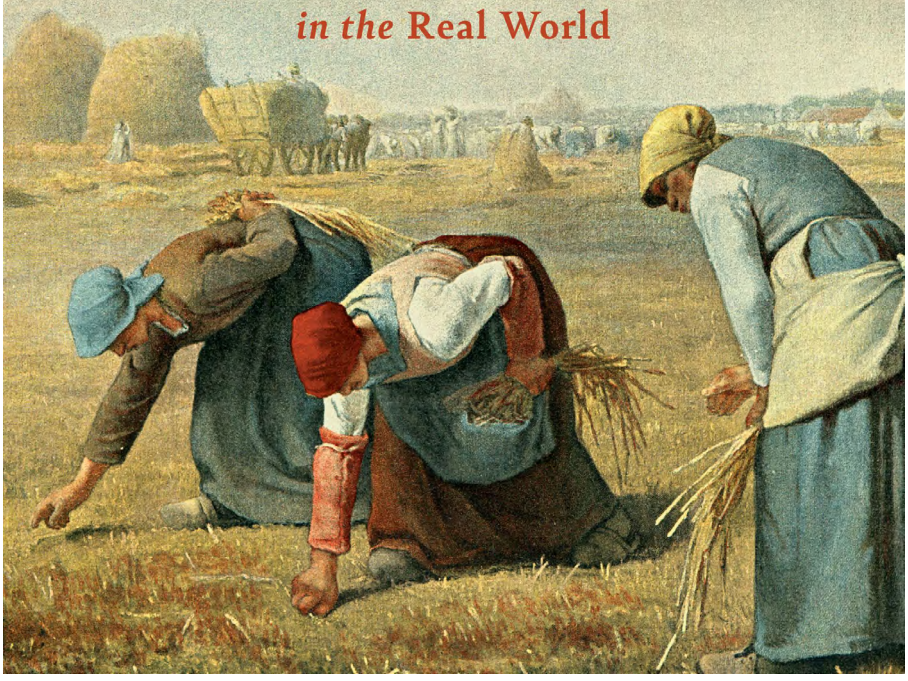
WORTH DOING

Fallenness, Finitude, *and* Work *in the* Real World



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INTRODUCTION

Theologians must be reminded of the harsh, complicated, and tiring circumstances and conditions under which work is often done—along with the rest of our lives in the quotidian.

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity*

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father,
you have brought us in safety to this new day:

Preserve us with your mighty power,
that we may not fall into sin,

nor be overcome by adversity; and in all we do,

direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A morning prayer, from The Book of Common Prayer

It's all a matter of perspective. Or is it?

The workers laying sewer pipe were sweaty, dirty, and weary. They had been digging, lifting, fitting, and securing pipe since seven o'clock that morning. And there was additional aggravation. During the previous night a portion of one of the walls of the trench that ran down the middle

of the busy street had partially collapsed, so much of the morning had been spent digging that section again. It was now approaching noon, and they were looking forward to sitting down with their thermoses and lunch pails. Just as they emerged from their trench and climbed onto the sidewalk to have lunch, they happened to notice a group of three nicely dressed people emerge through the glass doors of the steel-and-glass office building and walk past them. One was talking on her cellphone and the other two were overheard comparing two possible restaurants for lunch. "Must be nice," said one of the trench workers. "Sit in a nice chair, at a desk, in an air-conditioned office. Get up when you want to get a cup of coffee or to talk with someone. 'Work' a few hours and then go to a nice restaurant for a three-drink lunch. And the company probably pays for it. People like that have no clue what it's like to work in the real world."

Later that day, at about four o'clock, the ad agency team was visited by a vice president. She informed them that their client had changed the timeline for the launch of their new product and that, as a result, the team's marketing presentation would need to be ready to deliver in just four days, rather than two weeks. As soon as she walked out of the room and people had blurted out their feelings about this, they huddled among themselves and grudgingly concluded they had to stay and continue to work well into the evening. Individual team members began to send texts and make phone calls, canceling dinner engagements, informing spouses that they would not be home until late, and reassuring children that they would be at the next game. One of the workers had wandered to the window and rather blankly stared out as he briefly spoke with his wife. Having finished his phone call, he began to turn back into the room and just happened to look down from the sixteenth-story window and see the trench workers. He watched as they loaded tools and equipment into a secure storage box. They then slowly made their way to their truck, laughing and slapping each other on the back along the way. They got into the truck and drove off. The ad agency worker glanced at his cellphone. The time was four-fifteen. "Must be

nice," he thought. "Quit work at four o'clock, having had quite a few breaks throughout the day. Then, precisely at four o'clock, not a minute later, you hop into the company truck and take off. They'll probably stop at a bar for a few beers before they go home, and when they get home, they're home—no lingering worries about unfinished responsibilities or the office politics of the next day. 'Punch the clock' and you're done. People like that have no idea what it's like to work in the real world."

This kind of thinking, and feeling, is not limited to people who lay sewer pipe or craft advertising campaigns. It's not too difficult for anyone to look across the landscape of paid work and see people who don't appear, from the perspective of the viewer, to work in the real world. Some businesspeople look at academics and think their excessive job security (under the cover of tenure) and paid time off (during sabbaticals) are just a couple of the inefficient and costly excesses of higher education. Some academics look at many businesspeople with envy over their financial remuneration, benefits packages, and numerous perks. Some laypeople wish they could work just one day a week and have complete freedom to manage their schedules, the way they think pastors do. Some pastors long for the shorter hours with higher pay and less close-up scrutiny that so many people in their congregations enjoy. And almost everyone, except professional athletes, thinks that professional athletes are so grossly overpaid that they can easily retire in their early thirties and never have to work again.

The real world. It is a phrase we often use when comparing various people's situations in life, including our own, or when we want to impress on a young person what they can expect when they enter adulthood. (Because the adult world is the real world.) Furthermore, it is not uncommon that directly or indirectly, paid employment is often at the center of the notion of the real world. After all, for many people, work is where we spend most of our time.

However, the real world is not simply a notion. It is the real world. It is the world in which all of us and each of us lives. It is the world in

which all of us and each of us works, both paid employment and mundane but necessary tasks, some of which are invigorating and interesting, others of which are stultifying and frustrating. It is the world—particularly as it bears on and shapes work—that we hope readers will understand and navigate a bit better as a result of this book. A genuinely Christian understanding and navigation of the real world will be distinctively theological, and we here pursue a contribution to the theological foundation and framework for approaching work in the real world. The chapters that follow will address rather specific and discrete theological issues. Specifically, this book will address itself to one key question: Is there a theology of work—a way of understanding the nature and purpose of human labor in light of the Christian faith—capable of speaking to work the way that we experience it: a mixture of pleasure and pain, fulfillment and futility, beauty and boredom, satisfaction and stress, finitude and fallenness? Is there a theology that might resonate both for workers with high degrees of autonomy and prestige *and* those who do not naturally find much meaning in their work or whose work is degrading? In short, is there a theology of work for the real world?

TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF WORK FOR THE REAL WORLD

Over the last two decades, evangelical accounts of the theology of work have proliferated. Indeed, the faith and work movement has become a cottage industry unto itself, complete with a vast literature, dozens of organizations, and a bustling conference and media scene.[1] However, as both its critics and proponents have observed in recent years, even though the faith and work movement has exploded among what Andrew Lynn has termed "creative class Evangelicals," it has struggled to gain traction among blue- and no-collar workers. "Many conversations about calling and work among professionals," explains Jeff Haanen,

[1]For a more comprehensive description of the faith and work movement in which we seek to situate our account, as well as its foundational literature, see the appendix.

entrepreneur and founding CEO of the Denver Institute for Faith and Work, "assume a certain amount of choice and agency that are foreign to most working-class men and women."[2] In short, the preponderance of faith and work resources has been devised by and for the creative class.[3] Indeed, from its inception, the faith and work movement has always focused on "the great professions": "law, education, medicine and the social sciences . . . commerce, industry and farming, accountancy and banking, local government or parliament, the mass media."[4]

But as it stands now, the movement has yet to produce a theology that might resonate with other kinds of workers, those who populate not "the great professions" but "the ordinary professions." Whether and to what extent this can be done remains an open question. However, in what follows we aim to address this lacuna in the faith and work literature through some constructive proposals rooted in two key methodological emphases: the recovery of finitude as a genuine good of creation (and therefore a genuine good in our working lives) and greater attention to and a more sober reckoning of how sin has distorted work. As we will argue at length, all human work east of Eden is undertaken *in medias res*—that is, in the middle of a story that is already unfolding. We labor, as it were, between two gardens, exiled from Eden and not yet residents of that future garden-city, the new Jerusalem. To put it another way, we come onto the scene in chapter two of a four-act drama, sometimes called the grand narrative: creation (chapter one) → fall (chapter two) → redemption (chapter three) → consummation (chapter four). Though we have been told about chapter one, none of us ever experienced it, and

[2]Jeff Haanen, "God of the Second Shift," *Christianity Today*, December 2018, 10.

[3]Andrew Lynn mounts this argument at length in *Saving the Protestant Ethic: Creative Class Evangelicalism and the Crisis of Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), especially chapters 1 and 5. However, even more sympathetic interpreters of the faith and work movement, such as David W. Miller, concede that its current iteration emerged in earnest only when evangelicals achieved social, political, and economic prominence starting in the 1980s. See Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 65-75.

[4]John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1975), 31-32. Quotation edited slightly.

though we've heard rumors of chapter four, none of us has ever seen it. Accordingly, any realistic theology of work will need, first, to attend to the sheer finitude of human creatures, our fundamental boundedness, while also reckoning with the phenomenology of sin, the ways in which sin twists and malforms the very fabric of reality. A realistic theology of work, then, will need to make the experience of finitude methodologically prime, since the experience of finitude is universal, and it will need to make fallenness methodologically prime, since the experience of the majority of workers reflects Genesis 3, not Genesis 1–2.

In light of these considerations, we propose here a revision to the ways in which the grand narrative described above is typically deployed in faith and work literature. As we shall discuss, most evangelical approaches ground the theology of work in protology (chapter one) while also drawing heavily on eschatology (chapter four), with sustained reflection also on redemption (chapter three). However, we suggest that at least part of the reason the faith and work movement has stalled out in its attempt to translate its message for blue- and no-collar workers is due to some key theological deficiencies to which we address ourselves in this book. In the first place, our revision will involve greater emphasis on an oft-overlooked aspect of chapter one of the grand narrative, since many of these theologies of work have not attended sufficiently to *creational finitude* and its impact on work, sometimes conflating finitude and fallenness. Yet, in the second place, existing accounts almost universally situate their theologies of work in the doctrine of creation, emphasizing human co-creation with God as the primary meaning of the *imago Dei*. Such a move, however, may inadvertently exclude workers who do not experience their work in these terms.

We aim to address these deficiencies in the form of two overarching emphases. In the first part of the book, we offer a more robust account of human finitude as a foundational element of the Bible's view of work. Accordingly, a realistic theology of work may and should appeal to protology, of course, but this must include an adequate and accurate

reckoning of finitude, which is entirely proper to creaturely existence, as it does so. In the second half, we propose a methodology that more accurately reflects our present experience of work—which is beset by enmity, absurdity, and tragedy—by grounding it primarily in the doctrine of the fall (chapter two of the grand narrative) and only secondarily in the doctrine of creation. With this restructuring in place, we then gesture toward some ways in which the prevailing theology of work might be recalibrated to speak to the experience of a broader range of workers.

To anticipate the full breadth of the argument that follows in these pages, we propose a theology of work grounded primarily neither in protology nor eschatology, but rather a theology of work *from the middle, for the middle*—a theology rooted firmly in what David Kelsey calls "the quotidian."[5] That is to say, although the Bible offers multiple theologies of work, the faith and work movement, broadly speaking, is concerned mainly with two: the dignity-agency-power narrative rooted in Genesis 1–2 (protology), which relies on an interpretation of the *imago Dei* that (over)emphasizes human creativity and often ignores or understates human finitude, and the perfection-of-human-culture narrative glimpsed in Revelation 21 (eschatology). Our constructive proposals for a more realistic theology of work, expounded at length in chapter six, are from and for the middle, situated between protology and eschatology, and will revolve around three main theses. First, we consider creaturely work, finite though it is, in relationship to God's freedom and transcendence as sustained by God's presence. Second, we aim to affirm the instrumental value of work—not merely so-called intrinsic values—as biblically based, theologically viable, and pastorally helpful. Third, we situate human work within a broader anthropology that does not identify the *imago Dei* primarily with the capacity for creative co-labor with God but rather with a christological teleology in

[5]David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 1:190.

which the saints are conformed fully to the image of Jesus Christ. This methodological shift will therefore also involve deconstructing two harmful work mythologies that are at risk of being unwittingly reinforced by the faith and work movement: "You Are What You Do" and "Do What You Love," both of which rest on dubious anthropological foundations and a questionable theology of vocation. Paradoxically, we argue that, ultimately, a realistic and healthy theology of work will be a theology in which work is *de-emphasized* and *de-centered*.

That is where our argument leads. Our analysis will begin, however, with a diagnosis of the various ways in which the grand narrative has been operationalized to build a theological understanding of work, since the vast majority of evangelical accounts of work use this framework. Although this paradigm is no doubt useful and illuminating, its application to work entails certain risks, namely the risk of distorting the Bible's full theology of work by focusing too narrowly on protology or eschatology. To put it starkly, of all the many recent theologies of work that deploy the grand narrative as an interpretive device, we know of not one, popular or scholarly, that does not situate its account of work in chapter one of the grand narrative.[6] Moreover, as we will show, these heavily protological accounts of work are almost always accompanied by an eschatology that envisions the perfection of human work and culture in the new heavens and the new earth. Before

[6]Of course, not all theologies of work employ the grand narrative as a framework, but most do. Faith and work literature has proliferated over the last two decades and is therefore voluminous, but here are some key works representative of the methodological decision to ground a theology of work in chapter one: Ross Chapman and Ryan Tafilowski, *Faithful Work: In the Daily Grind with God and for Others* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2024); John Mark Comer, *Garden City: Work, Rest, and the Art of Being Human* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2017); Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008); James M. Hamilton Jr., *Work and Our Labor in the Lord* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017); David H. Jensen, *Responsive Labor: A Theology of Work* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006); Timothy Keller with Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York: Penguin, 2016); Tom Nelson, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011); Amy Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011); R. Paul Stevens, *Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012); Ben Witherington III, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

proceeding, we would note that our proposals are not intended to replace existing approaches to the theology of work entirely, but rather to revise them with a more accurate and adequate account of finitude and fallenness, which, in turn, will result in a more vital and pastorally viable theology of work for the real world.

THEOLOGY OF WORK: THE GRAND NARRATIVE

One cannot approach work (or any other matter) in a distinctively Christian way without that approach being theological. To think about and perform work in the light of God and his creation is to think and act theologically. To think about and perform work in the light of the Bible is to think and act theologically. To think about and perform work in the light of the gospel is to think and act theologically.

The challenge, then, is not whether Christians' views of and approaches to work will be theological, but whether they will be theologically true and wise. The challenge is to approach work in ways that are congruent with who God is, and with the way God has made human beings as well as the rest of creation. The challenge is to approach work in ways that comport with the teaching of the Bible. The challenge is to approach work in ways that testify to and advance the gospel of Jesus Christ. An authentically Christian response to these challenges will be by its very nature theological. It is with a view toward that theological address of work that we offer this book.

In addition to the explicitly theological challenges, there are also existential challenges to be addressed. The theology of work must be formulated in ways that acknowledge and address the wide range of human work experiences. We make no claim that this book addresses the entire range of human work experiences. We do, however, desire to make a constructive contribution to the theological address of work already under way. We seek to do this by thinking about and responding to work in the light of the realities of finitude and fallenness. Obviously, this is not the first book on the theology of work. Equally obvious, it will not

be the last. What we say here falls within helpful trajectories already taken in the theology of work, while at the same time we offer some revisions and proposals that will help advance the further maturation of the theology of work. Furthermore, beyond the theology of work itself, it is our desire that this theology might help Christians think and act faithfully in relation to their work. We include ourselves among those Christians who feel the need to think deeply and act faithfully in and through our work.[7] For now, we will explore one of the most common ways, and potentially a very helpful way, of theologically framing human work. It is often referred to as "the story of the Bible" or "the grand narrative."

In recent years scholars in a variety of disciplines and with diverse subjects in view have formulated simple yet theologically comprehensive frameworks for their projects by tracing out the overall progression of the biblical canon. The number of chapters in the narrative may vary, as may the titles given to the chapters may vary, but the same fundamental storyline is clearly present. In *Visual Faith*, William Dyrness moves from creation to fall to redemption to eschatology in his discussion of beauty.[8] Responding theologically and ethically to the question "How should we think of the earth?" Steven Bouma-Prediger, in *For the Beauty of the Earth*, structures the core of his answer in accord with the narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and culmination.[9] The late pastor Timothy Keller frames his response to racial injustice and the concluding chapter of his book *Generous Justice* in terms of creation, fall, redemption, and

[7]For those who might be inclined to chuckle and say, "But you're professors, and professors don't know what real work is," we would humbly invite you to revisit the opening paragraphs of this chapter.

[8]William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 74-80.

[9]Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 112-19. For other examples of discussions of creation care framed in terms of the grand narrative, see Daniel L. Brunner, Jennifer L. Butler, and A. J. Swoboda, *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology: Foundations in Scripture, Theology, History, and Praxis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 117-41, and Mark Liederbach and Seth Bible, *True North: Christ, the Gospel, and Creation Care* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 29-134.

culmination.[10] This rendering of the narrative or story of the Bible is not isolated to the arena of faith and work, nor is it the naive construction of people who are unsophisticated in biblical studies.

As the subtitle of his book indicates, Old Testament scholar Christopher J. H. Wright casts his landmark study of the mission of God as "the unlocking of the Bible's Grand Narrative."[11] He writes,

> The Bible presents itself to us fundamentally as a narrative, a historical narrative at one level, but a grand metanarrative at another. It begins with the God of purpose in creation, moves on to the conflict and problem generated by human rebellion against that purpose, spends most of its narrative journey in the story of God's redemptive purposes being worked out on the stage of human history, finishes beyond the horizon of its own history with the eschatological hope of a new creation. This has often been presented as a four-point narrative: *creation*, *fall*, *redemption*, and *future hope*.[12]

Similarly, Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen believe that "the true story of the whole world" is told in "the drama of Scripture."[13] They present this drama in six "acts": act 1, God establishes his kingdom: creation; act 2, rebellion in the kingdom: fall; act 3, the King chooses Israel: redemption initiated; interlude, a kingdom story waiting for an ending: the intertestamental period; act 4, the coming of the King: redemption accomplished; act 5, spreading the news of the King: the mission of the church; and act 6, the return of the King: redemption completed.

So, when authors writing on the theology of work discern in the Bible a version of this grand narrative and regard this narrative as providing a theological resource for a large and complex arena of Christian thought

[10]Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010), 120-23 and 170-89.

[11]Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006).

[12]Wright, *Mission of God*, 63-64, emphasis original. Note that the phrase "the God of purpose" in this quotation, rather than "the purpose of God," is not a typographical error. It is an expression of Wright's belief that "this whole worldview is predicated on teleological monotheism."

[13]Craig B. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2024).

and action, they are not alone. As we shall see below, the majority of faith and work authors have, each in their own way, drawn on the grand narrative to frame the theology of work.[14] In *The Other Six Days*, Paul Stevens writes, "Taken as a whole the covenant mandate gives us a comprehensive vision for the human vocation." He delineates this mandate in Scripture in the following fourfold manner: creation one consists in design (Gen 1–2) and fall (Gen 3), and creation two consists in substantial salvation (Eph 1–3) and final salvation (Rev 21–22).[15] One of the more influential voices in recent conversations about Christian faith and work is that of Amy Sherman. In *Kingdom Calling*, she sets forth "The Basics of a Biblical Theology of Work" and implicitly but clearly traces the overall arc of the grand narrative. Sherman begins with creation, stating, "*Work is something we were built for, something our loving Creator intends for our good*."[16] Moreover, God the Creator, God himself, is "a worker." God is good, and his giving of work to do is itself a good gift. These creational affirmations are set alongside—or more to the point, *before*—a reality that impacts but does not negate the creational truths. This juxtaposed reality is the fall. Sherman correctly observes that "the curse of Genesis 3 brought toil and futility into work. Ever since, our experience of work involves pain as well as pleasure." Thankfully, this is not the end of the story. The "intrinsic value" of work perseveres beyond the fall as human beings "participate in God's own work,"

[14]In his analysis of methodologies in the theology of work, Darrell Cosden does not observe the four chapter grand narrative. He does, however, see prominent roles for the first and fourth chapters—creation and consummation—in literature in the theology of work. He observes that "a common feature among Protestants generally and also among those particularly viewing work as vocation is a strong appeal to and dependence on the various doctrines surrounding the initial creation, or, protology." And for theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann and Miroslav Volf "their eschatological orientation means that from protology, work is perceived as teleologically directed and oriented toward the future new creation rather than backward toward the restoration of the initial creation." See Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation*, foreword by Jürgen Moltmann (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004), 41, 46. For a more extended representative account of theologies of work that deploy the grand narrative, see chap. 5.

[15]R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 101.

[16]Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 102, emphasis original.

his redemptive work, providential work, justice work, and revelatory work. Indeed, "Christians need to have a big conception of God's redemptive work. . . . God's salvific work is not limited to individual salvation but concerns his mission of restoring the whole of the created order (Col 1:19-20; Eph 1:9)." And humans participate with God in his work. She concludes her brief biblical theology with eschatology. "Our work lasts," she observes and, citing Isaiah 60 and Revelation 21:24, posits that "work—pleasurable, fruitful, meaningful work—will be an eternal reality." Finally, in an appendix to the book, Sherman summarizes the Bible's answers to basic worldview questions in the following fourfold manner: "creation," "fall," "redemption," "restoration."[17]

Two other oft-cited books come from two pastors and the director of a church faith and work center who have been significant participants in a variety of Christian faith and work endeavors. The first four chapters of Tom Nelson's *Work Matters* explicitly follow the grand narrative: chapter one, "Created to Work" (creation); chapter two, "Is Work a Four-Letter Word?" (fall); chapter three, "The Good News of Work" (redemption); and chapter four, "Work Now and Later" (culmination). "Scripture presents the gospel to us," writes Nelson, "in the broader story line of redemptive history."[18] "The Bible places work within the literary framework of an unfolding progression in God's redemption of the physical world"—a progression from creation, through sin and death, through the redemption of both workers and their work, into "a great future in store for [God's] image-bearing workers."[19] Timothy Keller was the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, and he was instrumental in Redeemer's establishment of the Center for Faith and Work. Katherine Leary Alsdorf was the founding director of the center. Together they cowrote *Every Good Endeavor*, and the overall structure of the entire book is a progression from creation through fall to redemption. They wrote the book this way because they believe that

[17]Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 103, 235, 104, 244.
[18]Nelson, *Work Matters*, 53.
[19]Nelson, *Work Matters*, 66-67.

"People cannot make sense of anything without attaching it to a story line."[20] "If you get the story of the world wrong," they say, "you will get your life responses wrong, including the way you go about your work." And, "the Christian story line, or worldview, is: creation (plan), fall (problem), redemption and restoration (solution)."[21]

As a final example, James Hamilton has explicitly framed his book *Work and Our Labor in the Lord* in accord with "the salvation-historical storyline, i.e., the worldview story of creation-fall-redemption-restoration."[22] The first chapter, "Creation: Work in the Very Good Garden," includes the definition of "a righteous job" as "one that does not exist to commit or promote sin but to accomplish the tasks God gave to humanity at the beginning: fill, subdue, rule."[23] This is followed by a chapter devoted to fallenness and flourishing in "Work after the Fall," and a third chapter that describes God's redemptive response, "Redemption: Work Now That Christ Has Risen." In the fourth and final chapter Hamilton offers a vision of work "in the new heavens and the new earth." "God will make the world new," he writes, "and we will do new work" of "ruling and subduing, working and keeping, exercising dominion and rendering judgment, all as God's people in God's place in God's way." Thus, Hamilton sets forth a view of work "as it was meant to be, as it is, as it can be, and as it will be."[24]

THE SHAPE OF THIS BOOK

The theological vision we seek to cast is not entirely new. We believe that this book falls within helpful trajectories already taken with regard to faith and work, particularly the theology of work. Among these helpful trajectories is the desire to think about and act on work in the light of a biblically faithful and biblically comprehensive framework, such as the

[20]Keller and Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor*, 155.
[21]Keller and Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor*, 156, 162.
[22]Hamilton, *Work and Our Labor*, 12.
[23]Hamilton, *Work and Our Labor*, 22. See Genesis 1:26-28.
[24]Hamilton, *Work and Our Labor*, 91, 13.

grand narrative. At the same time, we believe that the potential for the grand narrative to provide wise real-world guidance for thought and action in relation to work has not been adequately realized, and in some respects the way that the grand narrative has been applied has been misleading and unhelpful. Some scenes in the Story have been misunderstood. Some have not been adequately portrayed or acted on. In some instances there has been a compounding of both. We believe that through closer attention to these sometimes misunderstood and overlooked scenes and chapters in the Story a more adequate—a more realistic—theology of work can be formulated and applied. Specifically, in what follows, we will aim to recover a robust understanding of creational finitude, an oft-overlooked aspect of chapter one of the grand narrative, while situating our account of work primarily within the doctrine of sin and the fall (chapter two) and not exclusively in the doctrine of creation (chapter one). Moreover, a more complete and accurate understanding of these scenes and narrative chapters will meaningfully address a wider range of work situations in which people find themselves in the real world.

So what are these misunderstood and undervalued scenes in the Story? Finitude and fallenness. The truth about finitude is anchored in chapter one of the grand narrative, creation. Finitude is one of the characteristics of God-made creation, both human beings and the rest of creation. Moreover, finitude *perdures through the fall*. While the realities of sin may exacerbate and compound our creaturely limitations, the fall into sin did not fundamentally alter the finite structure of human existence. So while we are skeptical of some protological claims—accounts of work, for instance, that simply point to Genesis 1–2 as a blueprint we can follow in our world—it is theologically legitimate to appeal to finitude as one enduring aspect of our good and proper creaturely existence, since it is neither a product of the fall nor does the fall radically transfigure creational finitude itself. The story of fallenness constitutes chapter two of the grand narrative. And just as finitude pertains to both

human beings and nonhuman creation, so too does fallenness. In here singling out chapter one of the grand narrative, creation, and chapter two of the grand narrative, fall, we do not mean to say that we will look at these two chapters only. The grand narrative is *a* narrative. It is cumulative, with each chapter remaining significant for the unfolding of subsequent chapters, and each of the subsequent chapters presuming and often looking back to earlier chapters. Each chapter of the narrative matters. And all the chapters together matter. So while our attention will be focused on revised interpretations of chapter one (creation) and chapter two (fall), we want never to lose sight of each chapter's role in and significance for the entire Story. Reality demands it.

Reality also demands that, to a greater degree than is generally the case in the theology of work, we pay close attention to finitude and fallenness. Upon reading those two words someone could gain the mistaken impression that we are here pursuing a vision for work that encourages mediocrity or discouragement or, even worse, a hopelessness with regard to work or a stoic resignation to exploitative or dehumanizing work. Any of these conclusions would indeed be mistaken. We seek to advance the theology of work by bringing some critical realism to bear. Alister McGrath indicates that critical realism simply reflects "the way things really are."[25] Not the way we wish they were. Not worse than they are. Simply the way they are. And among the realities of our world—the world in which all work is done—are finitude and fallenness. These two by no means constitute the totality of the real world, nor the totality of work in the real world, but they are nevertheless ever-present conditioners of everyone's work that, in our estimation, are too often misunderstood or overlooked, or both. If one's view of finitude and fallenness is such that one despairs over the potential for good work in this world, then one has a view of finitude and fallenness very different from that which will be found in the chapters that follow. Simply put, work that is limited by finitude and plagued by fallenness

[25] Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, vol. 1, *Nature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 73.

is still good enough to be *worth doing*—and worth doing "with all your might" (Eccles 9:10 NIV). Indeed, that is the title of this book. And we mean it.[26]

Toward these ends, the book proceeds as follows. The two chapters that immediately follow this introduction are devoted to finitude. Chapter two advances a Christian theology of finitude with a view of applying this doctrine to our understanding of work. Traditionally, finitude is not a major locus of theology. A brief sampling of both the tables of contents and the indices of comprehensive systematic theologies will illustrate this, as will a sampling of major theological dictionaries and encyclopedias.[27] This chapter sets forth a modest yet constructive Christian theology of creational finitude. Chapter three then brings this theology to bear on the realities of work. In so doing we seek to constructively modify the theology of work, not least the appeal to chapter one of the grand narrative, creation.

The next two chapters are devoted to the fall. Chapter four sets forth a theology of the fall that we will then deploy as a framework for our interpretation of work in the real world. Unlike the topic of finitude, the fall and its consequences have been a major topic of theological reflection throughout the history of Christianity and continue to be so into the present. Consequently, unlike the chapter on the theology of finitude, chapter four is of necessity more selective in its treatment, focusing on what we call a phenomenology, rather than a genealogy, of sin. In other words, this chapter seeks to describe the conditions sin creates (and in which all work is undertaken), namely enmity, absurdity, and tragedy. In this way, chapter four provides the constructive foundation

[26]Both of us enjoy and cherish the opportunity to work as seminary professors, which work includes, but is by no means limited to, research and writing . . . such as our work on this book. And, just like everyone else, we regularly experience the realities of finitude and fallenness in our work, including our work on this book. With the exception of a footnote or two, we have chosen not to feature our own experience here in the book, but simply want to assure readers that we share with you the experience of finitude and fallenness in our work.

[27]A recent exception to this generalization is Daniel J. Treier, "Finitude," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 3rd ed., ed. Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 317-19.

for chapter five, in which a robust theology of fallenness is applied to the theology of work. We seek in this chapter to advance the theology of work in ways that correspond more closely to the real world in which most people work day-by-day.

In chapter six we step back, if you will, from focusing specifically on finitude and fall and revisit the grand narrative as a whole, exploring the ways in which the theologies of finitude and fall developed here can deepen and expand the application of the grand narrative to the theology of work. It is our hope that ultimately this deepened and expanded theology will provide encouragement and guidance for workers and their work. We offer here theological perspective that we hope will enable workers to see creational finitude clearly when they are constrained by the reality of it and to respond to it hopefully—recognizing it for what it is and not for what it is not. We present here theological reflection that, when workers are confronted with the reality of fallenness, we hope will equip them to think rightly about it and engage it redemptively. Along the way, we will gesture toward some constructive possibilities for work in the real world.

Finally, we conclude this introduction with a few words about words. People use a variety of terms to talk about their work: *job*, *career*, *position*, *employment*, *occupation*, *ministry*, *calling*, and *vocation*, to name some of the more common terms.[28] More often than not, when people talk about their work they are referring to that which they do for pay—gainful employment. How does one describe the work, though, of a stay-at-home parent, the effort of someone who is unemployed to obtain a paying job, or the activity one engages within retirement? In order to have clarity in our conversation about finitude and fallenness we need to define the terms related to work that we will use here and briefly explain why we chose these terms.

[28]For a helpful discussion regarding the importance of work-related terms and how they are defined, see Amy Wrzesniewski, Clark McCauley, Paul Rozin, and Barry Schwartz, "Jobs, Careers, and Callings: People's Relations to Their Work," *Journal of Research in Personality* 31 (1997): 21-33.

Work encompasses activity engaged in all the dimensions of a person's life. We here use the term *work* to refer to a definite and intentional field of activity.[29] This activity may or may not be done for financial remuneration. For example, when someone engages their place of employment on Monday morning, they are working. This is work. When that same person comes home that evening and mows their lawn, this too is work. Other examples of work include volunteering at church or a local school, coaching a youth sports team, or raising children. The word *job* refers to a gainfully employed field of activity. In this more specific work context, monetary compensation accompanies work. Specific jobs include being a teacher, firefighter, contractor, engineer, doctor, barista, or farmer. Those who work a full-time job, string together part-time jobs, or operate within the gig economy often spend a significant portion of their waking hours engaged in work that is gainful (or, too often, less-than-gainful) employment. These forms of work, financially remunerated employment, will most often be the focus of our attention in this book. While terms such as *vocation* and *calling* are often associated with work, we avoid their use because of the wide range of functional meaning associated with them.[30] We will address calling and vocation specifically at different points in our book, but we will not use these terms outside of these instances of focused attention.

[29]We adapt this phrase from Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 209. Dietrich Bonhoeffer also cites Weber and uses the same phrase to describe the scope of responsibility a person has to follow Christ in the whole of their life. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglass W. Stott, vol. 6 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 289 and 292.

[30]See also Scott Waalkes, "Rethinking Work as Vocation: From Protestant Advice to Gospel Corrective," *Christian Scholar's Review,* 44, no. 2 (Winter 2015): 135-53; Lori Brandt Hale, "Bonhoeffer's Christological Take on Vocation," in *Bonhoeffer, Christ and Culture*, ed. Keith L. Johnson and Timothy Larson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 175-90; and William W. Klein and Daniel J. Steiner, *What Is My Calling? A Biblical and Theological Exploration of Christian Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022).