

Work – The quintessential commission given to mankind: A missiological approach

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Opsomming

Werk is 'n gawe van God, begin by God en dien as 'n refleksie van Sy Drie-Enige goddelike karakter. Werk, in die beeld van God, is deur Hom oorgedra en ingeweef in alle lewende skepsels en dien as 'n uitvloeiing van Sy Natuur. Werk is ontologies tot menswees, die gegewe en geseënde instrument waardeur die mensdom hulle skeppingsdoel verwesenlik. As gevolg van die ineenstorting van Eden is alle dissiplines van die samelewing egter gestrem; gevolglik het die karakter van werk verander, en wel in so 'n mate dat werk moeisaam en 'n vervloeking vir die mensdom geword het. Tog is die opdrag om te werk nooit deur God teruggetrek nie – nie tóé, vandag, of in die eskatologiese Koninkryk nie. Inteendeel, Christus het aan die Kruis die essensie van menswees herstel, insluitende die mens se skeppingsroeping om te werk. Werk is dus nie sekulêr of heilig nie. Werk is óf versoen, óf verlore. Hierdie versoening bring mee dat werk weereens op verhoudings geskoei is, verhoudings wat transformeer en as getuie van Sy karakter dien. Werk is

nog steeds die enigste sleutel waardeur die skeppings-opdrag uitgevoer, en waarmee die verlore institusionele dissiplines van die samelewing (mens se habitat) ontsluit en getransformeer kan word. Werk integreer en konnekteer die mens met die res van die Skepping – vanuit en vanwaar die mens ook geskape is en waaruit daar 'n geskape interafhanklikheid bestaan.

Abstract

Work is divine, beginning with, and stemming from, the Trinity. Work is replicated within all living Creation as a continuum of God's nature and is ontological to being human. It is the gifted instrument through which humanity executes its creational mandate. The collapse of Paradise saw all disciplines of life becoming strained; subsequently the character of work changed and became a curse. However, the commission to work was never revoked, not then, not now, or in the eschatological Kingdom. Christ restored the essence of being human, including mankind's creational calling to work. Work is therefore not secular or sacred, but rather redeemed or lost. Work is once again relational, transformational and witness. Work is once more the key commissioned and serving instrument to unlock and transform the lost disciplines and institutions of the marketplace, which is humanity's habitat. Work connects and integrates humanity with Creation, from which mankind originated.

1. Introduction

This article approaches the concept of work from a missiological perspective, giving purpose to working humanity, who represents God in the Kingdom on Earth. Humanity fulfils their creational intent and commission through work. This article proposes a rediscovery of the original intention of work, as the instrument and expression of being human. Its focus is on a corporate Kingdom culture that goes beyond individualism.

It is about work orchestrated by a higher being, for eternal purposes. This article does not negate individuality, but focuses on individual input within the corporate reality determined by God, for the wealth and health of His Creation as a whole. The article acknowledges that, since the Fall, the essence of

work¹ has consistently been challenged by the evolving geopolitical, cultural and economic cycles mankind has always experienced.

As humanity's habitat evolves through such cycles and transitions, there is a call to define self through what we do. It has been that way since the Fall, throughout the Agricultural Age to today's Information Age, and continuing with the advent of new technological compounded applications (Thurow, 1999:16). The essence of work was, and always will be, challenged by sociopolitical scenarios, whether stemming from feudalism, fascism and communism to authoritarian capitalism, and from destabilisation of Protestantism to secular humanism (Neuhaus, 1997:ix).

It is for this reason that this article proposes a protological understanding of work to transcend the evolutionary transitions. It intends to fill the void created by change with scriptural meaning and understanding, instead of alternative worldviews imposed by 'the ambitions of the modern state' (Neuhaus, 1997:ix) and the lack of an alternative ecclesiastic response.

In the beginning God worked and created Earth as the habitat both of humanity and the animate world. Adam and Eve were created to work; they cultivated Eden according to the will of God. Adam and Eve were the first *ecclesia* and representatives of God on earth and were sent on a specific mission relating to the rest of Creation. Their apostolic mission was to be priests to Creation; they were endowed with all the gifts and abilities to successfully serve and bring Creation in line with God's will.

They walked daily with God, discussing the advance of their work and service rendered to Creation which was also their worship (Green, 2005:37) rendered to God. Sadly, their mission failed, resulting in the collapse of all the disciplines that supported their habitat. However, Christ redeemed and restored their initial position and purpose. The commission of God's ecclesiastic fraternity is now to bring the good news that humanity's habitat could be restored to its pristine state and that this should be done through discipleship – a process of educating people to live and work according to the will, precepts and ordinances of God.

Today the marketplace cradles the institutions of society through which humanity's habitat can be transformed. The marketplace provides the grid and infrastructure through which all disciplines interconnect to give substance to the habitat of mankind. A missiology of the marketplace advocates the restoration of humanity's habitat by involving all disciplines of society,

1 Work defined as relational, transformational and witness is noted under section 4 of this article.

executing its work in accordance with His will. The various disciplines within the marketplace network by means of work. Work is the substance by which communities live, communicate and create wealth. Work is performed by God's created agents, who are redeemed and appointed to transform Earth to represent and mirror His goodness.

A missiology of the marketplace embodies the various disciplines in which work resonates, focusing on humanity as the created corporeal instrument through which the Kingdom on Earth is intended to be managed, now and in the eschatological future. This missiology endorses an understanding that redeemed humanity and their created essence to work, is the commissional key to transform (read disciple) humanity's habitat. Work can never become redundant. It is ontological to being human and as such will also be carried forward into the eschatological dispensation.

1.1 Angle of approach

This article connects with current global interest relating to work, humanity and their common habitat: the public square. The view taken is that the phenomenon of work transcends all disciplines of life, including that of the ecclesiastical fraternity. Work involves and influences all spheres of life, because work is quintessentially a human activity. Governments, institutions and religious groupings are continuously grappling with issues relating to the realities of work. People are constantly searching for possible solutions to the challenges of social stability, wealth creation and a healthy society – all of which hinge on humanity's ability to work.

Globalisation has heightened the need to study work which, as a process, has fashioned global economic interdependence. Globalisation has spurred an increase in migration and a swelling of humanity's expectations within the global socio-economic realm. The reason for migration, however, whether global, rural or urban, goes beyond the mere 'flattening' of the world. At the heart of the pull and push of migration lies mankind's desire and related expectations to be able to work². It influences all disciplines of life – disciplines in which the ecclesiastic family exists.

From a Biblical perspective work, executed in accordance with God's design, is the key to the transformation of humanity's habitat. Work not only involves all institutions and disciplines of life, but is the executive substance thereof. It is thus the fulfilment and expression of the most basic human need, and

2 Also see *The Coming Jobs War* by Gallup Chairperson, Jim Clifton, providing insight into trends that might influence communities.

transcends all institutions, religions, cultures and creeds. The Christian ecclesiastical fraternity is, by default, involved in the deliberation on work as they are part of the global network of working people who experience being in the frontline of a world in search of meaning.

The ecclesiastical fraternity approaches the subject from a characteristically ecclesiastical perspective, with a need for greater involvement of the laity of the Church in the transformation of communities. The laity/clergy divide presents its own set of challenges translating into a worldview whereby work can unfortunately be defined as either sacred or secular. Classical mission models have also relaxed the traditional bias towards work because of the need for alternative missional methods. These changes are mainly as a result of tightened resources and the need for creative access into restricted domains. The most common expression of this line of thought is 'tent making', which in essence is very dissimilar to a missiology of the marketplace.

This article upholds the view that in order to transform Creation, the ecclesiastical family of Christ cannot be a specific culture, government or institution. Its calling is to co-empower: to be the people who are the change agents within their given habitat.

1.2 Intended objective

The approach of this article is protological more than ecclesiastical. It acknowledges contemporary needs and is concerned with work as ontological to being human and also the proto-commission given to humanity. Work is viewed as the primal gift and ministry imparted by God to humanity, enabling them to execute their individual and corporate creational purposes. The process is intended to liberate, enhance and enlighten mankind in its place of interaction: the marketplace.

Work as the primary commission given to mankind is intended to enhance, rather than inhibit, humanity's spiritual and physical development. Work is therefore not merely a tool of operation, but given for transformation. It is in the working to transform mankind's habitat that humanity finds its missional objective, commission and identity. Therefore work does not stand in the way of mankind's true spirituality, but rather reflects it and inevitably influences the concept of what it means to be Christian and, more specifically, to be human. The objective is also to negate a negative theological worldview that "looks forward to the day when they would grow spiritually to the place where they, like the missionaries, could cast off the burden of their daily work and

go out and serve God” (Cosden, 2006:i). Work presents an alternative to a perceived spirituality that is clearly disconnected from the (metaphysical) world, from and for which humanity is created.

The objective is to restore a positive worldview of Christianity and its relation to work. This discussion presents a progressive approach to work that can enhance humanity’s understanding by highlighting that mankind does not work their way to Hell, nor escape the latter through the termination of work. Mankind therefore does not enter the Kingdom by resigning from how work is perceived. Work does not stand in the way of humanity’s spirituality, it *is* their spiritual expression. By rediscovering that humanity’s creational essence is to work, and that this complements and empowers mankind’s unique makeup and work is *what* they are and part of *who* they are.

1.3 Preliminary considerations

The restoration of humanity’s habitat does not happen in isolation but rather within three important areas. These are: work, priesthood of all believers, and a pluriform expression of what it means to be the ecclesia. This article focuses on work. Work is part of that which was and had to be redeemed. Therefore work cannot be separated or excluded from the Gospel of Salvation. Humanity has been salvaged, by Christ, for human beings to be human and to execute their human commission. Humanity, as recreated in Christ, is called to live its creational purpose, worshipping, working and living together as humans were created to be.

Consequently the message of salvation understands that work, in its creational intent, has evolved *in character* and value since the Fall – to the extent of becoming a curse. However, work in its fullness was restored on the Cross and is irreversibly linked with the message of the Kingdom to come. A redeemed understanding of work now finds its hope and surety both in the present and teleologically in the eschatological new Heaven and Earth. Work, in its ontological relationship with mankind, is not going to be discarded with the return of the Messiah. It will be carried forward to the new and as such, has eternal significance.

Cultivating a wider understanding of work in a pre- and post-Paradise context brings greater clarity to what mankind’s commission entails. It is to announce the good news that Jesus came to save *that*, which was lost (Luke 19:10). This restoration includes humanity’s protological commission to work, which

mirrors the essence of the Great Commission³. Such an understanding liberates it from a delineated interpretation of the Gospel as being just the salvation of souls. Therefore, humanity's creational commission as *imago opus Dei* is by implication a movement of His people in the world. It is a movement of redeemed working people whose witness is one of restoration – the restoration of humanity's lost position, identity and unfulfilled commission of cultivating their habitat.

By redeeming humanity, God redeemed its work – work that permeates all facets of human life and is understood and experienced as the common good and being “primarily a form of civic virtue” (Bellah, 1985:4). Work, then, is an important and central requirement for revitalising society. It brings perspective to a world of encompassing work, where work is mostly understood as a matter of duty, a means to profitability⁴ and where it is ultimately performed as a necessity to survive (Cosden, 2004:67). It brings a message to a world where humanity perceives work as an instrument to achieve goals and a tool to become that which they cannot, without work.

In the culture of capitalism, work has become a means and symbol through which to attain success and status, which in turn are mainly defined by financial wealth. Sociologists and psychologists observe the ‘increasingly self-directed nature’ (Sherman, 1987:20) of modern cultures. Some people work to survive, while others are looking for more spiritual satisfactions from work, such as relationships, expressions of gifts and sufficient leisure

3 The ‘Great Commission’ as an appeal from Matthew 28:18-20, “was never the one and only motive, dominant and in isolation” but “was always connected with other motives” (Johannes van den Berg, 1956:165). It has unfortunately evolved from an inclusive appeal to being primarily an act of obedience.

4 The basis of the teaching of profitability and prosperity (Venter, 1990:60) is that God wills prosperity and that His people will prosper if they obey the spiritual laws that He has set in place. It links spirituality with health and prosperity over against the curse of sickness and poverty: “God gives the power to get wealth” (Copeland, 1974:42). The teaching of prosperity is fundamentally centred on humanity (Venter, 1990:63) and simultaneously individualistic in its nature (Neuhaus, 1997:21) and bordering on secular humanism as the deistic and secular worldview hinges on the application of certain spiritual and physical laws that will produce success and property irrespective of a person being a believer or not (Savelle, 1980:8-11). Work is thus, as with tent making, a means or tool to a (prosperous) end. The focus in this article is not on humanity or the application of specific natural, physical or spiritual laws, but rather on being obedient to the will of God in executing the commissions given to mankind to work (serve) humanity and nature in such a way that it reflects the image of God. It is in the working in obedience, with humanity for the good of the habitat where God has called the ecclesia. God is a personal and sovereign God who governs creation according to His will and not certain ‘clockwork’ laws (McConnell, 1988:45). The earth and its fullness belongs to God and humanity the stewards originally appointed and their position reinstated by the death of Jesus (Barron, 1987:91).

time. Workers have moved from a survival culture to an identity culture (Stevens, 1999:107). There has also been a transition from work as hard work to work that is stressful, compounded by a workplace redefined by telecommunication, email and the Internet, making work a totally intrusive and all-encompassing environment (1999:108).

Transformation of the meaning and application of work is not a case of fine-tuning economic institutions alone, but by changing the essence and fundamental understanding of work. It requires a deep cultural, social and psychological transformation (Volf, 2001:4) backed by a theology of work. The intention of this article is to think beyond the underlying dichotomy and tension of work *per se* and what it means to be human. It endeavours to bring concepts in line with an integrated Biblical view directly related to mankind's commission to work, bearing in mind that this commission was never revoked. The character of work changed with the Fall, but was again restored at the Cross.

1.4 Initial challenges

Presenting a unified understanding of humanity and work is challenged by an entrenched dualism, that of work and ministry. This mindset is supported by another regrettably divisive dichotomy: the class-structure implicit between the clergy and laity. The latter is usually defined by its association with secular work, while the clergy is seemingly released from the mundane and secular. The clergy are the ones called to serve the interests of the Kingdom and are generally understood to be employed by God, making all other work supposedly meaningless (Cosden, 2006:i).

This frame of mind questions the possibility of the workplace being a place to experience the relational presence of God. Consequently, it nullifies the idea of that anyone's work can be a witness of the Kingdom. Even worse, it cements the outlook that Earth is forever lost and beyond redemption. The Kingdom to come is thus a spiritual Kingdom and the corporeality of humanity is only an interim phase of a cyclic existence. It also tends to restrict the believers' spiritually to the realm of the Church giving rise to the Kingdom being predominantly defined in ecclesiastical terms. This view results in an ecclesiology becoming so primary (Bosch, 1991:201) that both eschatology⁵ and pneumatology (and in effect mission) are submitted to the Church, fostering the perception that only work done for God in and through the Church, has eternal and spiritual value.

5 Eschatology concerns not only the completion of the life of humanity but also the consummation of God's purposes for the whole creation (Migliore, 2004:409).

1.5 *Alternative expectations*

The above highlights the need for a theology of work and the formulation of alternative missiological paradigms. Here are, however, other contemporary reasons for developing a working ecclesia:

- a. The emergent ecclesia in the non-Western world are basically mobile, nomadic and communal people. They make do without undue religious facilities and are rarely in a position to have trained and ordained clergy. Many Christians from emerging nations do not belong to any formal congregation or denomination (Bellagamba, 1992:3), but they form a 'people movement' and then specifically a movement of working people within a communal environment.
- b. The global phenomenon of migration invites a supportive theology of individual worth, enhancement and empowerment. Christians working away from home are doing so because of need and not as a result of having a call from God in the traditional sense. This necessitates a threefold understanding of the 'spiritual' nature of work, of God calling His people through circumstances and the articulation of a pluriform expression of being the ecclesia.

There is thus a need for an alternative theological perspective on work for His people to be mobile, to articulate their contemporary nature and the way they congregate in a pluriform expression within the marketplace and community.

2. Towards a theology of work

So, what is work? Work is a gift from God and essentially part of being human. The focus here is less on the *phenomenon* of work but rather on the *essence* of work. Martin Luther originated the concept of work as vocation (Volf, 2001:105) and developed this concept within his doctrine of justification by faith. The latter was done against the backdrop of medieval monasticism (Bosch, 1991:239) and the reductionism of vocation as a calling to a particular religious way of life. Today Protestants still interpret work as something of a calling and the vocational model of work has remained dominant in Protestantism and Evangelical missiology. It has again and again provided an enduring understanding of work and one that displayed the ability to be re-casted, reformed (Shriver, 1995:539) and able to stay relatively relevant.

2.1 *Protestant thinking*

After the Second World War, Protestant thinking veered more towards the problem of work (Richardson, 1952:35-39) as a vocation and how work

translates into the realities of life and spiritual growth. Importantly, obedience to the call of God in daily life translates into work and this continues to be a reformational emphasis that most Protestants retain in some form (Cosden, 2006:40). The distinct, yet interrelated beliefs regarding the Protestant view on vocation include the following:

- a. The priesthood of all believers. Luther's view of work affirms the personal role and responsibility (Holl, 1958:238) of believers in all facets of life. Yet the traditional understanding of work as vocation appeared to have been too inwardly orientated, individualistic, with limited social concerns and too defined for static forms of society. The solution is to look beyond work, as the answer to the transformation, by rediscovering the ontological relation between being human, work and the protological commission.
- b. All Christians, not only monks and priests, have a vocation. Vocation is therefore not a call to a select group or person, but a call to all believers.
- c. Any work performed by Christians can be a vocation – demanding a definition of work⁶.
- d. Since every vocation rests on God's commission, every vocation is fundamentally of the same value before God.

Luther also speaks of a double vocation (Volf, 2001:105) for every Christian: spiritual vocation (*vocatio spiritualis*) and external vocation (*vocatio externa*). The spiritual vocation is for all who answer God's call to enter into the Kingdom. Luther saw this call as common to all Christians and comes through a mandatory experience of conversion (Bosch, 1991:125). The external vocation is a call to serve God and humanity at large through one's standing or profession in life. Luther consistently tried to link the daily work of every Christian with the centre of Christian faith (Volf, 2001:5). Therefore, in theory at least, work in every profession, including ecclesiastical professions, rests on divine calling.

The belief that every believer can and should stand in direct, personal relationship with God was, however, only practised and carried through to its logical conclusion by the Anabaptists (Bosch, 1991:26). Luther supported a more rigid understanding of office: "he denied the validity of any office that was not linked to the existence of geographically defined parishes" (Volf, 1991:242). Luther still valued the Church as a centripetal phenomenon and the gathering of people as the point of reference deliberating on all issues of

6 See 5. Working definition.

life. Protestants concluded that “since the exercise of absolute power by the papal church was wrong its exercise by the opponents of the papacy was right” (Niebuhr, 1951:29).

Any centralisation of authority, however, whether in the religious realm or otherwise, opens the door for a bi-vocational interpretation of work in terms of class and position, and not as ontologically realised. This creates a problem in the way work can be approached. Positively, Protestants have a strong interdependence on the various doctrines surrounding the initial Creation, or protology, and rightly so. It is an important aspect in uncovering and defining the nature and ontological meaning of work. The very structure of Creation supports the attempt to see work move beyond being simply an instrument of activity. Work is a command grounded in the initial Creation as a “creation ordinance” (Brunner, 1952:387) and so also for Bonhoeffer, who considered work as sharing in the primary creational mandate (Cosden, 2006:42).

2.2 Probing other and alternative disciplines

Theological anthropology is very prominent among doctrinal deliberations of the who, why and how humanity came to be where, and what humanity is. Christian anthropologies likewise have humanity as an integral part of their formulation with a specific angle on the doctrine of the image of God. There are three fundamentally different ways to understand the image of God from an anthropological approach (Erickson, 1983:489), namely the substantive, the functional and the relational.

The common denominator of the various disciplines in seeking answers (Migliore, 2004:144) to *who* and *what* humankind is, is their consistent reference to humanity as being created in the image of God. The answer comes partly through reflecting upon what humanity does in relationship with the rest of Creation where mankind occupies a central position. Humanity thus tries to make sense of its nature through working and living experiences and its understanding of reality in relation to His Creator, self and Creation.

3. Created as imago

Approaching humanity's being and position in relation to God and Creation from a protological angle provides important creational understandings. First, God's intention was initially not with humanity, but with the non-human world (Moltmann, 1977:185). His objective was to create from chaos an orderly and interrelated world that would eventually stand as witness to His work. The human-less creation of this earth, in time and space, is thus the first

reflection and witness of His image. Humanity, being constructed from the elements of nature, and given life for the purpose of managing Creation, can thus only begin to find its own image portrait as *imago mundi* and *imago Dei*.

3.1 *Imago mundi*

Humanity contains all of the simpler systems found in Creation, they are present in them and humanity depends upon them. Humanity is *imago mundi* (Moltmann, 1977:190) and stands before God, representing all the creatures. In this act as *imago mundi*, humankind is a working priestly creature defining its role and relationship with itself, God and the rest of Creation. Humanity does so as created corporeal beings in the image of God which is “an amazing work of the Almighty God’s art” (Bavinck, 1960:521). It incorporates the eventual commissioning of humankind in relation to the rest of Creation, through work.

Placed within the context of Hebraic-Christian ontology of being-in-relationship and liberated from its own dogmatic past (Hall, 1986:21), the *imago mundi* and *imago Dei* concepts can fashion an alternative image of humankind within the larger order of nature. Humanity belongs and shares in the rest of Creation and is uniquely commissioned to cultivate the latter according to God’s protocols. Humans represent the will and glory of God here on Earth. Humans can intercede before God because they are also from the community of Creation, being *imago mundi*. However, it is also in being God’s counterpart and being His reflection (Moltmann, 1975:191) that humans are distinct from the rest of Creation.

3.2 *Image and likeness*

The concept of *imago Dei* has consistently been the dogmatic device (Migliore, 2004:141) by which Christianity attempts to explain the essence of being human and its calling. Mankind is the only recorded entity to be created ‘*in the image*’ and ‘*after the likeness*’ of God. There is no difference between image and likeness as it is a Hebrew parallelism and a poetic device as used in the Psalms (Berkouwer, 1962:83). There are four explicit references in the book of Genesis to image as ‘*tzlem*’ and likeness ‘*denuh*’ (Hall, 1986:68). Genesis 1:26-27 is generally referred to as God’s original decision to make man in His image and likeness – a distinct and inseparable relationship between being in His image and the working commission bestowed upon mankind.

Humanity can therefore not fathom being in His image without identifying with its working ordination, image and commission. These are given both to

male and female (Genesis 5:1-2), who were also the first ecclesia. Eve was to be a co-worker, assisting Adam in the execution of the commission. The following verse (5:3) refers to Adam who; “had a son in his own *likeness*, in his own *image* and he named him Seth” sharing in the same attributes to empower them both to fulfil the protological commission. The Genesis 9:5-6 reference to the Great Flood underscores the value of human life (Genesis 9:5-6) in relation to *imago Dei* as well as relationships within self, humanity and with the rest of Creation.

3.3 *Image and relation*

These passages of Scripture, in combination with a substantive outlook on *imago Dei*, provide a comparative basis (Gunton, 1989:103) for humanity to find itself in relation to God, itself and the rest of Creation. The symbol “image of God” describes human life in relationship with God and with other creatures (Migliore, 2004:141). Humanity has thus been created to mirror His image in their respective mutual relationships and within the order of nature. Being in His image goes beyond a set of human capacities, possessions or endowments.

The comparative substantive view also helps humanity to understand who they are by defining mostly who they *are not*. Virtues such as free will, reason and rationality provide the main distinction between humanity’s commission, to creatively cultivate Creation, versus Creation’s readiness to be cultivated according to His ordinances. Mankind is then also the sum of what others are not. Protestant Reformers viewed the concept of *imago* as the original righteousness people possess by virtue of their relation to God (Evans, 1988:69). *Imago Dei* therefore refers to what humanity has in common with God, functionally and substantively.

God created humanity differentiated as male and female and therefore in natural fellowship with God (Barth, 1958:73) as expressed through the Trinity. Adam and Eve executed their commission in relationship with each other and found their different abilities and personalities working towards the same end and in unison with God and Creation. Humanity’s working image is restored for those in Christ who are now called to model the Kingdom in His likeness.

The instrument, through which this likeness is realised, is work.

4. *Imago Dei* as opus Dei

The proto commission, involving Creation, is irreplaceably fused in the image of God. Approached from a chronological protological perspective, the unfolding events in Genesis sequentially unveil the way God intended to reveal Himself. Every day, and the sequences in that day, were building blocks leading towards the eventual completion of an Earthly habitat, as envisioned by Him. This orderly and chronological creational process eventually ended with the moulding and commissioning of mankind, not as a climax, but as a conclusion. It was rounded off by a day of no work. Any one day was not more important than another. It rounded off the completion of the habitat where mankind would live and execute its commission.

Notably, the very first sequentially and prevailing revealed image of God is that of God as Creator. It portrays God *at work*. In Genesis 1:1 God introduced Himself ontologically as a working entity before any other revelation. God's involvement in Creation is known through His work: "God is a worker, and work is something He chooses to do – part of His plan, consistent with His holy nature" (Green, 2005:27). It is within this revelational framework that humanity finds its primary creational purpose, that of work and the first expression of humanity: being in the image and likeness of God.

Humankind as *imago Dei* is a worker – not because of some evolved misfortune of nature, but because God first is a worker. Work in its essence is built into the fabric of all Creation. Humanity thus mirrors His image through executing its creational purpose. Mankind, as *imago Dei* bearers, can only express its ontological functions and relations through work executed in relation to God, self and the rest of Creation. Work, then, in its ontological protological context provides the functional essence and elements for the definition of work⁷: relational, transformational and witness.

a. Relational

The correlation between God at work and the commission bestowed on humanity is clear and translates into a functional creative intent, making of mankind a specific relational and working entity. Humanity's primal image is likewise related to being in the Trinitarian *imago Dei*⁸. The Trinitarian God's work is in relational unity with Him, just so humanity expresses its work in relationship with God, self and the rest of Creation. Work is also the relational instrument that connects mankind (male and female) with the rest of Creation.

7 Also see 5. Working definition.

8 Also see 4.1. Trinitarian

b. Witness

It is through the work of God's fingers (Psalm 8:4 and Rom 1:20) that He reveals Himself. His creational work in the Old Testament (Childs, 1885:31) stands as a witness of His greatness, character, goodness, faithfulness and provides the role model for created humanity. Likewise, mankind's work should stand as a witness reflecting the character of the God they worship.

c. Transformational

God created the physical elements and also time and space (*ex nihilo*) with their predetermined parameters. He created the core elements needed to creatively form life. He laid the foundation for a wonderful network of related disciplines devoted to the coming humanity, such as anthropology, palaeontology, history, sociology, psychology and theology. Work is the essential link between God, humanity and the rest of Creation. Humanity was empowered to work by inheriting certain imagery from God for the execution of an ordained transformational mission in the world.

In addition to its centrality, Genesis also complements the substantive effect of work, in the consistent comment of God each day: '*it was good*'. Work, as *imago Dei*, releases the essence of work – the satisfaction and a sense of completion, providing substance and function to the meaning of work as an attribute of God. God exhibited the power to create and also the inclination to transform being good in the sense of being perfect.

Sequentially, on the fourth day (Genesis 1:22), God blessed the Creation, revealing Himself as priest. God worked by performing the very act of a priest (Kessler & Deurloo, 2004:33&36), speaking in terms of abundance, multiplication and praise (Pedersen, 1962:160). He transformed the habitat and also empowered it to live out its creational purpose. The substantive characteristics of work as *imago Dei* include transformation and priesthood. There seems to be no dichotomy between being a priest and transforming (work) Creation. By performing a priestly action God worked in the same way in which He created. Any priestly gesture of redeemed humanity then is an ontological act of being human – it is work.

During the fall of humanity God revealed Himself as the provider, clothing and caring for Adam and Eve, a theme that is carried throughout Scripture (Isaiah 58:6-8 and Matthew 25:34-40). God subsequently guarded the Garden of Eden so that no one could gain access – an act bestowed on the apostolic work of the ecclesia acting as the witnesses and guardians of the Faith (Küng, 1976:407). Work understood in this fashion reveals the context

of the Triune God's work delegated to mankind. It is a pluriform expression of work executed as character and purpose and done so in unison, holistically. This provides the function and substance for a definition of work. It also reflects the character of work not as exercising dominion, but rather respect, protection and care (Migliore, 2004:141).

4.1 Trinitarian

When God in the Old Testament said: "Let us make man" it was done in a relationship and with a Trinitarian understanding of God (Childs, 1985:44). The key characteristic of a relational ontological view is that it ultimately suggests a corporate definition of *being-with-others*. The triune God is an expressed community in relation with Self and His Creation. It stands as a model for humanity – to image. An ontological understanding (Berkouwer, 1979:89) does not establish individuality at the expense or the alienation of human from human, or humans from the rest of Creation. The Trinity speaks of unity and then a *communio unity* (Volf, 1998:78) built on relationships and working together towards a common goal.

A Trinitarian view includes individuality or otherness and yet also a connectedness, giving a better understanding of the first commission as an individual, corporative, holistic and interactive mandate. This emphasises and projects the Trinity as agreeing and working together for the creation of this world *ex nihilo*, the transformation of the void and the making of mankind. The latter is to image the Trinity as in unity, interrelatedness and as working beings. The Trinitarian structure is neither pyramidal dominance nor hierarchical: it is polycentric and symmetrical (Volf, 1998:217).

Humanity, however, was not only created in the Trinitarian image, but now also in Christ. Mankind can thus be reflected upon as being created as *imago Dei*, *imago Christi* and *imago trinitatis* (Migliore, 2004:141). The Old Testament also clearly indicates that there is no other God who will have humanity's devotion (Brueggemann, 1982:36) and in whose image mankind is created.

5. Working definition

Work is more than the sum total of its instrumental parts (Cosden, 2006:17). Work is fundamental to our creational existence, expression and execution. It is an ontological reality God built into the very structures of Creation and thus human nature. Work as such is fundamental to humanness, being an end in itself. Work is ontological and also a functional relational mechanism.

It employs different instruments to express the glory of God. It becomes a normative study because it is universal in scope and applies to the 'then, now and to be'. It guides the present realisation of work towards the redeemed reality of transformation in this age, using the past and the coming new Creation as a mirror of what is to be. Work thus becomes inclusive for all cultures. It is *pan human* (Volf, 2001:86) and also not limited to a particular timeframe of history. This universality of work encourages a better understanding of its nature and meaning as well as its position within nature.

Defining work as *imago opus Dei* translates into three interrelated ontological, non-hierarchical modes of expressions: being witness, relational and transformational. These expressions employ various instruments of functionality and substantive characteristics to anthropomorphise its intrinsic values into the metaphysical world. A basic definition of work is 'to be' – what God has created us to be. It is to be in relation with God and the rest of Creation. It translates into symbiotic relationships that *transform* Creation and stand as a witness. Within this formulation, checks and balances are built into the defined interrelationship components of being relational, transformational and witness. Work is the agent of transformation.

These three components form the criteria for evaluating what we understand work to be. If any component is missing it is not work in the light of Creation or the Cross. Slavery and human trafficking and similar activities are misaligned expressions of work. These are neither witness, nor transformational, nor relational and therefore not work as intended by God, nor work as redeemed by the work on the Cross and neither a fitting description of work within the Kingdom to come. A fourth complementary substantive element, reserved for mankind only, is one that distinguishes humanity from the rest of Creation. Mankind, being created in His image is ontologically priestly – in speaking and being a blessing. Work as a redeemed priestly expression is devoid of any centripetal motives of pride, position, value, esteem or personal concerns. Humanity was not called to be priests to mankind, but priests to Creation.

Christ restored humanity in order to be priests again unto their habitat. Priestly work is intrinsically service and worship humanity brings to God. The word in Hebrew for worship and for work is the same, *avodah* and is best translated into English as "service" (Green, 2005:37). It describes the heart of the creational intention of work which mankind was commissioned to do. When work is service, it correlates with the word that is used in the New Testament to describe the offices of the ecclesia: "The particular place and function of the individual in the community was comprehensively described

with a word which carried no overtones of authority, officialdom, rule, dignity or power: the word, service” (Küng, 1976:389).

The creation of mankind is prototypical in that humankind was brought into being for a specific purpose, but then *always* within the serving interrelationships of witness, relation and transformation. Yet it can only be so if and when humanity is brought into the redemptive work of Christ.

5.1 *Work redeemed*

Jesus became human, the new Adam in God’s image (Anderson, 1984:67), modelling what it means to be human again. This soteriological approach unveils the redemption that flows from His work, restoring mankind (Migliore, 2004:151) who lost their divine relationship, history and mission to work the land and their destiny to take control of all the Earth. It announces that God saved *this world*, instead of creating a new world totally detached from any history of the present. It unveils Christ being adorned with a crown of thorns⁹, for the crown of His Creation, mankind, redeeming its work. In this way humanity finds its original commission to work justified, redeemed and restored to its original creative intent (Wright, 2006:313).

Redeemed humanity fulfils its proto-commission, knowing that its *opus imago Dei* has been restored. No work done in Christ can thereafter be construed as spiritually superior to another. There is neither class, nor hierarchical distinction. Redeemed humanity works with the understanding that it comprises corporeal beings, created for a purpose. They, their habitat, as well as their ontological commissioned purpose are restored and carried forward into the eschatological future. Salvation now and in the future is not only of humanity’s souls, but also bodies (Kümmel, 1976:142), their bodily expression of work and the non-human creation as well.

The Resurrection of the Crucified One and His subsequent assertion of divine position, power and authority is the beginning of an eschatological anticipation of the resurrection of the dead as corporeal beings. Jesus is a historical ‘bodily person’ (Kasper, 1966:154). The body (*soma*) is vital to being man and it is unthinkable to be without a body after death (Kee & Young, 1996:182). The resurrection of Jesus was not a “symbolical resurrection, but a genuine and physical (*naturalem*) one, for eyes cannot be witness of a ‘spiritual’ resurrection” (Calvin, 1960:315). The body, as God’s Creation, describes the whole of man whether communicating, in relationships or at work in His Kingdom.

9 Thorns being the symbol of the changed character of work being cursed at the fall of Paradise.

Humanity, in Christ, now lives in and models a redeemed *opus imago Dei*, mirroring the world to come. The eschatological world is part of the Gospel; Paul (Bruce, 1982:23) sees the present material universe being transformed, rather than annihilated, to fulfil its protological purposes for which God created it. The eschatological new creation is thus a continuation of the protological framework established in Genesis and therefore also in a continuous relationship with the present. The Resurrection was not a negation, but rather a restoration and affirmation of the earthly human identity. The restored earthly work will likewise have an influence on the resurrected personality of mankind (Volf, 2001:97).

The purpose of post-resurrection work is in its transformation and preservation, and then specifically as a witness of the Kingdom to come. Jesus frequently responded to transformation in the lives of people by alerting His audience to the fact that the 'Kingdom has come close', thereby implying that the restored work that He had done had become visible and recognisable in the present. The resurrection body demands a corresponding glorified, but nevertheless material, environment that not only anticipates future material existence (Moltmann, 1967:58 & 133), but also gives impetus to the present. Corporeal humanity is God's instrument for transformation.

6. Concluding

The message of the Gospel centres on the work of Christ manifested in His ministry, crucifixion and resurrection, making it Christocentric and Trinitarian (Migliore, 2004:132). Work is ontological; it is what it means to be human. The ecclesia is working people ordained as an apostolic priesthood of all believers, to be servants in the empty spaces of the market square. Work, from a missiological perspective, presents redeemed humanity as re-commissioned by Jesus to make disciples of people for a purpose – to restore, by means of work, the habitat where God has placed us. Discipleship implies the teaching and doing of God's will in every discipline of life. Work is an executive instrument translating discipleship into transformation.

Work is spiritual and gifted of God, complementing the corporeality of being human in the image of the Triune God. It is not a barrier or hurdle. It is not something that stands in the way of humanity's spirituality, but a creational instrument to release the goodness of the Triune God. Work is more than a legalistic functional commission: it also reflects the character, relationships and work of the Triune God who created a highly differentiated habitat (Migliore, 2004:115) that from its inception always showed interrelationships and interdependence.

Humanity's habitat, or environment, is a community interacting in the marketplace. Work is the means to bring the elements of the community into relationship with God and the subsequent release of God's intended and fundamental goodness. Work not only gains entry into other communities within the marketplace, but more so into the hearts and minds of the people ministered to. Work adds value to people, the environment and communities. Work is the functional transformational mechanism and a relational entity employing different instruments to express itself. Ultimately, it is a witness to the glory of God. Work as such is fundamental to humanness. Work is to be and reflects the three working offices of Christ (Migliore, 2004:186) as prophet, priest and king.

Work is embedded within the commission of Christ (Matthew 10:10) and the Gospel and it needs to be taken, worked and lived as a witness to the nations with whom the ecclesia share the 'naked spaces' (Neuhaus, 1997:157) of the market square. The focus is on the ecclesia being obedient to the will of God in executing their commissions, namely, to work (serve) humanity and nature so that its work reflects the image of God. It is to work with humanity for the good of humanity's collective habitat. Work also provides important principles in the believers' missional quest to reach the unreached. These keys are entry, sustainable presence, relationships, trust and acceptance (Mayers, 1987:49).

In closing, the earth and its fullness belong to God. Humanity was originally appointed as His stewards. Now humanity's position is reinstated by the death of Jesus (Barron, 1987:91) and the ecclesia is called to announce, disciple, work and live according to His ordinances. When they do this, the goodness of the Creator will transform the land (Wright, 2006:426).

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POPULATION MOVEMENT IN AND TO SOUTH AFRICA. Updated version: June 2010. Migration fact sheet 1 of the forced migration study program of the University of the Witwatersrand as prepared by Tara Polzer (FMSP).