



WORK

Reconnecting Our Labor and Liturgy

AND

Matthew Kaemingk and Cory B. Willson

WORSHIP



WORK AND WORSHIP

Reconnecting Our Labor and Liturgy

Matthew Kaemingk and Cory B. Willson

Foreword by Nicholas Wolterstorff

B

Baker Academic

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Matthew Kaemingk and Cory B. Willson, *Work and Worship*
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group © 2020
Used by permission.

Contents

Foreword *by Nicholas Wolterstorff* xi

Introduction 1

Part 1: Foundations

1. Worship That Forms Workers 17
2. Worship That Fails Workers 27
3. Workers in the Pews 35

Part 2: Resources

4. The Old Testament: The Integrity of Work and Worship 63
5. The Pentateuch: Bringing Work into Worship 69
6. The Psalms: Singing God's Work into Ours 89
7. The Prophets: Decrying the Destruction of Work and Worship 117
8. The Early Church: Worship and Work in Ancient Christianity 137
9. The Early Church Offering: Work Becomes Worship in Christ 163

Part 3: Practices

10. Work at the Lord's Table 193
11. Worship That Gathers Workers 209

12. Worship That Scatters Workers	241
Epilogue: <i>Rethinking Monday</i>	253
Acknowledgments	257
Bibliography	261
Scripture Index	285
Subject Index	289

Introduction

How beautiful will be the day when all the baptized understand their work, their job, is a priestly work . . . [that] each metal worker, each professional, each doctor with the scalpel, the market woman at her stand, is performing a priestly office!

—Oscar Romero, *The Violence of Love*

There exists a profound separation between work and worship in the lives of many Christians today. Their gathered worship in the sanctuary and their scattered work in the world often feel as if they are a million miles apart.

Monday after Monday, people engage in a variety of workplace rituals: driving to work, walking across the factory floor, quickly scanning email, checking equipment, meeting with staff around the conference table. Work—be it white collar or blue—has some predictable rhythms to it. Standing at a register or sitting at a desk, mopping or designing, typing words or picking fruit. All workers have rituals, things they “just do” every Monday morning—often without thinking.

Sunday after Sunday, people engage in a variety of worship rituals: driving to church, walking down the aisle, singing hymns, saying prayers, listening to Scripture readings, confessing, and participating in Communion around the Lord’s Table. Christian worship—be it ancient or contemporary—often has a predictable rhythm to it. Standing in song or sitting in a pew, praying or praising, eating bread or drinking from the cup. All worshipers have rituals, things they “just do” every Sunday morning—often without thinking.

What do these activities we label “worship” and “work” have to do with one another? Should they intersect or inform each other? Some workers do

their best to keep their worship and work separate. Others attempt to connect them in all sorts of fascinating and creative ways. By and large, most pastors and worship leaders deeply desire for Sunday morning worship to meaningfully connect with the Monday morning lives of their people. But does it?

Walking into a sanctuary, many workers feel like they're visiting another world, a world quite detached from their world of work. Sitting in their pews, workers feel as if an increasingly wide chasm has opened up between the rituals they're being asked to perform in the liturgy¹ and the rituals they perform in their daily work. This chasm between work and worship is not new. Nearly one hundred years ago G. A. Studdert-Kennedy noted,

A very large number of the people who attend our services and partake of the sacrament are disassociated personalities. They are one person on Sunday and another on Monday. They have one mind for the sanctuary and another for the street. They have one conscience for the church and another for the cotton factory. Their worship conflicts with their work, but they will not acknowledge the conflict. I want to press home what seems to me to be obvious, that while this unfaced conflict exists, the soul is not on the road to salvation.²

Some contemporary workers have completely resigned themselves to this growing chasm. Some have even grown to appreciate it. They're grateful for a liturgical escape, a chance to forget about the pressures and pains of work—even if just for a moment. In the sanctuary they find a spiritual haven from the cares of work and the world.

Other workers are deeply bothered by the growing chasm, haunted by a gnawing sense that the sanctuary is completely irrelevant—incapable of responding to the raw struggles, questions, and issues they face in the workplace. The chasm eats at them. They long for things to connect.

1. Some readers will be given pause at the word "liturgy." Nicholas Wolterstorff offers a helpful description of this term and its usefulness to discussions of corporate worship: "Whenever Christians assemble on Sundays they enact a liturgy. There may be nothing printed out, the cues may consist entirely of 'audibles' voiced by one or more leaders, and the participants may be strongly opposed to the claim that they have a liturgy; the term suggests to them the 'ritualism' they abhor. They speak instead of 'the order of worship.' But . . . their order of worship is an example of what I call a 'liturgy.'" He continues, "There will be actions that are to be performed and, usually, an order in which they are to be performed; and that is their liturgy. This is true even for the meetings of Quakers on the Eastern seaboard of the United States. Each person is to meditate in silence until he or she feels moved by the Spirit to say or sing something; the others are then to listen attentively." What a liturgy provides is a form of "scripted activity" that guides the bodily movements and speech patterns of participants. Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, 8, 12, 13.

2. In *Report of the Anglican-Catholic Congress* (London: Society of Saints Peter and Paul, 1923), quoted in Leech, *Eye of the Storm*, 2.

Some workers make valiant attempts to forget about daily work during worship. They do their level best to psychologically check their work at the church door. With no dedicated time or space to spiritually reflect on their “work stuff,” it piles up inside their souls. The emotional plaque of vocational stress and anxiety is something they will “deal with” themselves. Perhaps, at some point in their lives, these workers were told that when they go to church they need to “focus on God” and “put the stresses of the week out of their minds.” Whatever the case, these workers imagine that a sacred sanctuary is not the place to wrestle with the mundane issues of secular work.

The next step comes rather quickly: if the sanctuary is not really interested in work, perhaps it is not really interested in workers either. Left to their own devices, workers try to “handle it” themselves—through exercise or alcohol, vacations or yoga, medication or entertainment. Whatever it is, workers are on their own.

This is a problem worth tackling. The integrity of our work and our worship is at stake. Separated from one another, their relationship can quickly become distorted. We can easily begin to “worship our work, work at our play, and play at our worship.”³

This contemporary divorce is a pervasive and devastating fact of life in the modern West. There is no need for a laundry list of surveys, stories, or statistics to substantiate it. Those of us who live in this culture know intuitively that the divorce is real. We see it with our eyes. We feel it in our bones. Modern Christians are living their lives in pieces—and the pieces are dying.

The purpose of this book is not to argue that a divorce exists between worship and work. That much is obvious. Our goal is to explore how these separated worlds of labor and liturgy might actually come to be reconciled.

Integrating Faith and Work *through* Worship

If all of life is going to be worship, the sanctuary is the place where we learn how.

—James K. A. Smith, “Sanctification for Ordinary Life”

Theologians, of course, value theology. And, rather predictably, theologians believe that good theology can be profoundly helpful for just about everything that ails humanity. Whenever theologians come across a problem, be it political or psychological, artistic or economic, you can be assured that a theologian will prescribe *more theology*. It should be no surprise,

3. Dahl, *Work, Play, and Worship*, 12.

therefore, that when theologians come across an issue like the separation of faith and work, their first reaction is to prescribe more theological education. After all, when you're a theological hammer, everything looks like a theological nail.

Why do people struggle to connect their faith to their work? How can they integrate these two disparate parts of their lives? Well, the answer is quite simple. They need to be theologically trained.

The theological line of thinking continues. If workers would only read more books about theology, work, and vocation; if they would only hear a good theological lecture about business and economics; if they would only study a biblical worldview of labor and industry; if they would only join a class to help them think Christianly about nursing or marketing or accounting—*then* these workers would be intellectually equipped to connect their faith and their work. Their faith and their work will be held together through the sheer power of their theological minds. Simply put, if workers were more like theologians, everything would be better.

Our task in this book is not to dismiss theology. *We are* theologians. We love theology. Nor is our task to belittle the importance of theological education. We have dedicated our lives to its cause. We believe in the power of theological ideas. We certainly would not write a book filled with them if we didn't. Christian workers absolutely need some level of theological training.

However, through our research and experience working alongside pastors, professionals, and congregations on this issue of faith and work, we've become increasingly convinced that *theologies of work need to be practiced, embedded and embodied in communities of worship*. Theologies of work will never be sustainable if they remain theoretical. If my work truly matters to God, that theological assertion needs to be reflected in my community's worship. Daily work should "show up" in the community's prayers and sermons, its songs and benedictions, its testimonies and sacraments. Theologies of work matter, but they need to be sung and prayed. We need to find ways for our theologies of work to inhabit more than our brains—they need to enter our bones.

In the past, the two of us followed a common path. We believed that faith and work "integration" was an intellectual problem that needed to be intellectually grasped. A worker either "got it" or didn't. Today we believe that "integration" is not so much an intellectual concept that you grasp; it's more like a craft or a skill that you practice. An integrated life is not an intellectual achievement, an all-of-a-sudden eureka moment of theological discovery. *It is more like a fabric that's been torn into pieces. The fabric of faith and work needs to be slowly and intentionally woven back together over a lifetime of*

prayer and worship. In short, integration is more a habit to be practiced than an idea to be learned.

Our wager here is that gathered worship in the sanctuary can offer workers the time and space they desperately need to begin the long process of mending the torn fabric of “faith” and “work.” Week after week a worker can practice bringing her daily work before her Lord in worship. Through prayer and petition, thanksgiving and lament, she practices laying down her work before the larger work of God. The torn cloth of her faith and her work can be mended *in and through her worship.*

The mind of the worker still matters. What workers think about theology, vocation, and work is still important. The question is, in part, one of pedagogical method and formation. How does a theological idea about work actually embed itself deeply in the life of a worker? Put another way, how does *intellectual* theology of work become *lived* theology of work? Some Christians have a theology of work floating about in their brains; others have it embedded in their bones. We want the latter.

Our wager here is simple: if we want to cultivate this deeper way of knowing, we will need the practices of worship. Studying biblical and theological concepts about faith and work will always matter. However, if these ideas are not constantly reinforced and remembered in and through the practices of communal worship, they will fail to put down sustainable roots.

Two Nurses, Two Pastors

Imagine, if you will, two nurses and two pastors. The first nurse comes to her pastor and shares stories of the highs and lows from her past year of work at the local hospital. She talks about her struggles with anxiety regarding her patients. She shares her workplace joys of accomplishment, healing, and blessing. She asks some difficult theological questions about illness, disability, and death. She shares some laments about the health-care system.

The first pastor responds by making a valiant attempt to answer her many difficult theological questions. He falters a bit (he’s never worked in health care). Running out of things to say, he gives the nurse a book about faith and work and looks up another on theology and health care. Finally, he lets her know that he will be leading a book club on faith and work in the spring. Perhaps she could invite her fellow nurses to come and hear him teach.

The second nurse goes to his pastor and offers the same reflections. He receives a very different response from her. Hearing him out, the second pastor makes no attempt to teach him about faith, work, or health care. This

pastor offers no theological answers about death or disability. Instead, she listens and asks probing questions about the nurse's work and his workplace joys and heartbreaks.

In closing, the pastor asks if she could meet with him and the five other nurses from their congregation for lunch at the hospital. Sitting around a small table in the hospital cafeteria, the pastor asks the nurses even more questions about their work. She wants to hear more about their victories and failures with their patients. She wants to hear more about their prayers for their colleagues and doctors, their challenges and frustrations of work on their specific floors. The pastor takes notes. She commends them, prays for them, and closes by inviting them to worship on Sunday morning rather than to a class.

That Sunday, during worship, the pastor asks the nurses to come forward. She asks the elders to lay their hands on them and she prays—not a generic prayer but one that she's composed specifically for them. The prayer articulates the nurses' vocational struggles, longings, praises, and pains to God—all those things they shared in the hospital cafeteria. The prayer asks for the Holy Spirit's protection and power to go with the nurses as they return to the hospital the next day. Following the prayer, the congregation stands together and commissions the nurses. The pastor sends the nurses out with a blessing and a charge for their ministry to their patients.

Two nurses and two different pastoral responses. In the first encounter, church is largely understood as a place you go for theological "answers" about work. It is a place of theological training. However, in the second interaction, we find a different understanding of the church. It is not, first and foremost, a place for theological training or answers; instead, it is a place where workers can carry their workplace questions, pains, and praises to God in community. The church won't always have answers for work, but it can provide a set of practices and a group of fellow workers who can bear the weight of work together—week after week.

There was nothing inherently wrong with the first pastor or his response. There is a chance that the nurse will remember (and perhaps even appreciate) the pastor's class and his attempts to answer her theological questions about death and disability. There is even a chance that she might read and remember a few of the ideas from his books on faith, work, and health care.

But the second nurse? There is no possibility whatsoever that he will ever forget the day his entire church surrounded him, placed their hands on him, and prayed for his work. He will never forget that they carried the joys and the heartbreaks of his hospital, that they—as one—offered his career up to God's sovereign grace. This is the power of worship.

A Modern, Western, and Urban Problem

The one who sows hoping in you will harvest the richness of your grace.

—Ethiopian prayer, in Mebratu Kiros Gebru,
“Liturgical Cosmology”

In many ways, the divorce between work and worship is a universal malady of the human condition. In Genesis 3, the deep connections between worship and work were distorted and severed. No longer directed toward God, work and worship took their own idolatrous paths. After Genesis 3, all children of Adam and Eve universally experience this cataclysmic divorce between worship and work. Every culture, every time, and every individual fails to worship and work faithfully. East of Eden, the divorce is universal.

While this is a universal affliction, one specific culture has grown particularly adept at exacerbating the division. We are speaking, of course, about the modern and urban West. Over the past four centuries, Western modernity has erected a wide array of conceptual and cultural barriers between “reason and religion,” “facts and values,” “public and private,” “material and spiritual,” “work and worship.” These formidable walls make any effort to practice an integrated life extremely difficult.

There is an urban element to this division as well. In many modern cities an individual’s place of worship is often far removed from their work. As they commute, their modern lives, labors, and liturgies are being geographically stretched to the breaking point by the city itself. Take, for example, an executive who works downtown but lives and worships in the suburbs. Attending a suburban church led by a suburban pastor, he most likely will experience *suburban* sermons, *suburban* prayers, *suburban* confessions that are specifically relevant for his *suburban* life. His work downtown, however, will rarely make an appearance in the worship service designed by and for the suburbs. This is just one example (of many) of how the disparate geography of urban life can exacerbate the divorce between work and worship.

Compare this to life in a medieval European village. There a worker’s labor and liturgy were all geographically centered around the intimacy of the town square and its surrounding fields. A farmer could likely see the church steeple while he worked in the fields. Merchants bartered within the steeple’s shadow. Likewise, a parish priest was intimately aware of droughts in the local fields or corruption in the central market. The actual geography of the village bound the life, labor, and liturgy of the people together. The urban geography of the modern West, however, can actively pull apart pastors and professionals, worship and work.

In light of the modern West's struggles with worship and work, our research project intentionally looks to other times and other cultures for wisdom. To this end, *we primarily draw insight from premodern, non-Western, and nonurban contexts to learn from their collective wisdom.* This is the main reason why ancient Israel, early Christianity, and the global and rural church serve as our primary guides throughout this text. We do not wish to idealize or romanticize these communities. Nor do we wish to say that nothing good is happening within the modern West; that is certainly not the case. Our hope, rather, is to highlight specific ways in which our premodern and non-Western sisters and brothers might inform our efforts to bring worship and work together.

The Authors

One might rightly say that we, the authors, are a part of the problem—not the solution. The two of us are modern Western urbanites. To complicate matters further, we both are systematic theologians who are white, male, and Reformed. This means that we are academically trained to slice and dice life into the neat little theological categories called “faith,” “work,” and “worship.”

Everything we write is contextual; our eyesight is limited by our cultural privilege and the unique worship communities that we call home. Rather than take on the audacious role of speaking for all cultures and all worshiping communities, our desire is to do the hard work of focusing our critical eye on our own community and majority culture context. We invite our diverse readers to do the same with theirs.

We've tackled this topic not from a feeling of personal mastery but out of a sense of urgent need. We knew that our culture and tradition alone could not offer us a path out of this mess, and so we needed to learn from other communities whose worship looks quite different from our own. This book, therefore, constitutes an expedition of sorts into some strange and illuminating worlds of ancient and global worship. As Reformed scholars, we've worked hard to highlight important insights from Catholics, Pentecostals, Anglicans, Baptists, and Eastern Orthodox. We've also sought to learn from racially and culturally diverse worshiping communities across the United States and around the world.

Both of us have spent more than a decade investigating the divorce between faith and work in a variety of urban American contexts. We've either researched or served in faith and work organizations in New York, Los Angeles,

Phoenix, Seattle, and San Francisco. Today we live in Houston, Texas, and Grand Rapids, Michigan, where we teach at Fuller and Calvin Theological Seminaries. We spend much of our time training Christian leaders on issues surrounding faith and public life, theology and culture, missiology, and marketplace ministry. Over the years we've had the privilege to interview and work alongside a wide variety of working professionals and marketplace leaders. Their careers and callings were ever before us throughout this long research project.

Furthermore, we are the sons of hardworking parents. As children, we watched our mothers and fathers leave early and stay late for jobs in nursing and carpentry, waitressing and teaching, auto repair and home construction. Many years were a grind for our parents. Our grandparents, children of the Great Depression, had raised them with the no-nonsense maxim of the age: "If you don't work, you don't eat." As young boys, we worked alongside our fathers as they built our family homes. Today, our scholarly hands are far softer than theirs, but our fathers' patterns of work (healthy and not) have left their mark on us. Over the years we watched our parents worship their God in and through their daily work. Their labors inspired this book.

One final, and more painful, memory informs this research project. Throughout our childhoods we went to church. Sunday after Sunday we gathered for worship with our parents. Sunday after Sunday we watched our parents pray for missionaries and nonprofit leaders to go and "do God's work." We listened to pastors pray for Christian ministries all over the city and all around the world. *But never once did we see our parents' labors in the fields of the Lord recognized or blessed during gathered worship.* Never once did the pastor mention our fathers' construction sites or auto shops. Never once did they mention our mothers' hospitals or restaurants. Never once were the countless students, employees, patients, and customers whom our parents blessed and served ever mentioned. The silence of the sanctuary still rings in our ears. It informs and energizes this book.

The Readers

We had three specific types of readers in mind for this book: workers in the marketplace, worship leaders in the sanctuary, and scholars and students in the academy.

Working professionals who read this book may be challenged by some of its academic terminology. However, if they stick with it, they will encounter a variety of ways in which they can bring their working lives before God in

gathered worship. Herein workers can explore how their vocational struggles and praises, questions and thanksgivings can (and must) be brought into worship.

Pastors and worship leaders who read this book will discover a variety of illuminating resources and paradigms for leading worship that deeply engages work and workers. The concepts and models provided in the book will enable them to create worship services that speak directly to workers in deeper and more transformative ways.

Scholars and students will discover what we believe to be several fascinating theological intersections between labor and liturgy in both Scripture and history. Academic readers will encounter an array of theological resources and rabbit trails in the notes begging for further research and investigation (see the bibliography for an extensive list of resources). There is much more to be done. Finally, as scholars, we've done our best to keep this book accessible for thoughtful lay readers. To this end, we've relegated many of our more technical discussions and academic references to the footnotes.

Overview of the Book

The purpose of this book is to explore how faith and work can be reconciled through gathered worship. Informed by the wisdom of ancient Israel, early Christianity, and the rural and global church, this book aims to articulate a vision for worship that is “vocationally conversant.” By “vocationally conversant” we mean forms of worship that engage work and workers in a divine dialogue. Worship that is vocationally conversant facilitates an honest exchange between workers and their God. Herein workers are invited to communicate openly with God about their daily work. They are invited to carry their vocational failures and frustrations, their praises and their requests, directly into worship. Workers are also invited to listen and learn about God’s work in the world and the city. In and through vocationally conversant worship, workers discover the patterns of God’s work, creativity, and service. In this, they are invited to make God’s patterns of work their own.

This book is divided into three distinct sections. The first lays the conceptual foundations for the project and explores the contemporary divorce between worship and work. We examine the failure of worship today to engage that divorce. The chapter titled “Workers in the Pews” offers a theological and pastoral examination of modern workers and the working lives they bring with them into worship.

The second section of the book is the scholarly heart of the research project. There we explore the interwoven nature of work and worship in the Old Testament and the early church. Insights from global and rural worship communities are inserted throughout in the form of brief but illuminating vignettes.

In the third and final section we address the question of practice. What difference does this make for the church today? Here we offer principles and practices for reconciling faith and work through communal worship.

What This Book Is Not

This book is academic, but it is not written exclusively for academics. We draw on a variety of academic disciplines to make our case. While we hope that this book contributes to academic discourse, our primary concern is that it remains accessible to the church. Moreover, while this is an academic work of theology, it does not subscribe to the traditional theory-praxis method (theology first, application second). Instead, it takes the work of the people, their lives and labors, as its starting point for biblical and theological investigation and reflection.

This book is designed to serve worship leaders, but it is not a “how-to” manual. There are no five easy steps to developing “worship for workers.” Every worshiping community is different (different music and prayers, liturgical styles and traditions). Likewise, every economic community is different (blue- and white-collar communities bring different concerns into worship). Rather than dictating a one-size-fits-all solution, this book provides readers with a diverse array of Scriptures, resources, and paradigms through which diverse *worship* leaders can imagine their own ways forward.

As we complete this book, COVID-19 is circling the globe. Millions have lost their jobs. Millions more are experiencing profound professional exhaustion, frustration, anxiety, and fear. To make matters worse, these workers cannot physically gather to cry out to God in worship. Pastors and worship leaders are being forced to improvise, imagine, and create something new. This unique historical moment highlights two critical themes that run throughout the book. First, congregational worship needs to be attentive and responsive to the vocational challenges facing Christians in the world. Second, societal challenges that impact people’s working lives often require creative liturgical responses. Our task in this book is not to prescribe a universal plan for tying worship and work together that is applicable to every time and place. Our task is to provide a set of enduring biblical, theological, and liturgical resources

that diverse leaders can use to imagine and create deeper connections between worship and work—come what may.

This book occasionally engages in critique and deconstruction. However, on the whole, it's designed to serve as a positive and constructive resource on the issue of work and worship. We occasionally will criticize trends in pastoral and worship leadership. Both the church and the marketplace will sustain critical hits—so will seminaries, for that matter. When we consider the mess of work and worship in the modern world, there is plenty of blame to go around. Christianity and capitalism, pastors and professionals—all have a share in the guilt. That said, writing a book filled with nothing but critical deconstruction is not terribly interesting or helpful. We grow weary of the dark and defeatist cynicism surrounding the church and the marketplace. We want this book to serve as a constructive contribution for all parties involved. As theologians, we see ourselves primarily as servants called to build up the church, the pastorate, and the priesthood of all believers.

This book celebrates the creational goodness of human work and industry. However, it will not romanticize the raw challenges that real workers face in a sometimes brutal global marketplace. In our experience, Christian discussions of faith and work tend to be overly cheery and positive. “God cares about your work!” “Your work can be worship!” “You can find God at work!” “You can change the world through work!” While these sunny declarations might inspire us for a moment, the hard and simple truth is that work—for a lot of people—is often horrible. Work in a fallen world can be degrading, boring, unjust, stressful, and ugly. This book will not idealize or romanticize the current state of work; it will not paper over its broken or sinful nature. It will never suggest that Sunday morning worship should try to ignore the injustice and ugliness of work or blindly pretend that everything is okay. Christian worship should never instruct a suffering worker to “whistle while you work.”

This book is focused on paid work. It rarely discusses unpaid vocations like parenting, marriage, volunteering, or political activism. These vocations are all deeply important to God, and their absence from this book is not meant to communicate otherwise. In the interest of space and time, we decided to remain laser-focused on paid work. We fully expect volunteers, stay-at-home parents, students, and active retirees to find useful information and insights within these pages. We trust that this book will help them carry their vocations into gathered worship as well.⁴

4. Our discussion of “parish” in chap. 3 will be of particular interest to those readers seeking to understand how to put their creative, culture-making gifts to use outside the workplace.

In this book we often label human beings “workers.” Human beings are clearly more than just workers. They’re also called to serve as parents, friends, neighbors, and citizens as well. We call them “workers” not to reduce their humanity but rather to highlight and carefully examine an important aspect of their humanity—their work.

We make the case that gathered worship can have a (trans)formative impact on work and workers. We believe that worship can help workers lead more integrated lives. However, the primary purpose of worship is not to solve the problem of faith and work; the ultimate purpose of worship is to glorify God. Gathered worship should not be instrumentalized or reduced to a pedagogical tool. The formative benefits of worship are a secondary by-product of liturgies that are primarily concerned with God’s glory and honor.

This book is primarily focused on reexamining Sunday worship in the sanctuary. Readers should keep in mind, however, that worship can happen anytime and anywhere. Moreover, as we will see, *our daily work can be a form of worship to God*. With that clearly stated, our primary goal is to explore how gathered worship on Sunday can help reconcile the modern divorce between faith and work.

Finally, while we believe that gathered worship can powerfully contribute to the reconciliation of faith and work, *worship is not a cure-all*. It is not a panacea. The modern chasm between faith and work is deep and wide. Western modernity is an extremely powerful and divisive cultural force. It is a gusting wind that is constantly endeavoring to pull faith, work, and worship apart. Against the prevailing winds of culture, a single hour of gathered worship on Sunday cannot possibly hold these disparate aspects of our lives together on its own.

An Invitation

After four years of research we could not find a single book quite like this one. As far as we can tell, the academic fields of “workplace theology” and “worship studies” have never been brought together in sustained conversation. Seminary textbooks on worship almost never mention work or workers at all. (We’re not entirely certain who these textbooks imagine worship is for—if not for workers.) Likewise, we’ve never found any books on workplace theology that seek to learn from the field of worship studies. (If they had, they might have discovered that corporate worship was a primary way ancient Israel and the early church weaved together their faith with their public lives.)

While academics have never put liturgy and labor into sustained conversation, those serving on the ground (workers and worship leaders) have been wrestling with these questions for centuries. Therefore, our references and footnotes will point to many historical and contemporary voices that shed important light on this matter. Because of the significant academic silence on the issue, there is no established academic method or road map for this project. We—authors and readers alike—are on an uncharted journey together. This is the beginning of a conversation, not its end.



PART 1

FOUNDATIONS

1

Worship That Forms Workers

We do not go into liturgy in order to escape the world, we go there to learn how to do it the correct way.

—David Fagerberg, *Consecrating the World*

Worship as a Heartbeat

A healthy heart constantly pumps and pulsates. It beats with a predictable and consistent rhythm. It will draw blood in. It will send blood out. This systolic and diastolic movement, this gathering and scattering, is how the entire body receives life-giving oxygen. At specific moments the heart valves must tighten and release. This opening and closing movement draws blood in and propels it out. Without this rhythm, the blood stagnates. It becomes static and stale. Without the heart's dynamic force—pull and push, gather and scatter—the blood, the heart, and the entire body begin to decay and ultimately die.

The liturgical theologian J.-J. von Allmen asserts that worship is the heartbeat of the church. Like a heartbeat, Christian worship has a life-giving rhythm. Like a heartbeat, it has a systolic and diastolic function. Worship welcomes and gathers people in. Worship sends and scatters people out. In and out. Pull and push. Von Allmen argues that the regularity of worship's systolic-diastolic rhythm matters a great deal. One day in and six days out.

Like the valves of a healthy heart, the doors of worship must regularly open and close to draw people in and send people out.

Like a healthy heart, worship has no interest in holding people statically inside the sanctuary. Worship is concerned with the rhythmic *movement* of the people. This movement of souls is essential to the health of both the worship and the worshiper. Like a heartbeat, if worship stalls, worshipers struggle to access the life-giving oxygen of the Holy Spirit. Everything begins to decay—the worship, the worshipers, and the community itself. Like a heartbeat, worship must be constantly gathering and scattering people in and out.

Healthy worship, von Allmen writes, is “a pump which sends into circulation and draws in again, it claims and it sanctifies.”¹ Worship scatters God’s people into “the world to mingle with it like leaven in the dough, to give it savor like salt, to irradiate like light.” Similarly, worship gathers people in “from the world like a fisherman gathering up his nets or a farmer harvesting his grain.”² On their way into the sanctuary, they carry their whole lives—their fish and their grain—into the presence of the Lord. On their way back out to the city, worshipers carry the grace of Christ, the law of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit into the world. Gathered and scattered. Welcomed and sent. This is the heartbeat of healthy Christian worship.³

In its *diastolic* function, worship gathers workers in from a wide variety of careers and callings. From all over the city they come. Worship gathers workers so that they might offer their working lives to God and so that God might offer his work to them. In its *systolic* function, worship does the opposite. It sends them out with a great work that must be extended into the city. Worship scatters workers, transformed by the work and Word of the Lord, throughout the city to be salt and light wherever they have been called. Worship blesses and commissions workers so that they may go (with systolic force) out into their various careers and callings. Worship scatters workers so that they can extend Sunday worship into Monday work.

Worship does not cease come Monday. Disciples continue to worship God in a new way through their daily work. As Clayton Schmit asserts, “The sending forth of gathered worshipers is the pivotal moment when worship turns from adoration to action. . . . In the sending, worship redirects its focus from the liturgy of assembly to become the living liturgy of discipleship.”⁴

Charles Price and Louis Weil echo these sentiments but add an additional insight. They argue that Christ is the only leader of the church’s whole life

1. Von Allmen, *Worship*, 55.

2. Von Allmen, *Worship*, 56.

3. Wolterstorff, “More on Vocation.”

4. Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 155.



Courtesy of Matthew Whitney

Figure 1.1. *Gather and Disperse* by Matthew Whitney

Matthew Whitney is a visual artist whose work focuses on the spaces that urban citizens navigate on a daily basis. This piece depicts the gathering and scattering of a church as it goes about its life and labor within the city of Seattle, like a heart that gathers and scatters blood throughout the body. See the artist's website, www.matthewwhitney.com, and his discussion of the poetics of walking at www.matthewwhitney.com/writing-in-the-urban-grid.

of worship. The worship that Christ leads has two movements: intensive and extensive. In Christ's *intensive* worship, the church is gathered to receive assurance, pardon, and renewal. In Christ's *extensive* worship, the church is scattered into the world to love and serve the Lord. These two distinct forms of worship, intensive and extensive, are one in Christ.⁵

5. Price and Weil, *Liturgy for Living*, 14.

Pastors and worship leaders have a responsibility to encourage both intensive and extensive worship, in the sanctuary and in the world. Worship must facilitate this systolic and diastolic movement of work and worship. Worship must generously draw work and workers into the presence of the Lord, and it should also send them out the door with some systolic force. Workers who remain stagnant, whether in the sanctuary or in the workplace, begin to decay. Movement in the Spirit is life—it is oxygen.

Worship Gathers

Let me tell you what he has done for me.

—Psalm 66:16

Nicholas Wolterstorff extends von Allmen’s heartbeat metaphor even further. He argues that corporate worship not only gathers our *souls* but gathers our *stories* as well. When the doors of the sanctuary open, worshipers enter carrying their stories with them from all over the city. These are stories from their week—stories that they need to share with God. Wolterstorff argues that faithfully designed worship will welcome three specific types of stories: stories of thanksgiving and praise, stories of sin and rebellion, and stories of heartbreak and lament.⁶

While worshipers need to communicate their weekly stories to God, they don’t always know how to articulate them. Some feel awkward, others unsure. Good worship, Wolterstorff maintains, provides worshipers with three helpful mediums to articulate their various stories to God. Wolterstorff calls them trumpets, ashes, and tears. Through *trumpets*, a worshiper is empowered to communicate their praise and thanksgiving—their happy stories of the beauty, goodness, and abundance they’ve experienced throughout the week. Through *ashes*, worshipers can confess and honestly carry their weekly stories of rebellion and sin to God. Through *tears*, worshipers are graciously given some time and space to openly share their weekly stories of sadness, confusion, and even anger with God.

For our purposes of worship and work, these images of trumpets, ashes, and tears are profoundly helpful. They enable everyday workers to honestly carry their workplace thanksgivings, confessions, and laments to God. Here worship can cultivate a candid conversation between God and workers, faith and work, the sanctuary and the workplace. Worship that is vocationally conversant will make space for all three.

6. See Wolterstorff, *Hearing the Call*, chap. 1.

This book will make two additions to Wolterstorff's list: petitions and fruits. Workers need to regularly carry their workplace petitions and requests before God. As members of the priesthood of all believers, workers need to practice the ministry of priestly intercession. They need to intercede before God on behalf of their workplace. As priests, they must petition God with urgency to move on behalf of their coworkers, clients, customers, and entire industries. All workers have a priestly responsibility to carry their workplace petitions to God, to intercede for divine action and transformation in their industries. Gathered worship is a place where workers can begin to practice their own sacred calling to the priesthood of all believers.

The final element that workers need to carry with them into worship is fruit. Healthy worship regularly calls workers to carry the fruits of their labor to God's table. In the sanctuary, workers can practice offering their first fruits, the best work of their hands in a holy and pleasing act of worship. Healthy and formative worship will find ways to welcome the diverse fruits of workers as a holy offering of praise.⁷ As we will see, carrying workplace fruits into worship is far more involved than simply dropping cash into an offering plate or directing an electronic transfer of funds. There are many reasons the Bible clearly instructs workers not to come before the Lord empty-handed (Deut. 16:16).

What does this look like in practice? How might Sunday worship gather a worker's trumpets, ashes, tears, petitions, and fruits? These critical questions will be explored in the book's final section in dialogue with Scripture, history, and rural and global practice. There we will give practical examples and models, but for now we're simply laying the conceptual groundwork for developing worship that is vocationally conversant.

Worship that is vocationally conversant is able to gather workers and their work openly and honestly before God. It gives workers the space and time, and the language and practices, to offer their whole lives and their whole work to God as a living sacrifice of praise, holy and pleasing to God (Rom. 12:1).

Some workers will come into worship with bright and shining faces, excited to offer their vocational trumpets of praise and their first fruits of thanksgiving. Some workers will come to worship with faces that are weary and broken; they will come with nothing but ashes, petitions, and tears. Worship

7. Evelyn Underhill writes, "Here, the human creature presents his little offering, the raw material of his concrete and yet symbolic sacrifice; and with this small gesture of generosity he moves out towards the Supernatural, goes up to the Altar of God, becomes a part of the great spiritual action of the Church in Christ her Head, and is subdued to the movement of the whole. 'In the oblation the Church, that poor widow, casts all her life into the treasury of God,' says St. Irenaeus." Underhill, *The Mystery of Sacrifice*, 14.

that is vocationally conversant will welcome these diverse workplace stories into the presence of Christ and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

After Jesus's crucifixion, two disciples are walking to Emmaus. Along the road they discuss the past week (Luke 24:13–35); their stories from the week are both painful and beautiful. Jesus interrupts them on the road to Emmaus. He inserts himself into the conversation and wants to hear their stories. Of course, Jesus already knows—quite intimately—all the things that have occurred in the city. And yet still he asks, “What things?” In the divine encounter, Jesus wants to hear about our week.

Worship Dialogues

But gathered worship is not a one-way conversation. God is not mute. God does not sit back and passively absorb our weekly trumpets, ashes, tears, petitions, and fruits. God is not inert. In worship, God has a story to tell, a Word to proclaim, fruits to offer, and a work to accomplish. Worship is not a monologue; it's a dialogue. Workers who enter the sanctuary are entering into a conversation—a dialogical exchange that may very well challenge, disrupt, and transform the stories they tell themselves about their work.

In the sanctuary, workers offer their stories to God. God does the same. Workers tell God about their work. God does the same. This great dialogue, this dynamic and gracious exchange between workers and God, reaches its zenith at the Lord's Table. Here workers offer their whole lives to God, and God does the same. Both sides have a story to tell. Both sides offer their work, their bodies, and their lives. Both sides receive the work of the other. In the worship dialogue, nothing is held back.

Returning to the Emmaus encounter, Constance Cherry's reflections are instructive. We, the disciples, share our stories with Christ, and Christ shares his disruptive presence and story with us. In corporate worship, “we are approached by his presence, instructed in his presence, fed by his presence, and we depart with his presence . . . a journey with Jesus together.”⁸

In worship that is vocationally conversant, both God and workers take turns speaking and listening, offering and receiving, acting and waiting. By engaging in this dialogue, workers slowly and clumsily begin to practice putting their *faith* in God and their *work* in the world into conversation.

When describing worship as a “dialogue,” we need to make one thing perfectly clear. This dialogue between God and worker in the sanctuary is not, in

8. Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 48.

any way, equal. A worker's story from the past week comes under God's story for the whole world—not the other way around. A worker's fruits offered to God are a mere pittance compared to the fruits God offers to the worker. A worker's body offered to God in worship is nothing compared to God's body offered to the worker at the Lord's Table.

Moreover, without God's *primary* work on their behalf, workers would have no standing whatsoever to enter into his holy presence and offer their work as worship. God made the workers, gave them gifts, gave them fruits to offer, called them into worship. Yes, worship is a gracious exchange between God and workers. Yes, it is mutual dialogue and a vocational conversation. Both sides have something to say, and both have something to offer. However, the origin, essence, and end of this vocational conversation is not the worker; it is God.

Worship (Trans)forms

O Jesus, Master Carpenter of Nazareth, who on the cross through wood and nails didst work man's whole salvation; wield well thy tools in this workshop, that we who come to thee rough-hewn may, by Thy hand, be fashioned to a truer beauty and a greater usefulness. . . . Lord in your Mercy—hear our prayer.

—Congregational prayer in Cameron Butland, *Work in Worship*

While the primary purpose of worship is the glory of God, it has a secondary purpose, a by-product, so to speak: the (trans)formation and sanctification of the church. Worship that is vocationally conversant will *both* glorify the work of God and (trans)form the work of the church.

Sometimes the sanctuary can impact workers by offering them comfort and assurance. It can remind workers who are either oppressed or downtrodden where their true value lies. It can remind them of their true master—the one who wills their liberation. As we will see in the psalms, the sanctuary can assure workers that the Lord establishes their work and that their daily labors are not in vain. It can remind workers that God is with them and works at their side.

While worship can sometimes offer comfort to workers, it can be a source of discomfort as well. Sometimes worship can be downright confrontational to workers. Sanctuary practices of kneeling, bowing, listening, submitting, and confessing can disrupt the self-assured worker. Worship practices can directly confront vocational postures of greed, dominance, pride, and grasping. Sanctuary stories of relationships that are covenantal, communal, and

gracious can confront marketplace stories of relationships that are contractual, competitive, and utilitarian. A worship experience of silence, rest, and waiting can disrupt a working experience of noise, busyness, and personal initiative. A sanctuary's encouragement to freely offer and freely receive can run up against a market's encouragement to seize and exploit. The economy of God and the economy of this world are not always the same thing. Good worship can expose this dissonance. Workers moving back and forth between these two economies, these two patterns of exchange, will not always feel comfortable or self-assured. Discomfort in the sanctuary can be a good thing. It can even be a (trans)formative thing.

In this book we argue that *gathered worship can be a (trans)formational space for workers and their work*. This space can be a place where workers learn about the unique patterns of God's economy. More than that, it can be a place where workers learn to slowly mimic and practice God's patterns of work in their own working lives. Through worship, little by little, workers are invited to sing and pray about the works of God. Little by little, workers sing and pray about God's craftsmanship and creativity, God's sacrifice and service, God's liberation and beauty. Little by little, workers begin to make God's patterns of work their own. In and through worship, they begin to inhabit this alternative economy of God. The lawyer can pray prayers for God's justice. The construction worker can read texts about God's craftsmanship. The oppressed field laborer can sing songs about God's liberation. The therapist can hear prophecies about God's coming restoration and healing. In and through worship, workers encounter the work of God, the economy of God. In this, they are invited to make God's patterns and practices of work their own. The sanctuary poses a question to the worker: If God is working in the world for beauty, justice, craftsmanship, abundance, and healing, how might you join that work? As Rodney Clapp notes, "Christians do not stop being Christians after they participate in the Sunday liturgy. They depart to live the liturgy."⁹

How might the humble practice of footwashing on a Sunday impact a powerful CEO's practices on Monday? How might it impact the way she treats her employees, partners, and clients? In generous sharing of the bread and wine on Sunday, how might she begin sharing with others on Monday? As she waits humbly to take Communion on Sunday in a long line behind children, the unemployed, and the disabled, how might she reflect on her business's treatment of these people on Monday?

Here the sanctuary is potentially a dangerous place for a worker. Here the economy of God is revealing certain unseemly things about the economy of

9. Clapp, *A Peculiar People*, 117.

the world. Through worship, the work of God threatens to invade workers and transform their work. In worship that is vocationally conversant, our work is made open to God's work. As we move forward in this book, we will explore through Scripture, history, and global Christianity precisely how worship can transform workers; we will show how it can slowly habituate the work of God into the work of the church. The leading desire will be to develop an understanding and a practice of vocationally conversant worship.

The Present Challenge

Before we can chart a course for the future, we must honestly acknowledge the present challenge. Gathered worship today, by and large, is not “vocationally conversant.” Many Christians today do not enter the sanctuary expecting to dialogue with God about their work. Some choose to withhold their daily work from God. Others try to bring their work into worship, but they feel as if the doors are closed on them. For a wide variety of complex reasons, gathered worship is not often a place where faith and work come together. Even churches that profess to a great theology of work rarely mention work in their congregational prayers, blessings, confessions, sermons, and songs. Why is that? What's going wrong? This is the focus of the next chapter.