

WORK, CREATIVITY AND VOCATION

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FROM CONSIDERING THE EARLY CHAPTERS OF GENESIS, COLIN SMITH DEVELOPS AN UNDERSTANDING OF WORK AND VOCATION BASED ON GOD'S CREATIVITY AND HUMAN FREE WILL.

The conventional starting point for our understanding of work is a careful reading of Genesis 1-3, which tells us that humankind was created by God in his own image (Genesis 1:27). Thus, it is reasonable to suppose that something of that creativity remains within us all and that we all have the ability to be creative in varying degrees. How we express our creativity however, depends very much on our own particular gifts. Thus, someone who is a good musician may be quite unable to paint, act, sculpt, draw, write or dance. Let us not be dismayed therefore if we have only one, or very few gifts, rather let us develop and use the gifts which we do have, to his honour and glory.

Also, let us not think that creativity is the domain only of what are traditionally referred to as the arts. More controversially perhaps, a good scientist may be able to apply his knowledge and imagination creatively to design artefacts, which may not exhibit great beauty. Nonetheless, they can be of great benefit to all humankind. Today we tend to think of spectacular machinery; medical scanners or computers and the internet in this context. However, simpler devices are equally relevant. One such is the humble Davy lamp, which remains in use today in some parts of the world, even though it was invented many years ago. Today, the creative inventiveness of those working in the field of appropriate technology, largely focussed on the third world, is awesome.

CREATIVITY AND FREE WILL

If we take creativity as the ability to make something new which is beautiful or useful, or both, then it is easy to see that the freedom to make choices is crucial, for within any creative task choices have to be made. This word or phrase is better than that one, this musical note jars whereas this one produces harmony, this colour clashes with that one etc. God's gift of free will works together with the creativity within us.

God got a good deal of creative satisfaction from his handiwork, as indicated by the refrain throughout Genesis 1, that 'God saw that it was good.' So, when humankind was given the responsibility to

subdue and care for the earth (Genesis 1: 26-28), then it is reasonable to suppose that a sense of creative satisfaction would also accompany this work. I have some direct experience of this in that I have both a small garden and a large allotment, and readily concede that the growth of the produce is largely God's work. Nonetheless the preparation of the soil, the choice and planting of the seeds and the care of the plants, are tasks given by him to humankind. And there is considerable decision making and a large measure of creativity within those tasks. Such work can be a joy too.



CREATIVITY AND WORK

However, the Genesis story tells us that it all went horribly wrong. Rebellion against God (the fall), changed everything. God consequently cursed the ground (Genesis 3 17-19), and work became much harder. Much of it became joyless hard labour necessary for food production and survival. But it is important to remember that this did not entirely change humankind. Freewill was unaffected and creativity remained a human characteristic. Exercising

creativity within our work, whatever it may be, can and should lead to a sense of satisfaction both in the doing of it and in the appreciation of the work of others. How sad it is when people are denied this satisfaction, which is God's will for us, through unemployment, exploitative employment practices or as a result of illness or disability.

As we progress through the Old Testament we see God giving specific tasks to specific people - often with a creative aspect to them. A good example of this is Exodus 26-39 where skilled workers are set to work creating the tabernacle to his design, but with specific details left to them. They have become God's co-workers in implementing his will, and sharing his satisfaction in the end result.

Individuals, working with God become even more prominent in the New Testament. In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-29), the disciples are tasked to make disciples throughout the nations and then to teach and nurture them on his behalf, and he promises to be with them throughout. Similarly, Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are God's fellow workers (2 Corinthians 6:1). Work has become more than food production, subduing the earth and safeguarding the creation - though these tasks remain. The Christian now is also to work creatively with and alongside God in building the kingdom.

VOCATION

So, let us not dwell over much on the consequences of the fall, but instead let us see our work as a creative partnership with God. Indeed, the whole of life, not just our work or leisure activities, can be seen in this way and brings a deep sense of fulfilment with it. Remember too that our individual gifting may well change as we grow older - our younger self has creative potential that needs to be developed. I blush when I reread some of my early writings, and often disagree with my younger self; but if we honestly and prayerfully try our best for God, then our efforts can be seen as a form of worship and he will be pleased with it.

I would venture to say, that our work is to discern what God is doing in our own situation and prayerfully to seek guidance as to our role in it. If we are fulfilling this role, then we have found and are carrying out our particular vocation.



Loving Father God,

How beautiful is your creation!

Humankind at the pinnacle, fearfully and wonderfully made,
Intricate physical bodies with all parts working harmoniously together,
Conscious minds and a living spirit, with freedom to choose.

We are creatures made in your image, made to create.

Our writings express our creative thoughts,
Our paintings show beauty and inspire us, and
Our music gives an aural experience that moves the soul.

As we demonstrate your creativity within us, we too experience something of the satisfaction you felt when you rested, seeing that your creation was good.

We also show something of yourself in your creation.

We see your love of beauty in land, sea and sky.
We see your love of humanity, especially in the gift of our senses to appreciate that beauty, and in your creation of male and female, for mutual loving support.
We see too the constancy of that love in the rhythms of creation - of day and night, of tides and seasons, of work and of play.

Yet we know that all is not as you intended it to be. It is a fallen creation.

But our knowledge and experience of your love, seen in creation,
in Jesus, and, in your continuing work as Holy Spirit,
reassures us that you have not given up and that you will continue to work until the end times when all will be put right, and made new once again.

At harvest time particularly, we are reminded that, in the beginning, you created a garden, first for us to enjoy and then to work creatively within.

As we contemplate the food brought forth by seed, sun and rain, lead us to appreciate fully your love in the beauty of your creation,
live in harmony with its rhythms, and
always give you thanks for your provision.

May we be continually praising you for all you are,
all you have done and all that you will do.

Amen.

This is an expanded version of an article first published in 'Search' - the magazine of the Open Bible Trust.



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