

A Trinitarian Doctrine of Christian Vocation

Scott Harrower¹

Abstract

In his short essay 'What is Enlightenment?' Immanuel Kant urged the reader to "dare to know"—*Sapere aude!* Likewise, in his recent work *The Deep Things of God*, Fred Sanders dares the reader to dare to know God the Trinity and thereby truly live.² The subtitle—*The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*—is very significant. The purpose of this article is to extend the claim that "The Trinity Changes Everything" into the realm of Christian vocation. This is a key aspect of anthropology which is not often explored with reference to trinitarian theology. Such a state of affairs is surprising given the centrality of a theology of vocation to the God-humanity relationship. Our proposal for a trinitarian view of human vocation will be carried out in conversation with Sanders' work as well as with biblical, Lutheran and Reformed sources. The implications of a robust theology of vocation are enormous. Few questions are more important than "Who am I?" and "Who (or what) am I here for?" This work especially focuses on our calling and identity as human beings in the light of the triune life and economy of salvation.

Introduction:

In Sanders' work, *The Deep Things of God*, the central thesis—and perhaps the most helpful point of Sanders' work—has to do with "God's life in us." Sanders has outlined a participatory view of salvation and the Christian life in direct contrast to what he sees as a "reductionist" Evangelicalism. To his credit, Sanders has applied his trinitarian insights to the key Christian practices of prayer and bible reading. However, our view is that "God's life in us" entails greater outworkings in the human realm than just these two individual devotional practices. Indeed, such a limited view of the human response to God would be tantamount to falling prey to the individualism which Sanders so roundly rejects. If trinitarian theology is truly able to change everything (as Sanders' subtitle claims), then surely the comprehensiveness of the triune-human relationship must capture the full sweep of our being.³ For this reason a theology of vocation plays a key role in spelling out a theological anthropology and the divine-human relationship.

¹ I am particularly grateful to my wife Kate Harrower and to Jonathan King from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School for their valuable feedback on this paper.

² Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2010).

³ Other areas into which Sanders' work could be extended include the areas of mission and ecclesiology.

Vocation refers to God's call upon people's lives. It is based on the Greek *kaléō* (to call), which is to summon and invite.⁴ Vocation answers the question: "What does God the Trinity call and invite us to do?" A "thin" theological response to this question tends to be expressed in such a way that trinitarian theology is entirely absent. This view, commonly expressed in the realm of practical theology, holds that God is primarily active and rational rather than the triune God who is a personal knower and desirer.⁵ Such a minimalist view of the trinitarian grounding for a doctrine of vocation will locate this doctrine within God's providential care and guidance (Ps. 127, 139; Prov. 3:5-6; Matt. 10:29-31). For example, this approach may claim that vocation merely follows on:

...from two propositions. The first, that God is everywhere active in human affairs and his will operative at all times. The second, that he is a rational God, fully aware that the world needs farmers and miners as well as priests and nuns...⁶

If such a minimalist view were taken, then as far as the doctrines of the Trinity and vocation go, we may have lost our focus on God himself. Hence we heed Sanders' caution against unthinkingly throwing ourselves into the "river of salvation and swimming downstream" with little regard for the fountain from which the life of salvation flows.⁷

The need for extending trinitarian theology into the realm of vocation is clear. Its benefits include the fact that such a view is more closely related to the witness of scripture and it also places the triune life of God as both the ontological basis and the relational source and goal for human life. A loss of focus on God when it comes to human vocation naturally leads to various theologies which place false calls upon our lives. After the fall of Adam, the relational and purposeful aspects of human nature are distorted. As a consequence, humankind's relationships and work are irrevocably altered, and people fall prey to the tyranny of distorted, destructive, idolatrous pseudo-calls. Moreover, theology which is inexorably dependent upon God's own life will expose the *Abgotts*, the false gods, in whose shadow we seek to live.⁸ More positively, a gospel-centered trinitarian theology will richly capture who God is and who we are as his people. This is because our human vocation is only truly understood in the context of conversion and regeneration, and for this reason must be seen within a trinitarian reality.⁹ Only a trinitarian basis for vocation can include the renewed call to be God's

⁴ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "Vocation" in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1988), 995.

⁵ Naturally (!) He is God the Trinity who is only ever active in creation as the willful gracious outflow of the trinitarian super-life. Further to this, he is only ever rational in a personal manner.

⁶ Gordon R. Preece, "The Threefold Call: A Trinitarian and Reformed Theology in Response to Volf's Work in the Spirit" (Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997), 3:14.

⁷ Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*: 69.

⁸ For example, a very common *Abgott* today is the self-focused call to be physically fit and wealthy above all other concerns. In addition, a trinitarian theology of vocation will also respond to *ungodly* ways in which vocation theology has been employed for exploitation, on this issue see Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁹ "Conversion, or a change of heart and heart orientation, becomes the means by which we discover our identity; it does not change it, but rather enhances that call. You might say that prior to conversion you lived falsely; with conversion we find ourselves and our vocations, though it is certainly possible, before conversion, to live one's

covenant partners.¹⁰ Furthermore, the reception of this call and its enablement cannot be understood aside from the work of God through Christ and his Spirit.

This work outlines a foundational trinitarian theology of vocation. In our view human vocation consists of four calls from God upon our lives. These are the calls to be co-worshippers, vice-regents, disciples, and gifted servants. The first aspect of human vocation is to be worshippers of God as a covenant community. Secondly, we are called to be God's laboring and loving vice-regents. Thirdly, we called to be obedient Christ-like disciples of Jesus. Fourthly, we are called to discern the particular gifts we have received in order to serve others.

Being in Right Relationship with God

The first aspect of human vocation is to be worshippers of God in the company of his image-bearers. This is the *being-in-right-relationship* aspect of vocation. A trinitarian model of God's life presents him as the grounds for a personalist view of what is ultimate. In a Christian personalist account, the ultimate personal being and His desires lie at the center of reality. The super-personal God as three persons and His desires *is* the free personal plenitude and self-delight of God the Trinity. This is captured by Sanders' language of the "Happy Land of the Trinity."¹¹ The phrase helpfully clarifies that the 'personal' is the center of the universe, not only in terms of reality, but also in terms of axiology–value.¹² Indeed, the tri-personal One is accorded the highest axiology; the highest value. Thus, the first aspect of a doctrine of human vocation is the relational acknowledgement of God's worth-ship: our worship of God as Father, Son, and Spirit. A trinitarian theology of worship means that mere knowledge of God is not a sufficient outcome of a personal relationship with him. Rather, our "I-Thou" relationship will be experienced as the enjoyment of the exclusive worship of God.¹³ The telos of the creation is to "glorify God and enjoy him forever," however, due to the distinctive triune nature of God, the joyful ascription of worth to Him in this world will be of a particular kind.¹⁴ Firstly, our "I-Thou" enjoyment of God takes place as image-bearers. This involves a degree of con-naturality. Due to this

true vocation, but not in the light of the grace of God." Gordon T. Smith, *Courage and Calling* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1999). 52.

¹⁰ There is a dynamism inherent in this trinitarian reality which is a result of the present and eschatological nature of the Kingdom of God for both individuals and communities. In the present, the redemptive renewal of an individual and a people group by the Spirit of Christ involves knowing and experiencing the identity and call of the Triune God. We are called to be transformed in light of the ontological reality and economic acts of God the Father as co-triune creator and worker, the believer's new basic identity as 'dying and rising with Christ', and discerning the gifts and renewal made possible by the Holy Spirit.

¹¹ Not only is this a catchy phrase but it highlights the freedom and plenitude within the loving life of God. "In himself and without any reference to a created world or to the plan of salvation, God is that being who exists as the triune love of the Father for the Son in the unity of the Spirit." Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*: 63.

¹² Here I am indebted to Graham Cole's view of Personalism.

¹³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Colombia: Word, 1987). 9.

¹⁴ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace: The Kuyper Lectures for 1981 delivered at the Free University of Amsterdam* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1983). 69-72. See also Article 1 of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*.

con-natural relationship in which *like* knows *like*, we can truly relate personally to the super-personal God. The image-bearers of God know and enjoy the One they image. Importantly, the triune-to-image relationship can only occur in the light of his life *for* us and *in* us. That is, we only perceive God's self-revelation *post facto* human repentance, the divine forgiveness of sin and a person's reception of the Holy Spirit. We can only know and enjoy him in the person of the Son and the intimacy of the Spirit. In this way we are re-vivified to worship God. Thus, the Christian call to the worship of God necessarily assumes a trinitarian theology. Only a triune vocation theology can successfully accommodate the personal and historical forms of the saving good news God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

A trinitarian view of our primary vocation, the worship of God, has tremendous ramifications. Such a perspective halts the "means-to-an-end" view of God which Sanders has highlighted within some pockets of Christianity. He writes that if our trinitarian reflection and practice has a starting point other than God himself, then "... everything we say about the practical relevance of the Trinity could lead us to one colossal misunderstanding: thinking of God the Trinity as a means to some other end, as if God were Trinity in order to make himself useful. But God the Trinity is the end, the goal, the *telos*, the omega."¹⁵ Thus, we reject functional approaches to God, and thereby derivatively uphold that humanity was created in order to be *creatures-in-right-relationship*: God's people in God's place, in God's presence.¹⁶ This far reaching personal relationality means that the human vocation to be worshipers cannot be actualized on an individual level. It is irrevocably a call to be worshipers with other redeemed image-bearers of God.¹⁷ This is a necessary consequence of the triune economy, and is no mere outward call imposed upon the believer. We are ontologically determined as co-worshippers with other regenerated people by the new nature we receive and the indwelling of God. As those who worship Jesus in the Spirit, we are inherently in *koinonia* with one another. Thereby worship (and the service it entails) is never an individual action. Indeed, we worship with others even when we are not worshipping in the local church. Christians are not alone in worship because we are conjoined to worshippers throughout the world and throughout time. Further, a trinitarian appreciation

¹⁵ Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*: 62.

¹⁶ This is a variation on Goldsworthy's work wherein he claims that the Kingdom of God seen in the Garden of Eden and woven throughout Scripture is "God's people in God's place under God's rule." In our view, however, "God's Rule" is an outworking and facilitation of his presence. Thus we give God's presence the priority in our schema. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1981). 46.

¹⁷ Being in a relation of loving worship to God naturally leads to loving his image-bearers in their proper proportion; as relational flesh from our own flesh. Two distorted possibilities present themselves in the way in which people value other image-bearers once they lose sight of the One they image. These possibilities include the undervaluing and the overvaluing of God's image-bearers. On one hand the undervaluing of relationships between image-bearers leads to deep alienation and pain. On the other hand the over prioritization of people—the worship of humans—removes the "imaging" aspect of who we are. Moreover this over prioritization of persons places these fallen image-bearers in inherently abusive relationship to one another because inordinate power is both explicitly and implicitly given and served within these relationships.

of our vocation to worship means we never worship alone because we join with the prayers of Jesus and the Spirit in the company of saints.¹⁸

The character of the worshippers and the kind of worship which arises within Christians stems from divine freedom. These flow from the fact that God's wisdom delighted to determine humans into being as His image-bearers. The free divine plenitude as Father, Son, and Spirit is the objective basis of grace because God's relationship to us is configured towards us from the *a priori* plenitude of his triune freedom apart from creation. Sanders highlighted the gracious and astounding movement outwards from God's self as follows: "Imagining God without the world is one way to highlight the freedom of God in creating. ... Creation was not required, not mandatory, not exacted from God, neither by any necessity imposed from outside nor by any deficit lurking within the life of God... It would be wrong to say that God created because he was lonely, unfulfilled, or bored... Such divine freedom is one of the things meant by grace..."¹⁹ Grace is one of the implications of the Trinity's freedom from creation. The pure act of God's being *is* as Father, Son and Spirit. Any act to will or know outside himself is a strictly un-necessary, though strongly willed, act of generous giving. Therefore, the sum of the God-human relationship is predicated upon the basis of the kindness and generosity of God. In this light, the worship of God does not merely stem from his right over us as righteous creator, but from our appreciation of his gift of creating us in his image.²⁰ Furthermore, in salvation his grace is offered to humans despite their enmity towards him. By means of beginning with the fullness of the triune life, and hence the relational freedom of God, double good news are presented before us. These are the good news of general creation and the particular good news of salvation-life. Hence neither creation nor salvation-life are dependent on human faith or moral virtue, but on the gift and grace of being brought into a richness of life with God the Trinity. As humans we have experienced both the qualitatively gracious generosity of God before the fall, and after the fall we have received divine mercy. God the Trinity seeks to dwell with human beings. Ultimately the gift of creation and the grace of redemption both serve this relational goal (Rev. 21-22). The divine call to return to this primary worship is re-stated and re-offered in Jesus, and is enabled by the Spirit, as John's gospel makes clear (Jn. 14:6 ff.). Indeed, the book of Revelation climaxes with the call: Worship God! (Rev. 22:9). Thus all other areas of human vocation will be received in worshipful thanks as good gifts from God. Purposeful activity (work) and relationships are each a *Dei donum*. We now turn to these performative aspects of human vocation: labor and love.

¹⁸ Peter Orr writes: "This ignorance on our part is overcome by the intercession ... of the Spirit himself ... Our inability to pray is matched by the Spirit's own intercession. Paul then sees the Spirit helping believers by actively praying for them according to the will of God." Peter Orr, "Christ Absent and Present: A Study in Pauline Christology" (Durham, 2011), 163.

¹⁹ Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*: 64-65.

²⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 4/1: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988). 528-48.

Labor and Love

The second aspect of a trinitarian theology of vocation involves the call to be God's vice-regents, "in Christ," on earth. This involves the *labor* and *loving* aspects of human vocation. The divine call upon humans to be his working vice-regents on earth stems from the fact that the triune God is a creator-worker, and people are his image-bearers. The consequence of being made in the image of God, Gen. 1:26-30, is that as God's vice-regents our vocation is to extend God's life-giving rule via purposeful labor and relational fruitfulness.²¹ The divine re-statement of love in the incarnation, the cross, and the indwelling of the Spirit, re-affirms humanity as God's chosen creatures. The gospel highlights the Spirit's indwelling of believers as one of the main ways in which God the Trinity remains providentially involved in creation. Labor, or work, as an extension of human rule, is part of people's basic activity as beings, and not a result of sin.²² Because human identity is endowed with royal dignity and priestly purpose as image-bearers of God, "human work is invested with preeminent significance."²³ This is the great affirmation that God takes people and their work seriously, because he has entrusted people to co-manage the planet under Him.²⁴ In covenant with God, humans have the lofty task of defining the earth by obeying God's command to work in the Garden of Eden.²⁵ Our covenantal relationship with him is an outworking of his triune decision for life beyond himself. God's image-bearers are to reflect his decision for life and his care for the universe. People are to care for the garden because it is not self-caring, nor self-perpetuating.²⁶ God's speech in the second creation account nuances the nature of human world-care. Humankind is instructed to 'dress' and 'keep' the garden. Dress refers to serve: "the man is placed in the Garden as a servant. He is not to be served but to serve."²⁷ To 'keep' carries the nuance of tending, guarding, and "to exercise great care over."²⁸ A concern for the earth means a benevolent human 'subdue and rule' (Gen 1:28). This entails a righteous human treatment of creatures, the earth and other humans, as God would treat them.²⁹ On

²¹ Human vocation is necessarily connected to our relationship with God, other people, all creatures and the Earth. Therefore, human vice-regency entails a fullness of relational and active life within which God's intentions for humanity are mutually enriching.

²² Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1990). 171. Commenting on Genesis 2:15 ("Yahweh God then took the man and led him into the garden of Eden to dress it and keep it"), Hamilton writes: "...physical labor is not a consequence of sin. Work enters the picture before sin does, and if man had never sinned he still would be working. Eden is not a paradise in which man passes his time in idyllic and uninterrupted bliss with absolutely no demands on his daily schedule."

²³ William P. Brown, "Whatever Your Hand Finds to Do," *Interpretation* 55, no. 3 (2001): 271.

²⁴ Smith, *Courage and Calling*: 26-28.

²⁵ Brown, "Whatever Your Hand Finds to Do," 271.

²⁶ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*: 171.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*: 32.

God's side of the covenantal relationship, his command to 'subdue and rule' implies that God promises to assist humankind to carry this out.³⁰

Human work is never presented as a vocation in isolation from the other calls upon the Christian life. The creator-to-image bearer relationship lays the foundation for the fact that in the account of the Garden of Eden, a relational frame of reference conditions the work of human beings. Humans are not only worshippers of God but are also called to fruitfully multiply. The kingdom of God in Eden will only expand as people are in relationship to God and in relationship to one another. The 'personal' aspect conditions, or relativizes, the 'professional'. This is highly significant for Western cultures in which performance has priority over persons. Primary amongst the many examples whereby the relational conditions limit the realm of work is that the creation account makes it abundantly (and polemically) clear that God is the only right object of worship.³¹ Knowing God is both logically prior and properly basic to being commanded to rule the earth and be fruitful within it. Work is not the goal of existence nor should it be the object of worship or first allegiance. That the relational places delimiters upon human work-activity is also clear from the instructions people receive: dominion *and* reproduction. The reproductive aspect of our call means that the production of work is never valued more highly than the producers themselves, nor those who engage in the activity of labor. The relational goal of rest with God—the Sabbath command whereby rest is holy—means that rest relativizes work and points humanity to its ultimate state of shalom rest and delight with God.³²

The particularly trinitarian aspect of human work and fruitful relationships is refocused by the gospel. The gospel spotlights the need for, and the possibility of, both human work and fruitful relationships only rightly taking place "in Christ." In this way, the messiness of ordinary Christian life is truly connected to God and his purposes. This is the extension of the message of *The Deep Things of God* with its emphasis on good *participatory* news, which is best stated as "God participates in our life." We can extend Sanders' work by stating that this participation "in Christ" means work or "doing what the Lord has given your hand to do" (Ecc. 2:24-25; 3:12, 22; 9: 7-10; Col. 3:17) that takes place in the light of being called into God's household (Eph. 2:19). Thereby, a Christian spirituality of vocation and work truly entails the ultimately personal and divine in the midst of the messiness and ordinariness of human existence.³³ With regard to work Luther stated, "God himself will milk the cows through him whose vocation that is. He who engages in the lowliness of his work performs God's

³⁰ "This is repeated to Noah after the flood (9:1), and the patriarchs too are reminded of this divine promise (17:2, 20; 28:3; 35:11). The genealogies of Gen. 5, 9, 11, 25, 36, 46 bear silent testimony to its fulfillment, and on his death bed Jacob publicly notes the fulfillment of this divine word (48:4; cf. 47:27)." *Ibid.*, 33.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³² Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*: 143. Gordon R. Preece, "Choices at the Coalface," (Sydney: Anglican Diocese Social Issues Committee, 1991), 10.

³³ Simon C. Holt, "When it's an Industry, What's Hospitality?," *Zadok Perspectives* 79, no. 17-25 (2003): 19.

work, be he a lad or a king.”³⁴ Human work is “the work of our Lord God under a mask, as it were, beneath which he himself alone effects and accomplishes what we desire.”³⁵ Luther also modeled relational fruitfulness by means of his loving marriage and the couple’s ministry of hospitality. The fact that work and relationships are carried out “in Christ” leads to their expression in tandem with the progressive Christ-likeness of the believer. The in-Christ-ness of our vocations to work and be fruitful entails that we do these righteously—the “as Christ” aspect of our vocations.

Vocation as Human Imitation of the Divine Life

The third aspect of a Christian view of human vocation is the call to be disciples of Jesus. This is the *imitational* aspect of vocation. Whereas we have argued above that our work is to be done “in Christ,” here we turn our attention to the hope of working “as Christ.” This is so because Christ is our role model for both active and passive obedience to God as Father. This is enabled by the Spirit in line with the will of God the Father. Our first vocational call is to be worshipers. From this life of worship flows a life of obedience to God’s call to be workers and fruitful “in Christ.” The manner in which this is carried out after the Fall must reflect Jesus’ righteousness and call to be followers of him.

An unhelpful interpretation of this call and role modeling would be a practical Christomonism. Sanders’ helpfully highlights this danger in chapter 5 of *The Deep Things of God*. He warns of the danger whereby “Jesus becomes my heavenly Father, Jesus lives in my heart, Jesus died to save me from the wrath of Jesus, so I could be with Jesus forever.”³⁶ Sanders’ comment is helpful as he reminds us that the whole of the triune economy must be taken into account in order to properly reflect God’s concerns. Our first point here is that careful attention to Jesus’ call to be disciples entails a triune expectation on our behalf. That is, Jesus’ call to be disciples entails a dependence on God who is at least a plurality of persons. Jesus’ calls to faith and discipleship are only possible if Jesus is worthy of worship. Therefore Christian discipleship must be at the very least binitarian if it is not to be blasphemous. However, one cannot be a binitarian disciple and do explanative justice to the economic work of God in redemption.³⁷ It is impossible to come to that posture before Jesus by our own design. This highlights God’s grace towards us. Being a disciple of Jesus is an outworking of God’s free initiative and superabundant love towards and in people’s lives. Discipleship is predicated upon the regeneration by, and reception of, the Holy Spirit despite default human indifference or outright rejection of God. The Holy Spirit highlights Jesus’ person and work as well as enabling us to receive the justifying and sanctifying benefits of these. Vocational righteousness and God the Trinity

³⁴ Luther, *Exposition of Psalm 127 for the Christians at Riga, XV*, cited in Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957). 9. See also Preece, “The Threefold Call: A Trinitarian and Reformed Theology in Response to Volf’s Work in the Spirit,” 2.

³⁵ John S. Feinberg, “Luther’s Doctrine: Some Problems of Interpretation and Application,” *Fides Et Historia* 12(1979): 60.

³⁶ Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*: 171.

³⁷ We must also take into account the fact that God’s triunity is also the personal and active grounds for beginning the pilgrim journey of Christ-likeness as we are perfected by the Spirit.

must go together. Human fulfillment of all righteousness is only ever a trinitarian event.³⁸ The divine identity, which is perichoretic, not only secures the identity of the one God, it also secures the very possibility of human vocation.

We now turn to God the Trinity's enablement of human faithfulness. Progressive vocational righteousness, or sanctification by the Spirit, is given a clear shape and goal by Jesus' own model of righteous obedience to God. Jesus has demonstrated the true righteousness of God and of the new Adam and of faithful Israel. As such, Jesus exercised true human dominion and authority in that he responded faithfully and missiologically to the delegated authority he received (Matt. 28:1-20). The practical outworkings of the divine commission of the Father, Son and Spirit encompass the whole of our human vocations. Indeed, Jesus' threefold Great Commission moves us in the direction of re-creation based upon Genesis 1 and 2. This re-creation is aimed at a restoration of relationship between people and God, others, and the Earth. That is, firstly, there is the call for persons to be baptized and become disciples themselves. This re-states and restores the God-wards aspect of the covenant. Secondly, disciples are to do what Jesus refers to as: "All that I have taught you." This is the rule of right relationships in the horizontal aspect of the covenant. Thirdly, the call to make disciples is the work of the restoration of God's image-bearers who are to rule over the earth. These disciples are to do so by being salt and light in a decaying world. This involves anticipating the new heaven and the new earth.³⁹

Within this framework, Jesus called some of his followers away from their work in order to follow Him. However, he also called many to stay in the social context from which they had come (Mk. 5:18ff., 5:34; 8: 26; Matt. 8:13; 9:6). Luther appreciated the significance of this theology for everyone. He proposed that everyday activity becomes a vocation when it is transformed by the gospel. Luther rightly regarded the fulfillment of worldly duty as "the highest form which the moral activity of an individual could assume."⁴⁰ This takes seriously the call to grow in Christ-likeness (2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Pet. 1:16; 1 Jn. 3:2-3). As part of this call to be saints (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2) and "partakers of a holy calling" (2 Tim. 1:9), believers are to respond to God's active providence in faith. In this light, people can delight in God's providence amidst whatever occupies their daily time. This delight is based upon the knowledge that their activities are part of God's call upon their lives. This includes not only paid work but all the "smaller" purposeful activities in life such as putting out the bins or having lunch. These are the activities carried out by Jesus' disciples who have an active role in the extension of the Kingdom of God by means of their lived-out character. Any context where people are placed, such as at home, at a commercial workplace, or at a volunteer society, is where people carry out this discipleship aspect of their vocations.

³⁸ Just as God's concern for humanity is expressed in his trinitarian redemptive acts, so his enablement for carrying out our tasks in a Christ-like manner will be trinitarian.

³⁹ The new heaven and new Earth are the final land promise of God's covenant with his new people of God. This is a strong contrast to the Babel type of self-glorifying, this-worldly dominion of Genesis 12.

⁴⁰ Cited in Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*: 106.

Vocation as the Task of Discernment and Direction-Setting

The final aspect of vocation which we shall outline today is the call to be gifted servants. This is the *discerning and directional* aspect of vocation. Having established the world of work as one which must be carried out “in Christ” and “as Christ,” we now turn to establish the “for Christ” and “from his Spirit” aspects of human work. The sharper end of the question of vocation is in relation to the individual gifting a person receives from God for his service.⁴¹ It is possible to take an anthropocentric view, a solely pneumatological view, or a trinitarian view on individual giftedness. The anthropocentric view is that taken by Gordon T. Smith, who argues that people have a birth vocation which is inherent to them particularly. Smith argues that people have a lifelong vocation which does not change.⁴² A practical outworking of this is his view that vocation probably cannot be truly discerned until a person is in their mid-thirties. Sanders’ theology as a whole is a helpful corrective to the anthropocentric view. He writes: “A Christian, especially ... is somebody who is already immersed in the reality of the Trinity, long before beginning to reflect on the idea of the Trinity.”⁴³ Thus, Sanders lays the basis for a corrective to the anthropocentric view for two reasons. Firstly, Christians do not live in a reality which can be *a priori* considered apart from God’s particular gifts. Secondly, all Christian vocation and particular guidance must be addressed in line with God’s desires for the church and the world.

Another unhelpful view would be a *solely* pneumatological view. On the positive side, this perspective rightly stresses that people are gifted by God (Eph. 4; Rom. 8; Rom. 12) in specific ways for specific tasks (Exod. 35:2-3; 1 Chron. 28:11-12) for the benefit of others (1 Cor. 14:12). Gifts are not inherent to the individual, they are imparted by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11), and may be taken away by the Spirit (Rom. 11:29).⁴⁴ The problem with a *solely* pneumatological view, divorced from the Spirit’s relationship to the Father and the Son, is that one is in significant danger of committing what

⁴¹This may not be aligned with the primary use of people’s day-to-day time, which is often their work. This relationship between people’s purposeful activity (paid or unpaid) and vocation is crucial. A biblical view of vocation must be able to separate the vocation to work and an individual’s vocational gifting. People’s particular vocational gifting may or may not be utilized in a person’s paid work. Smith, *Courage and Calling*: 35. This is a particularly necessary clarification to make in developing economies. Though aligning employment with vocation is possible for a few in developed economies, to a great extent this is an ideal rather than reality. Chris J. White, “Beyond vocation: New Theologies of Work,” (Melbourne: Open Book Printing, 2002), 6-9.

⁴² Though he is inconsistent at times. He also argues that the vocation needs discovering and using if life is to be fulfilling inwardly, horizontally and vertically. Smith, *Courage and Calling*.

⁴³ Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*: 26.

⁴⁴ This view stresses the broad panorama of Spirit’s work of creation (Ps. 104: 30, 23) and re-creation (Rom. 8:22) in the present social context of the individual, as well as the final Kingdom of God. For more on this perspective see Robert J. Banks, *Faith Goes to Work: Reflections from the Marketplace* (Alban Institute, 1999). 164-68. The better of the pneumatological models take into account gifts, personality and social as people discern their vocations. An example of this nuance is seen in Volf’s work. He writes: “Neither the Spirit’s calling nor equipping occur in a social and natural vacuum...They are mediated through each person’s social interrelations and psychosomatic constitution. These mediations themselves result from the interactions of human beings with God.” Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*: 115. On the larger context of the Spirit of God’s work of creation (Ps. 104: 30, 23) and re-creation (Rom. 8:22) in the present social context of the individual and the Kingdom of God, see Banks, *Faith Goes to Work: Reflections from the Marketplace*: 164-68.

Gunton called the “worst kind of anthropomorphism.” That is, “of making the Spirit a kind of individual agent in relation to the created order.”⁴⁵

A trinitarian view of vocation robustly captures the Christological sense and hence missionary sense of Scripture.⁴⁶ Sanders writes: “...Jesus himself is always centered on the work of the Father and the Spirit, so successfully focusing on Christ logically entails including the entire Trinity in that same focus.”⁴⁷ A trinitarian view will not consider the work of the Spirit aside from the persons and acts of the Father and the Son.⁴⁸ Therefore a trinitarian theology of vocation will always be informed by the economy of salvation and the *Missio Dei*.

Conclusion

The goal of this work was to outline a trinitarian doctrine of human vocation in conversation with Fred Sanders’ recent work *The Deep Things of God*. This has involved much more than merely restoring the Sunday-Monday faith-life connection. Rather, we have argued that the divine triune life expressed in God’s economy of creation, salvation and recreation involves a particular set of callings upon God’s children. This set of callings includes the call to be worshippers, workers, lovers, disciples, and particularly gifted servants. These vocations must be lived out in the light of the economy of the triune God. As such, a theology of vocation will take into account our Spirit-enabled response and loving obedience to the triune God who has been revealed in the Jesus.

⁴⁵ Colin Gunton, “The Spirit Moved Over the Face of the Waters: The Holy Spirit and the Created Order,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 4, no. 2 (2002): 195.

⁴⁶ He writes that a “Christ-centered message can never be in real tension with a Trinity-centered message [because] ... the two messages are concentric.” Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*: 168.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Thus a mere pneumatological view of vocation will not do either. This model loses the eternal simultaneity within God’s loving inner being. This means diminishing the triune grounding of the Spirit’s work and a loss of the triune-Christological reference point of the Spirit’s work and goals.

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