ABSTRACT

Vocation/Calling as a Framework for Christian Character Formation in College Students

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This project examined the use of a Christian understanding of vocation/calling with first-year college students to discover how it contributed to their formation in Christian character. Over the course of a sixteen-week semester, a test group of students was taught a theological construct of vocation/calling and explored its implications for their lives, especially as it relates to higher education, work, and their relationships to God, others, and broader creation. A voluntary control group was utilized as well, which was formed by students taking a different course that focused on major exploration without the use of a vocation/calling framework. A pre-intervention survey served as a baseline assessment to discern students’ initial perceptions of vocation/calling and its impacts in their lives. At the conclusion of the semester, a similar post-intervention survey, supplemented by a long-form interview, was administered to gauge the impact of the vocation/calling curriculum on the test group in comparison to the control group. The purpose of this project was to equip college students with a more holistic perspective on the purpose and meaning of their lives and thereby lead to the development of character consistent with the Christian faith.
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DEDICATION

To my faithful wife, Jennifer,

Who has never said “no” to an adventure,

Even such a challenging one as this.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

Problem Statement

The key findings from a 2018 Strada-Gallup Education Consumer Survey, “Why Higher Ed? Top Reasons U.S. Consumers Choose Their Educational Pathways,” show that work outcomes are the primary motive for people to pursue higher education within the United States. In fact, fifty-eight percent of those who attend institutions of higher education reveal that “getting a good job” is their main impetus. The next greatest motivation, “learn[ing] more and gain[ing] knowledge,” is represented by less than half that number of people (23%).¹ These statistics are a microcosm of the zeitgeist that is neoliberalism, a mood which pervades Western society, especially the United States.

According to Daniel Saunders, neoliberalism is “a socio-economic theory that rejects governmental intervention in domestic economy and promulgates materialism, consumerism, and the commodification of many public goods.”² Neoliberalism manifests itself within higher education through commodification and enhanced attention to revenue generation. Students are the consumers, and universities/colleges are the producers. As seen in the statistics from the Strada-Gallup survey, this “hegemonic project” has resulted in a heightened focus on individualism, capitalism, and largely extrinsic goods (e.g., careerism, high-paying jobs, prestige) rather than those intrinsic to higher education (e.g., truth, perseverance,


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accountability). The metrics for success have become more closely tied to retention and graduation rates, endowments, and university/college rankings. While perhaps connected to student development in some ways, these quantitative measures are focused heavily on the security of institutions of higher education as well-funded enterprises. In turn, students are effectively viewed as statistics on a balance sheet rather than human beings with worth, dignity, and potential outside of their monetary contributions. Consequently, both the idea and reality of transformative learning are eroded as higher education is reduced to a de facto business transaction.

The discipline of academic advising within higher education proves to be no exception to this trend. While rightly advocating for the personal well-being and professional development of students, many prominent advising theories tend to be largely if not solely student-focused (i.e., individualistic) at the expense of a larger perspective. Guidance is given to students, perhaps with good intentions, which narrows the scope of focus to themselves and their accomplishments, and thereby it inhibits their awareness of the cares and needs of the world around them. Consequently, there is a need for a more robust approach to academic advising whose aims include both the holistic flourishing of students and their stewardship of creation.

Purpose Statement

For as long as there have been universities and colleges, students have pondered life’s biggest questions, especially those around one’s purpose and meaning in life. This project examines the implementation of an explicitly Christian framework of vocation/calling with college students to discover how it contributes to Christian character formation. Further, this project seeks to understand and explain how vocation/calling impacts students’ perceptions of

\[\text{Ibid., 4.}\]
various life elements (e.g., education, work, relationships) and thereby determine how it can be integrated into academic advising to develop a new, constructive model. Assimilating a Christian understanding of vocation/calling into higher education in general, and the discipline of academic advising specifically, can help to curtail neoliberalism by equipping college students with a more holistic perspective on the purpose and meaning of their lives.

Definitions

Calling – a summons to a task or good work which originates from an external source (i.e., for purposes of this project, this is primarily understood as coming from God, but may also be derived from others, societal pressures, or one’s circumstances)

Vocation – synonym for calling; derived from the Latin word *vocare*; work we are called to do

Work – understood primarily in terms of engagement in a particular task which glorifies God and serves the needs of others

Christian Formation – growth or maturation into a distinctly Christian character which coincides with bearing the image of God into the world

Kingdom of God – the rule or reign of God on earth as it is in heaven

Meta-narrative – overarching narrative which drives and interprets all other narratives

Careerism – pursuit of career advancement to gain a heightened sense of social status often at the expense of one’s personal life, integrity, and ethics; focused on human effort

Rationale

One of the main reasons for the pursuit of this project’s study is the prevalence of a postmodern ethos (including neoliberalism) within Western society, not least within the Christian Church and institutions of higher education grounded in the Christian tradition. This postmodern philosophy is marked by a variety of characteristics, but perhaps most relevant here are the
elements of pluralism, hyper-individualism, disdain for structures of power or authority, and skepticism towards objective moral claims. As postmodernism has seeped into the life of the Church, the consequences have been far-ranging. Christians’ abilities to discern and faithfully embody their vocations have been impaired. The redemptive history of God is seen as one among many narratives which speak to the true nature of life. The desires and longings of the individual have become guides for the pursuit of truth rather than Truth Himself, and the Christian Church is perceived as just another entity vying for influence and control. Lastly, moral assertions are viewed as relative to a given society or culture, but they cannot be true for all people across all history. In essence, truth has been whittled down to the subjectively formed opinions of human beings, often by those who abuse their authority. Yet truth as understood through the Christian faith stands in stark contrast. The scene in the gospel of John with Jesus standing before Pontius Pilate speaks to this very matter.

Therefore Pilate said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, “I find no guilt in Him” (Jn 18:37-38, NASB).

Ironically, only those who know Truth are fit to hear the truth. In other words, only those who know Jesus and recognize him as the Messiah and King under the direction of the Holy Spirit can understand that His word is truth. As Jesus stated earlier in John 14:6, He is “the way, and the truth, and the life,” and He came to be an agent and witness to God’s redemptive faithfulness. Truth is not determined by Roman authorities, Jewish factions, or any other person or group.

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In *Doctors, Lawyers, Ministers: Christian Ethics in Professional Practice*, Dennis Campbell notes that a Christian understanding of a professional in society has been put in jeopardy by a similar set of realities: secularization, pluralism, and relativism.  

Joe E. Trull and R. Robert Creech define such a professional as a person with 1) a well-developed set of skills and knowledge, 2) autonomy in their work, yet which adheres to a communally agreed upon set of principles, 3) a distinctive and important service to society, and 4) an ability to make difficult decisions which might have significant consequences.  

Pastors, ministers, academics, and many others would qualify as professionals in this sense. While John Piper rejects the notion of the pastor as a professional, Trull and Creech specifically emphasize that genuine professionals have a communal (versus individual) focus and mindset which upholds service toward others (versus personal gain). In so doing, pastors as professionals embody the universal calling from God to worship Him by loving others. Without such an attentiveness to community and worship, pastors’ vocations give way to careerism and ascending the social ladder. The results are no different for professionals in other work contexts. Professors who view their research merely as a means for earning tenure neglect the contribution of their knowledge to the education of their students.

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7 John Piper argues that “professionalism is not supernatural” and that “ministry is professional in those areas where the life of faith and the life of unbelief overlap” (John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* [Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013], x). Trull and Creech do not necessarily see these terms (i.e., pastor and professional) as mutually exclusive. They do argue that the modern secularization of vocation into career and contract has resulted in professionalism being seen in terms of self-interest and upward mobility rather than altruism and care for community (*Ethics for Christian Ministry: Moral Formation for 21st-Century Leaders* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017], 15). However, when rightly understood in its original meaning, a Christian approach to professionalism upholds the ideal of serving rather than being served, just as the gospel does.

students. Lawyers whose attentions are focused on maneuvering the legal system to attain a partnership with a prestigious firm do so at the cost of advocating for or defending those in need. Thus, as understood by Trull and Creech, the call of a true professional carries with it a moral obligation to share one’s knowledge and skills in service to others.⁹ Anything less is a shirking of humankind’s responsibility to reflect God’s image into the world.

Another rationale lies in the prevalence of a reductionistic approach to life which views aspects like higher education and work primarily as means for self-fulfillment and individual gain. In this view, if education and work have any intrinsic value, it pales in comparison to the external rewards. As a result, the goal of life is reduced from worship and human flourishing within the kingdom of God to pleasure-seeking and attention to self-interest above all else. This philosophy erodes the fabric of communal life and creates a conglomeration of isolated individuals who destroy the very thing that they most need. A well-known line from John Donne’s *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* speaks to the tragedy of such a worldview:

> No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee.¹⁰

Every endeavor in life, including education and work, ought to be approached with the recognition that it is performed within a community, and it should be oriented towards the common good.

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A personal rationale certainly exists for this project. In my work as an academic advisor, I am often witness to both the internal and external conflicts which students face regarding their direction in life. They struggle to find a deeper meaning to their education, work, and relationships among other things. They find it difficult to see how each of these domains relate to one another other than in a utilitarian manner. Christian colleges and universities often do a good job of practically preparing students for their next stage of life through development of both hard and soft skills, imparting of requisite knowledge, and fostering of professional connections. However, for all these goods, there is a lack of theological engagement with the purpose of these endeavors so that students can articulate the why behind the what and how of their lives. I believe that a Christian understanding of vocation/calling is needed within higher education to provide students with a coherent understanding of their lives and how their lives fit into the life of God and His kingdom.

The most influential hermeneutical method for this project is the biblical notion of the new creation. Particularly, Miroslav Volf’s eschatological (and pneumatological) theology of work provides a helpful lens through which to see not only work but also all life’s vocations/callings. Volf’s theology of work draws from the prior scholarship and ideas of Jürgen Moltmann who posits that an intrinsic element of the Christian faith is its eschatological character. In other words, the faith of a Christian is naturally directed towards and has as its goal the new creation, the shalom-filled new heaven and new earth. Rightly understood within the context of Christianity in general and new creation in particular, God initiates callings in the lives of human beings by the work of his Holy Spirit. As recipients of these callings, humans

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choose whether to participate in them and fulfill their royal-priestly roles. Like Christian faith, these divinely inspired callings are oriented towards a telos or end, namely renewed life in the eschatological community of God.

A biblical understanding of eschatology is vital for this project because it connects the present (and past) with the future. Christian eschatology affirms the ontological goodness of creation as understood protologically by expressing its continuity with the new creation via transformatio mundi, or the transformation of the world. In contrast to annihilatio mundi, or annihilation of the world, transformatio mundi maintains that the good things created and performed in the present time will persist into the redeemed new creation because they coincide with the righteous nature of God’s kingdom. The callings which God initiates with His people create opportunities for “human proleptic cooperation in God’s eschatological transformatio mundi,” or the “ministry of reconciliation” as referenced in 2 Corinthians 5:18. Therefore, an understanding of calling based on new creation claims to be a standardizing interpretation of calling. It is only legitimate in so far as it enables transformation of work, education, relationships, and other aspects of life “toward ever greater correspondence with the coming new creation.”

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12 The calling of God’s people to fulfill their roles as His kings and priests in the world is found throughout the Christian Scriptures. For example, the creation account found in Genesis 1 communicates that humankind, made in the image of God, is to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it,” thus launching God’s plan for all people. In Exodus 19:6, God instructs Moses to tell the Israelites that they “shall be for [Him] a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.” Finally, chapters 1 and 5 in the book of Revelation convey that God’s ultimate desire for His people will be accomplished in that He will make them to be a kingdom and priests to Him.

13 Volf, Work in the Spirit, 94.

14 Ibid., 99. This ministry of reconciliation is linked to Paul’s earlier exposition in 2 Corinthians 3. There Paul says that believers in Jesus are “ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit” (v. 6) and they participate in the “ministry of the Spirit” (v. 8) and “ministry of justification” (v. 9). This ministry of the Christians stands in contrast to the “ministry of death” (v. 7) and “ministry of condemnation” (v. 9) which resulted from the Law.

15 Ibid., 83.
This eschatological framework is embedded within the larger story of the Christian Scriptures. The Christian metanarrative provides greater context for a theology of vocation/calling by explaining the major movements of God’s creation. In *Creation Regained*, Albert Wolters presents a helpful schema which illustrates this narrative arc: creation-fall-redemption.\(^\text{16}\) Cornelius Plantinga too offers a similar narrative structure in *Engaging God’s World* which results in a vision of vocation in the kingdom of God and raises the following question for each follower of Christ: how can my own kingdom of “responsible dominion” fit within God’s kingdom and alongside the kingdoms of others given the ultimate consummation of all things in Christ?\(^\text{17}\) Further, a full-bodied understanding of the grand narrative of Scripture provides opportunity for discernment of both the structure and direction of the elements of life. In turn, through their vocations/callings followers of Christ can recognize the sinful misdirections of creation and work towards their redemption in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christology plays a vital role in the interpretive approach to a normative conception of vocations/callings and the role of sanctification within them. In *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, Joseph Kotva, Jr. argues that “Jesus of Nazareth embodies the true human telos or end.”\(^\text{18}\) Based on Colossians 1:15-20, this statement is true. The life of the Christian is to be shaped by the life of Jesus which necessarily includes his suffering, death, and resurrection. Consequently, the vocations/callings of a Christian also must be interpreted by and submitted to the pattern of


Jesus’ life. In this way vocations/callings help to form the life of the Christian believer since they function as pathways for sanctification and renewal into God’s image.

As mentioned in 2 Peter 1:4, followers of Christ can learn to become “partakers of the divine nature” through their vocations/callings. By submitting to the callings of Jesus, Christians bear witness to the outworking of God’s divine power which bestows “everything pertaining to life and godliness.” (2 Peter 1:3). Vocations/callings are focused primarily on who we are becoming and how we are being shaped into God’s image bearers through what we do. His power comes with the promise that He is making all things new and that we are participants in that renewal now even if it is not fully manifested yet. Therefore, this restorative process of becoming sharers of the divine nature provides perspective for our lives in the present and for eternity.

The framework of vocation/calling has been utilized by the Christian Church since its inception. In his various letters, the apostle Paul speaks to both the general and specific callings of not only himself but also those who are in Christ Jesus. Many early church fathers including Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius, and Augustine address the divine calling of the human person to a Christian life. Within the medieval age, the majority of prominent church leaders understood vocations in terms of callings to the religious life as a monk, nun, or priest. In the next few centuries ensuing the Protestant Reformation, a significant shift occurred when Martin Luther redefined the understanding of vocation. As a result, vocation/calling applied to nearly every station in life for the Christian believer. Finally, the last two centuries or so has seen the Christian Church emerge into a predominantly post-Christian world. As a result, Christians have broadened their conceptions of vocation/calling. Rather than fitting one particular mold, vocation can encompass callings to the Christian life in general, religious life in the church, a diversity of
work, and more. Yet one thing stays the same: the common thread of vocation/calling remains integral to the faith and mission of the Christian Church.

Research Questions

Academic advisors and career professionals provide advice to college students who are considering which subjects to study and what careers to pursue after their formal education is completed; in other words, what to do with their lives. These practitioners may even provide quite helpful guidance at times, but the counsel given is based largely on secular and individualistic models (e.g., positive psychology, rational choice theory) which focus primarily on the self. Further, these models tend to emphasize what the student becomes while often neglecting who the student becomes. If attention is given to the student’s identity, it is typically viewed in relation to their own sense of self, their work, or their contributions to society rather than an objective and normative understanding found in God. Often Christians utilize these methodologies indiscriminately because there is a lack of engagement with interconnecting subjects such as academic advising, education, and work from a Christian theological perspective.

The overarching aim of this project is to provide an alternative framework for academic advisors and other practitioners within higher education which is grounded in a Christian conception of vocation/calling. In turn, it is this project’s contention that a theologically rooted understanding of vocation/calling will equip students to see their lives in relation to God’s life and how He is calling them to be agents within and for His kingdom, as well as contribute to their formation as His image bearers. This project will be guided by a primary and several secondary research questions. First, does the use of a Christian understanding of vocation/calling affect how college students think about and embody life, particularly regarding education, work,
and relationships? Second, does the employment of this vocation/calling framework contribute to Christian formation? And does its utilization affect one’s vertical relationship with God and/or one’s horizontal relationships with others and creation?

Significance of the Project

This project aims to locate education, work, and self-formation within the framework of the Christian faith. In general, the field of academic advising is a very secular setting regarding philosophy and practice, something which is no different than many other aspects of higher education. Often theory and methodology are acquired from secular psychology and/or social behavioral models. Consequently, the study of academic advising from an explicitly Christian theological perspective is nearly if not entirely non-existent. This project has the potential to offer Christians a theological rationale for the use of vocation/calling as a reframing method in academic advising and show its merits in relation to secular approaches. While there are elements of truth within secular models, they do not provide a full perspective which aids in Christian character formation and holistic human flourishing. This project will offer an initial assessment of the effectiveness of vocation/calling within the context of higher education. From there connections can be made to the practice of academic advising and its significance therein. While the results of this project will be collected from an introductory college course on vocation/calling, future longitudinal studies can be performed within the context of academic advising which analyze the formation of college students through the implementation of a vocation/calling framework. Further, this framework can contribute to the mission of God’s church as students consider their vocations/callings in life in view of God’s grand story of redemption.
CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Much ink has been spilled in writing articles and books on the theory and practice of academic advising within the context of higher education. Likewise, there has been much written on and discussed about the biblical theology of vocation and the callings that human beings experience throughout their lifetime. Yet no exposition has been offered that integrates these two applied areas of study and argues the significance of the latter for informing our reflection on and deliberation about the former.

At its core, the practice of academic advising concerns itself with the learning and growth of students so that they can achieve their perceived goals in life. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) is an organization headquartered at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas which seeks to foster excellence in academic advising across the worldwide landscape of higher education. In 2005 a NACADA task force was commissioned to develop a “Concept of Academic Advising” statement which explained the nature and scope of academic advising within higher education and so further guide the development of its theory and practice moving forward. The statement was approved by the Board of Directors in late 2006 and the following summary highlights its key emphases.

Academic advising, based in the teaching and learning mission of higher education, is a series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes. Academic advising synthesizes and contextualizes students’ educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes.19

At first glance there seems to be nothing improper with this statement. As stated, academic advising is framed within an established program, instructional methodology, and series of learning outcomes for students. Further, academic advising aims to help students make sense of their educational experiences in light of their goals, giftings, and broader lives. The problem with NACADA’s Concept of Academic Advising statement lies not so much with what it includes but more so with what it omits. As referenced in the first chapter, the objectionable elements of a postmodern ethos are ever present within the world of higher education. Even here within NACADA’s statement, some of the disagreeable elements are manifested. Academic advisors are instructed to help students synthesize and contextualize their “educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities, and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes.”

This statement presents one major problem for a Christian interpretation of vocation and calling. This statement appears to place the normative epistemic and ethical weight on what the individual determines is good and true at the expense of being connected to a larger moral order. In so doing it inhibits humans from recognizing that a larger meta-narrative accounts for and gives meaning and purpose to their individual aspirations, abilities, and the lives of others. Consequently, NACADA’s statement (mis)leads academic advisors to frame students’ experiences solely within their own personal aspirations, abilities, and lives rather than God’s divine purposes. This engagement lacks an understanding of who we are and our vocations in the light of Christian theological presuppositions which should govern how we live and work as God’s people in all spheres of life. This postmodern turn neglects how the redemptive-historical narrative of the Bible (i.e., creation, fall, and redemption) reframes the way we reflect on and

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20 Ibid.
deliberate about vocation and calling. Furthermore, a deeper study of this narrative structure will reveal that a biblical and theological understanding of vocation/calling is a remedy for this postmodern philosophy within academic advising.

This postmodern contextualization of a person’s learning experiences within their own ambitions, skills, and lives bequeaths each person as the ultimate source of authority. Commonly, this line of thinking is extrapolated out and extended to other aspects of peoples’ lives, including their spirituality and religiosity, thus further inhibiting a Christian hermeneutic of vocation and calling. In a 2005 book entitled *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, sociological scholars Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton published what would be the first wave of results from the groundbreaking National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR). This initial book on the NSYR captures many key factors which influence the religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers (i.e., 13-17 years old). Perhaps the preeminent finding from the study is the discovery of a “dominant de facto religion among contemporary U.S. teenagers” which Smith and Denton label as “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” (MTD). According to the authors, MTD contains five core tenets which are adhered to by its followers.

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

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22 Ibid., 162-163.
It is worth commenting on each component to show their collective challenges to a Christian understanding of vocation/calling.

Underwritten in the premise of MTD is the moralistic posture which communicates that one of the vital elements of leading a nice, content life is being a nice, moral person.\(^\text{23}\) Whereas a traditional religious faith like Christianity or Judaism might connect personal and communal morality with the pursuit of righteousness in view of a holy God, those who subscribe to MTD tend to view upright, moral living as the means to a personally satisfying life. In other words, the reason for someone being respectful, responsible, and kind to others lies in their own self-satisfaction and success. The Christian faith grounds morality instead in the *imago Dei*, or the understanding of human beings made in the image of God. The *imago Dei* is exemplified in the person of Jesus Christ who lived a sinless life and yet gave up His own life on the cross to defeat Sin and Death. Therefore, being made in God’s image, all humans are called to embody the same self-sacrificial love as Christ, not for their own sake, but for the sake of God, others, and creation. Kenda Creasy Dean comments that MTD “does not ask people to lay down their lives for anyone, because niceness does not go that far…[but] love goes that far.”\(^\text{24}\) This love expressed through selfless living may not lead to success or personal satisfaction as MTD understands it, but it does result in fulfillment of vocations and flourishing in the kingdom of God.

Being successful and feeling good relates directly and is intertwined with the second element of MTD, namely the therapeutic benefits and advantages to its exponents.\(^\text{25}\) Similar to

\(^{23}\) Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 163.


\(^{25}\) Ibid.
the moralistic aspect, the therapeutic component does not mesh with the philosophy and practices of the Christian faith. MTD does not concern itself with sacrifice, suffering, or service to God and others for their sake; rather the dominant motivating factor is feeling good about oneself as a result of what one has done for another person. In this way, MTD yields a façade of altruism, but at its core it is largely self-seeking. Vocations/callings from God require faithful allegiance on the part of the one who is called to the One who calls. By nature, fulfillment of divine vocations/callings cannot be self-seeking because they come as summons from the outside. God defines the terms, not humans. Humans might benefit in some way, but that is not the main purpose. MTD challenges this notion and crowns the individual self as the recipient of praise and honor, not Jesus the King.

Lastly, MTD avows faith in a God who both designed and produced creation and instituted a common moral law, but who now stands largely aloof from the events and concerns of the world. While at first glance this belief appears to mirror the Deism of the 1700’s, it contains a distinctive “therapeutic qualifier” which separates it in one key respect.²⁶ The God of MTD can be called upon in times of need to resolve one’s issues.

This God [of MTD] is not demanding. He actually can’t be, because his job is to solve our problems and make people feel good. In short, God is something like a Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist: he is always on call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally helps his people to feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process.²⁷

This therapeutic revision of Deism runs contrary to a theological understanding of vocation/calling by portraying God as one who exists to placate the demands of humans. In a warped way, God is the one who is called upon by humans, and human satisfaction or happiness

²⁶ Ibid., 165.

²⁷ Ibid.
is the telos rather than God’s glory. The result is a teleological failure where God is used as “the currency needed to purchase personal idols.”

Or as Larry Crabb conveys, they “see Christ as a savior from pain, not from sin; as a responsive benefactor rather than a Holy Lord.”

Outside of involvement in helping with needs and desires, MTD proposes a faith in which God and humans are largely isolated from one another. To the contrary, a Christian understanding of vocation/calling is thoroughly theocentric and social in nature. God is the Creator and Lawgiver, yet also the one who personally relates with human beings and immanently interacts with creation. In contrast to classical Deism, the Christian God calls humans into relationship with Himself and one another through vocations. The callings which humans receive from God are not for mere human satisfaction and well-being. More deeply, God’s callings foster opportunities for humans to participate in the kingdom of God and orchestrate lives of worship to Him.

In *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*, authors Christian Smith and Patricia Snell provide a report on the second wave of findings from the NSYR. As a result of their continued research, they conclude that MTD is still thriving amongst emerging adults (i.e., 18-23 years old). This codification captures most of the student populations found on college campuses across the United States and encapsulates the targeted audience of this project. As briefly demonstrated thus far, the adverse aspects of postmodernism, especially as propounded through MTD, present a myriad of challenges to the Christian faith in general, and more specifically to a theological consideration of vocation and calling. The following sections will seek to offer both a biblical and theological foundation for vocation and

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calling and rebuttal to the harmful manifestations of postmodernism found within higher education and academic advising.

Creation

The Book of Genesis is a foundational book within the biblical canon in many ways. It provides a foundational account of the creation of the world. A world without sin, the way it was designed to be. A world that we present-day human beings have never known. As will be shown in due course, it also provides a foundational depiction of sin’s entrance into the world. A world that we present-day human beings have only ever known. A world permeated with sin and its ill effects. Perhaps most important, it provides a foundational understanding of the fundamental vocation of all humanity: image-bearing.

At the onset of this (or any) discussion of creation, it is important to delineate the origin, or better yet the Originator of creation. Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew point out that the first four words of the book of Genesis (i.e., “In the beginning, God…”) says far more than is often realized. This simple phrase establishes the understanding that there was a time where God alone existed prior to creation.31 As the reader comes to understand in the ensuing verses, creation came about as a result of the word and work of the God who chose to create. God did not create because it was compulsory, but rather because He chose to do so. It not only speaks to who God is in His nature, but as will be shown, it also shows who humans are and what they are called to do in relationship to creation. Additionally, this opening of the biblical narrative is foundational because it immediately establishes a theocentric worldview and the understanding

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that “everything else exists only because he called it into existence.”\textsuperscript{32} Therefore, all creation is both reliant upon God for its being and designed for His glory.

Tremper Longman points out that the first six days of God’s creative work are meticulously designed by Him. As shown in table 1, the first three days involve the creation of various habitations and realms whereas the next three days entail the formation of inhabitants (i.e., both humans and non-humans) for those spaces and elements.\textsuperscript{33}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day One</th>
<th>Day Two</th>
<th>Day Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Light, Darkness</td>
<td>Sky, Water</td>
<td>Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Four</td>
<td>Day Five</td>
<td>Day Six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun, Moon, Stars</td>
<td>Birds, Fish</td>
<td>Animals, Humans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. First Six Days of Creation

This design structure speaks to the orderly nature of God as Creator, the one who spoke creation into existence \textit{ex nihilo} (i.e., out of nothing). In this singular creative act, God demonstrated that He is sovereign over all creation. While His very presence and glory fills the world, God is distinct from that which He created and, as Acts 17:28 indicates, He exists as the One through whom creation lives and moves and has its being.\textsuperscript{34}

Within the sixth day itself, the artistic work continues with the creation of the remaining non-human creatures. God fashions “the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind” (Gen. 1:25), and He

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{33} Tremper Longman, III, \textit{How to Read Genesis} (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 105.

\textsuperscript{34} Goheen and Bartholomew, \textit{Living at the Crossroads}, 35.
determines that this creation is a *good* thing. We gather from Genesis 1 and 2 that God concludes the sixth day by creating human creatures, male and female, additions which prompt God to establish creation as *very good*. This “very good” distinction is perhaps suggestive of the importance of humanity within creation, yet as Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew offer, it suggests that “each part of creation is good, but the harmony of the whole is very good, more than the sum of its parts.”35 This notion of the goodness of what God created is not only significant for one’s understanding of the doctrine of creation, but it is also vital because it relates to the doctrine of eschatology and why God chose to pursue the redemption of His creation. The goodness of creation was not considered good by God because it was beautiful and majestic, although that was certainly the case. At a deeper level, creation’s goodness is ontological because of who its Creator is. In other words, the entire created order possesses an innate goodness as a result of its original relationship to God, who is wholly good Himself. As will be addressed in the ensuing section, the presence of sin in the world has brought corruption in all corners of creation; but nevertheless, at least some element of its goodness and potential is preserved.36 A sign of this intrinsic goodness is the normed nature of creation such that “there is nothing in human life that does not belong to the created order.”37 Every element of creation is imbued with a normative structure or designed form of existence. This is the sovereign law of God which ultimately orients all things back to Him.

God forms the man from the dust of the earth and fashions the woman from one of the man’s ribs. It is interesting to note that God not only forms completely new things, but He also

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35 Goheen and Bartholomew, 40.

36 Plantinga, Jr., *Engaging God’s World*, 35.

creates from the elements which He has already created. As will be demonstrated, this latter quality is conveyed to human beings and integral to their God-given vocation. Genesis 1 and 2 contains several passages which reveal important details of humanity’s creation and fundamental vocation.

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:26-28).

Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it (Gen. 2:15).

Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field…” (Gen. 2:19-20).

The birds and sea creatures are instructed to be fruitful and multiply and fill their respective habitats in Genesis 1:22. Genesis 1:28 echoes these commands as the humans are given similar directives. Yet the continuation of 1:28 unveils a major distinction between the vocations of humans and their non-human co-inhabitants. Unlike non-human animals, the humans not only are advised to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth,” but also they are told to “subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Their instructions from God include responsibilities not only to procreate

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38 See Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 21. Wolters mentions what theologians have called *creatio prima* and *creatio secunda*. *Creatio prima* is “the first and primordial creation of heaven and earth out of nothing,” whereas *creatio secunda* has “the character of elaborating and completing the unformed state of earthly reality.” Additionally, it is worth mentioning that God’s nature as Creator is unique from humanity in distinct ways. Although God was not created from anything (i.e., because He is the Uncreated One), He has the power both to create things out of nothing as well as from things already formed. In contrast, humankind was created from something else already created (i.e., dirt), so humans only have the ability to create things from other elements of the created order.
but also to practice wise leadership over creation. For non-human creatures to optimally fulfill their own vocation of fruitful reproduction, humans must fulfill their two-fold vocation as prosperous procreators and stewarding rulers of what has been given to them. These directives from God are truly world-changing because they were designed that way. As Wolters argues, humankind was created to be God’s representatives in the world and continue the creative and developmental work which God began.39 As one reads through the entirety of the biblical narrative and arrives at the end of the book of Revelation, it becomes abundantly clear that all along God’s plan for humankind in creation was not for them to maintain things as they originally were in the Garden of Eden. Instead, humans have been called “to be God’s helper[s] in executing to the end the blueprint for his masterpiece.”40 Each man and woman’s commission to be God’s helper in creation is bolstered by an unshakeable confidence that God’s creation is anchored in His own eternal commitment to it.41 Goheen and Bartholomew describe it as the historical movement and development of creation toward its goal, namely a life of shalom in the new heaven and new earth.42 More specifically, this life of human flourishing is to take place in a city: the new Jerusalem. Therefore, humans are tasked with wielding their cultural power within creation such that it grows from a garden into a city and manifests a variety of rich cultural expressions which honor God.43

39 Wolters, Creation Regained, 41.
40 Ibid., 44.
41 Plantinga, Jr., Engaging God’s World, 43.
42 Goheen and Bartholomew, 41.
As alluded to previously regarding MTD, classical Deism expresses the notion that God created the world and imbued it with a natural law and rational order such that He no longer needs to interact with it. God can step back and watch things work as they were designed from the beginning. This view stands in stark contrast to theism, and specifically Christianity, which contends that God is immanent and still operates within His creation. In fact, the biblical canon bears witness repeatedly to the workings of God within His created order (e.g., deliverance of the people of Israel from Pharaoh through the Red Sea, gifting of manna to the people of Israel from heaven, Jesus’ performance of miracles) although He is distinct from it (contra pantheism).

Indeed, a significant aspect of God’s vision for creation was to make a dwelling place for Himself so that He might reside with a people made for Himself.44 Genesis 2:15 underscores humankind’s responsibility as image bearers of this same God to work within creation, steward it, and help it realize its fullest potential. Albert Wolters too notes the immediate and mediate ways in which God enacts His law or sovereignty throughout creation.45 In some instances (i.e., the initial act of Creation itself), God acts directly. In other ways, God is involved with creation through the work of humans as they mediate His law and grace into the world. Thus humanity (male and female alike) shares a unique relationship to God which no other creature does.

This understanding of the divine-human relationship varies greatly from the other ancient creation accounts such as the Enuma Elish and Atrahasis which de-emphasize humankind’s value and purpose.46 In these stories, humans are viewed as mere minions for the gods. While it is evident that there is a natural order to creation, humankind has been gifted with the task of

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45 Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 16.

cultivating and keeping God’s Garden, which by extension includes the entire earth. God has chosen to work through His human creations so that all creation might experience and testify to the fullness of His goodness and glory. Furthermore, humankind possesses both a distinct relationship with God and a unique vocational role within His creation.

To the point made above, Genesis 2:19-20 indicates that God initiated creation but that He did not complete it. A Deist might argue that this is not the case because God established a logical order of creation which will see to its perpetual maintenance. However, God designed human beings to be participants in His creative work and to reflect His innovative, abounding, life-giving nature into the world. More specifically, God orchestrated His creation in precisely this way so that His divine kingdom might be established over all the world through His people forged in His image. It was not uncommon for ancient Middle Eastern rulers to place images or statues of themselves in various places throughout their domains. This gesture conveyed to the people who was king and thereby held authority in the land.47 But perhaps contrary to popular opinion, the kingdom that God has in mind is not characterized by golden statues, brick and mortar castles, royal throne seats, or vast territories of land. More precisely, God’s kingdom is embodied throughout His creation as each part faithfully embodies its vocation in kind, starting with humanity. Hence the bearing of God’s image into the world does not involve lifeless statues but rather living, breathing humans who serve as vice-regents of the “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (Rev. 19:16). All of this is bound by “God’s creational intention” for shalom – holistic and all-encompassing flourishing – to fill the earth.48


In view of Genesis 1:26-28, it is important to define further what image-bearing is and its implications for the roles of human beings in God’s creation. Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew propose four key components of the image of God which help give shape and direction to human living. First, the image of God denotes the “creaturely dependence” which humans have on God. This reliance on God relates not only to material matters such as food, water, clothing, and shelter. It also concerns one’s existence and larger purposes in creation (i.e., vocations). A second aspect of the image of God forged in every human being is living in communion with God. Prior to the corruption of creation, we read of God walking in the Garden of Eden in direct proximity to Adam and Eve. In the Book of Acts, followers of Jesus are gifted the Holy Spirit so that God’s presence dwells inside His people. Just as God resides with His people, so too are His people called to connect with Him. Third, as a result of this connection to God, humans embody God’s image by displaying His character. We are not God, but are reflections of Him. The practical out-workings of God’s image are displayed in a variety of ways, not least through doing justice, loving kindness, and walking with God in humility (Mic. 6:8). Last, the image of God involves serving as God’s representative to all creation. Being a steward of God’s image in the world means that humans are responsible for ruling over creation in a manner faithful to God’s character. Further, bearing God’s image entails not just showing

49 Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, 42.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 43.
God’s character to all creation, but also allowing creation to experience it and be transformed by it.\textsuperscript{53}

The \textit{imago Dei} is directly connected to an understanding of the fundamental human vocation. This vocation of bearing and mirroring the image of God is characterized by a missional movement, and in this outward movement, God’s just and loving reign is imparted through humans to the rest of creation.\textsuperscript{54} The more recent thinking and writing of N.T. Wright, one of the world’s preeminent New Testament scholars, focuses on this very notion, or what he labels the \textit{covenant of vocation}. The chief goal of this vocation is reflecting: 1) reflecting God’s creative love and care into the world such that it grows and flourishes, and 2) rendering the praises of creation to God the Creator for His own intrinsic beauty.\textsuperscript{55} Put in other biblical terms, this vocation entails being the royal priesthood, or the kingdom of priests. Although these terms are used explicitly in other books of Scripture such as Exodus (19:5-6) and Revelation (1:6, 5:10, and 20:6), the creation accounts in Genesis 1-2 imply and apply the royal priestly role to human beings.\textsuperscript{56} N.T. Wright expresses the royal and priestly vocation in this way.

\begin{quote}
[It is] to stand at the interface between God and his creation, bringing God’s wise and generous order to the world and giving articulate voice to creation’s glad and grateful praise to its maker.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[53] N.T. Wright, \textit{After Your Believe: Why Christian Character Matters} (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2010), 76.
\item[54] Middleton, \textit{A New Heaven and a New Earth}, 39.
\item[55] N.T. Wright, \textit{The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus’s Crucifixion} (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2016), 76.
\item[56] As originally designed, human beings were meant to function as both kings and priests in the world. However, throughout the Old Testament those roles were bifurcated and assigned to various individuals or groups within the collective people of Israel. It is not until the advent of Jesus in the New Testament that these roles are melded together again as they were intended. Jesus then serves as the exemplar for His renewed people, the Church.
\item[57] Wright, \textit{After You Believe}, 80-81.
\end{footnotes}
In other words, from the beginning God’s design (and desire) for human beings was that they would reflect His imaginative character, even demonstrate “something of the creator’s own lordship over the cosmos” in such a way that creation would resonate glory and majesty back to Him.\textsuperscript{58} As royal kings, humans are to rule over all creation in a manner of stewardship which both conveys its intrinsic goodness and uncovers its latent possibilities. Equally as priests, humans are to celebrate God’s presence and glory in the entire world, similar to how the Israelite priests did in a microcosmic way in the Temple.\textsuperscript{59} Middleton also comments that the biblical depiction of this royal and priestly vocation was unique within the ancient world, and it arguably still is today precisely because it “radically universalizes or democratizes the image of God” and applies it to all human beings, both male and female.\textsuperscript{60} The image of God does not take interest in class or ranking or whether someone is formally regarded as a priest or king. Rather, it instills intrinsic value in all people and regards them as worthy participants in God’s royal priesthood.

Implicit within this paradigm is the notion of creation as a type of temple, “a heaven-and-earth duality,” the point where heaven and earth meet one another.\textsuperscript{61} Again, this pushes back against Deism by emphasizing the intertwining nature of these two realities. The key element to notice here is God’s presence with His people. To carry out the fundamental vocation of bearing God’s image and functioning as the royal priesthood, human beings need God’s presence with them. In the Garden of Eden, God walked with Adam and Eve in the coolness of the day (Gen. 2:8). In the desert, God guided His people to safety from Pharaoh via a cloud by day and a fire by night (Exod. 13:21-22). Within the tabernacle, God’s presence moved with His people (Exod.

\textsuperscript{58} Middleton, \textit{A New Heaven and a New Earth}, 43.

\textsuperscript{59} Wright, \textit{After You Believe}, 83.

\textsuperscript{60} Middleton, \textit{A New Heaven and a New Earth}, 45.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
In the New Testament, God’s presence is given to His people in a different way. Upon his death, resurrection, and ascension, the Holy Spirit of Jesus descends upon the apostles (Acts 2:4). Consequently, all believers and followers of Jesus receive His Spirit to reside in them. Lastly, the apostle John envisions the new creation where God’s presence will dwell with his people as in the Garden: “I saw no temple in [the new Jerusalem], for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it” (Rev. 21:22-24). In conclusion, humans are called to “celebrate, worship, procreate, and take responsibility within the rich, vivid developing life of creation.” To do so, they need God’s presence. And they need God’s presence because they were meant for it.

Like our understanding of a meta-narrative as a story which guides and interprets all other narratives, we might label this calling from God as the meta-vocation of humanity. Human beings are unable to faithfully carry out their other callings if they are not illuminated by the primary human vocation initiated by God. This foundational vocation provides a framework for comprehending the purpose of all other callings in life.

_Fall_

The first two chapters of Genesis provide a rather extensive account of creation despite the relatively small number of verses devoted to it. As laid out in the previous section, the biblical understanding of creation is multi-faceted. The creation story is foundational because it denotes the source of all creation (i.e., God Himself), the nature of creation (i.e., its intrinsic goodness due to God as its source), the law of creation (i.e., God’s normative design for

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62 Ibid., 76-77.
creational flourishing), contents of creation (i.e., earth, humanity, animals, etc.), and intent for creation (i.e., God’s reign on the earth via humans bearing His image). Directly following these chapters, Genesis 3 offers an honest account of the fall of humankind and the results of its pervasive and all-encompassing distortion of creation. While maintaining its ontological goodness, now creation is stained with the ill-effects of sin and directed towards corruption rather than flourishing. Paul attests to this bleak reality in his letter to the Romans.

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now (Rom. 8:19-22).

This devastation from the fall is not limited to human beings, but it affects the entirety of creation. V. 22 references all creation moaning and experiencing the pain of giving birth, while at the same time yearning for restoration. Although primarily (yet not entirely) a metaphor, this itself is a side-effect of the fall. Genesis 3:16 mentions this very reality as God pronounces the judgments of sin to the man (Adam), the woman (Eve), and the serpent in the Garden.

One way in which the fall is articulated throughout the Scriptures is by the use of the term, world. As Albert Wolters notes, the world is multi-faceted and contains both positive and negative connotations. Many times, it positively refers to the larger created order prior to sin’s entrance. For example, Ephesians 1:4 states that God chose for Himself all believers in Jesus “before the foundation of the world.” Likewise, in various places the world refers purely to the physical realm in which humans live. In Mark 16:15, Jesus instructs His followers to go “into all the world” and proclaim the gospel message. However, on numerous other occasions, especially throughout the New Testament, the world comes laden with a negative meaning and “represent[s] something that pollutes and that Christians must avoid,” thus highlighting its
contrast to the original goodness of the world in the positive sense. Jesus and several of His apostles, including Paul, James, and Peter, utilize it in this way. Paradigmatic of this negative expression, Jesus proclaims in John 18:36 that “[His] kingdom is not of this world.” Based on the Greek text (i.e., ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου), the more accurate expression is that Jesus’ kingdom is not out of or does not stem from this corrupt world but rather from heaven. Additionally, Herman Ridderbos states that in Paul’s usage, such as Colossians 2:8, the world can be understood as “the totality of unredeemed life dominated by sin outside of Christ.” Thus, this negative usage accurately portrays that the effects of the fall are cosmic in scope and touch all things which God determined to be good at creation.

We see some of the immediate ramifications throughout Genesis 3. Upon eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as explicitly forbidden by God, the eyes of Adam and Eve are opened to their nakedness and in shame they seek to cover themselves. In a conversation with God, Adam blames Eve who in turn blames the serpent. Neither party can own up to their transgression of God’s command. Next, God hands down punishments for Adam, Eve, and the serpent. God curses the serpent and condemns it to a life of slithering on the ground rather than walking like the cattle and beasts of the field. By this judgment the serpent is brought below other land-dwelling animals in size and standing. God then turns to Eve and instructs that she will experience pain in childbearing and while her desire will be for relationship with her husband, there will be strife and discord between them. Lastly, God tells Adam that the soil has

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63 Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 63-64.

64 For Jesus, see Jn 18:36. For Paul, see Rom. 12:2, Col. 2:8. For James, see Jam. 1:27. For Peter, see 2 Pet. 2:20.


become cursed due to his disobedience, and consequently his work will be onerous for all his
days and the days of all his ancestors. Not only that but also Adam will die and return to the
ground from which he was formed due to being separated from the tree of life. Characteristic of
the fall, all humanity will be subjected to this same futility.

As a consequence of sin’s introduction into the cosmos, the created order does not
function as it was designed by God. Where originally there was complete harmony in the
divine/human, human/human, and human/non-human relationships, now hostility and friction
exist which erode those relationships. Yet it is important to clarify the relationship of the fall to
creation. While sin has run rampant and infected every part of God’s good creation, it is not
intrinsic to creation. Building upon the prior thought of prominent figures within the Christian
tradition such as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas among others, Wolters points out that
the initiation of sin into the world generated “an entirely new dimension to the created order.”

For many years prior to his conversion to Christianity, Augustine adhered to
Manichaeism and its belief in a cosmic dualism where good (i.e., the spiritual world of light) and
evil (i.e., the dark material world) are in conflict against one another, a belief also expressed in
other pagan philosophies and religions such as (Neo-)Platonism and Gnosticism. However, after
his conversion and as he deliberated further on the nature of evil, Augustine drew the conclusion
that “evil…has no substance at all; for if it were a substance, it would be good” precisely because
God is good in Himself and made all things very good. Informed by this idea of God’s
goodness expressed through His role as creator, Augustine argues moreover that corruption in a

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67 Wolters, Creation Regained, 57.
given thing is evidence for the existence of intrinsic goodness in all created things. If any given thing was not good, then it would not be possible for it to be corrupted. Therefore, we can conclude that in fact evil needs goodness to even occur at all.69 Augustine continues this argument in *City of God* where he explicitly states: “There is no such entity in nature as ‘evil’; ‘evil’ is merely a name for the privation of good.”70 Only the absence or loss of good directed towards its proper end in God can result in evil. Thomas Aquinas likewise questioned the origin of evil in his massive *Summa Theologiae*. Therein he employed the example of sight and blindness to contend the nature of evil as parasitic or privative. A human or animal eye was designed for the good of sight to that living being. When the sight is taken away because of some affliction, the result is evil or “the absence of the good, which is natural and due to a thing.”71 Sociologist Christian Smith carries a similar line of thinking in *To Flourish or Destruct*, yet he utilizes slightly different terms (i.e., badness and evil, instead of sin and evil). In his explanation for the ontology of badness and evil, he follows Augustine and Thomas Aquinas and describes them as *privatio boni*, a privation of good.72 Under no other circumstances do they exist. His own description helps to further illustrate the arguments made by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

This [*privatio boni*] approach says that badness and evil do not possess their own positive, distinct, independent ontological being in rivalry to good. Ontologically, evil has only a “shadow” existence that is parasitical on the good. Ultimately, only good is


independently real, and all of reality is innately good in being. … Even so, just as light really does exist on its own, but darkness and shadow do not, except as the absence of light, so good really does exist, but evil and the bad independently do not—what is evil and bad come to exist only in the absence, hindrance, or misdirection of good.73

Evil would not exist if the good was fully grasped. Such used to be the case in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve experienced unfettered relationships with God, one another, and the rest of creation. Sin’s entrance into the world shattered this reality, and it will continue to keep it in a distorted, unfulfilled state until creation’s redemption is fully realized. Yet even though our functioning as human beings is undermined, at no point do we ever cease to be fully human.74

This understanding of the relationship between the fall and creation underscores the prevailing inherent goodness of creation which cannot be removed regardless how bad sin sullies the world. To further explain this idea, Wolters utilizes two terms: structure and direction.75 Structure refers to the created order and its basic ontological goodness as established by God. Direction indicates the two trajectories (i.e., fall and redemption) in which the structure can be aimed. As the direction of a given structure is distorted and perverted, it resembles the fall. Conversely, as the direction of a given structure is honored and maintained, it resonates with the liberation and renewal of creation in Jesus. The consistent danger within human thought has been to conflate structure and direction such that at times it seems as if something is ontologically fallen and without any connection to the goodness of creation. As Wolters warns, this is a tendency towards Gnosticism, one of the heresies prevalent within the early church.76

73 Ibid.
75 Wolters, Creation Regained, 59.
76 Ibid., 49.
One example wherein the early church battled this dualistic heresy, or at least something with a similar influence, is found within Paul’s first epistle to Timothy. Paul entreats Timothy to be wary of both the “deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” and “hypocrisy of liars” (1 Tim. 4:1-2) which disallow marriage and advocate for refraining from specific kinds of foods. These distorted teachings tempted Christians toward a “false asceticism…derive[d] from a gnostic or gnosticizing view characterized by a strong anthropological and ethical dualism,” which expressed a disdain for the passions of the flesh. Consequently, twisted doctrine like this can lead one to be “ungrateful to God, who formed all things” because his or her conscience has been cauterized by false teachings. Or as Raymond Collins puts it, this metaphorical searing “destroy[s] living tissue” and results in a “loss of sensitivity to the Spirit and the truth.” Yet as v. 4 states, “everything created by God is good,” and nothing should be refused if it is received with a spirit of thanksgiving and a clear conscience. Ultimately, all things are connected to an ontologically good structure via God’s creation which can be directed towards or away from God’s plans (i.e., towards human flourishing or destruction).

As it relates to the overarching topic of vocation, the effects of humanity’s fall into sin are first expressed through the failure of Adam and Eve to embody their fundamental calling from God. Instead of living in faithful obedience to His commands found in Genesis 2:17, they question God’s authority, eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and seek to become like Him. In so doing they steer their devoted loyalty away from God and direct it towards their

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79 Collins, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, 114.
own self-fulfillment. This is a failure of their meta-vocation of bearing God’s image into the world. Instead of trusting in God’s kingship, they seek to rule their own lives as they see fit. The Greek word for “sin” is ἁμαρτία, or hamartia, which means “‘missing the mark’: shooting at a target and failing to hit it.”80 N.T. Wright points out that this breakdown of faithfulness to the covenant of vocation (i.e., in Adam/Eve, the people of Israel, and the rest of humanity) is the true context for our understanding of sin. It stems not from a failure to follow the rules and be good, moral people, but rather from a lack of fidelity to be the royal priesthood of God. In other words, it is “a failure of worship.”81

Another prime example of this failure of worship is found in the story of the people of Israel. The Old Testament conveys the recurring narrative cycle of Israel: issuance of a covenant from God, failure to live up to the covenant by the people, judgment (often by exile) to restore the people to covenant-keeping, and God’s deliverance of His people. Continually the people of Israel neglect their vocation from God to be a distinct people for Himself. In Genesis 12, Abraham is given a covenant which resonates with the meta-vocation of Genesis 1-2. God instructs Abraham to leave his country, his people, and his house and go to a land which He will show him. As a result of Abraham’s faithfulness to obey this command, God will bless him and others through him.

And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:2-3).

Notice the transition of blessing within this passage. While God will honor the obedience of Abraham by making his name great, His intent is not for the blessing to stop there. Consistent

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80 Wright, The Day the Revolution Began, 99.
81 Ibid., 100.
with the meta-vocation of Genesis 1-2, God’s desire is for His image bearers to reflect His goodness into the world and so be a blessing to it. The scope of God’s intended blessing is consistent with its nature: it is full and meant for all. Here we see the biblical notion of election intertwined with the formation of a people for God. The focus of God and the biblical narrative is narrowed to Abraham and the people of Israel, yet the blessing they receive is to be stewarded for and with the rest of the world. In this way, God’s election of the people of Israel is understood in missiological rather than soteriological terms. Despite their imperfections, the people of God are intended to be a “missionary people,” conduits of God’s blessing.82

In the book of Exodus, we see a different side to the covenant story which illustrates the effects of the fall on the meta-vocation from God. Exodus 1:7 states that “the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them.” This verse echoes language from Genesis 1:22, 28 which represents Israel’s overall faithfulness to the meta-vocation. But a new ruler (Pharaoh) arises over Egypt who does not know Joseph, the sons of Israel, or their connection as God’s people. Pharaoh enslaves the people of Israel and subjects them to difficult labor. Through the obedience of people such as Moses and Aaron, the LORD God delivers His people from their captivity and renews His covenant with them. In Exodus 19, Moses and the people of Israel camp in the wilderness of Sinai, and Moses ascends the mountain there to speak with the LORD. The LORD provides instructions which Moses is to convey to the sons of Israel.

You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel. (Exod. 19:4-6)

82 Bartholomew and Goheen, The Drama of Scripture, 54.
These words from God make explicit what was implied first in Genesis 1-2. God’s desire is for His people to be a royal priesthood which rules the earth in righteousness and gathers up the praises of the nations to Him. They are to be a kingdom on earth which manifests the heavenly authority of God. Anything else falls short of this divine design for humanity and creation. Yet Moses descends Mount Sinai to discover that the people of Israel (under the supervision of Aaron!) have created a golden calf and are worshipping it. Despite God’s covenant with them and His deliverance of them, the sons of Israel manufacture and worship an idol. Consequently, they compromise their vocation to be a kingdom of priests and holy amongst the nations. Like Adam and Eve, they transgress God’s commands and forsake His plans to make them His possession for the sake of the world.

As can be seen throughout the remainder of the Old Testament, the people of Israel are slow to learn and obey God’s commands. Through Israel’s repeated disobedience, we see that evil and sin do not just reside outside the people of God. Their obstinance and rebellion lead to exile and deportation to lands not their own, first to Egypt and then to Assyria and Babylon. In fact, this facet serves as prime evidence of the nature of the fall. The effects of the fall do not discriminate; they pervade everything and everyone. While sin is certainly a moral lapse, it is not just that. It also is a failure of vocation; a failure to worship the Uncreated One in favor of created things, a failure to bear God’s image in favor of faux imitations, and a failure to be a people who function as a light to the nations in favor of darkness.

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84 Ibid., 103.
Redemption

As it was vitally important to address the nature and scope of both creation and the fall, so it is for the concept of redemption as well. First, what is the quality or character of redemption? Here it is helpful to return to Albert Wolters’s paradigm of structure and direction. Structure is understood as the intrinsic goodness or right ordering of creation as set forth by God in the beginning. Direction describes the two paths toward which the creation structure can be aimed: toward sin and the fall, or toward God’s purposes and redemption. Therefore, redemption can be rightly understood as the renewal or restoration of creation to its ontological goodness. However, one must be careful to distinguish that this renewal is not repristination or “the cultural return to the garden of Eden,” but rather “a restoration of culture and society in their present stage of development.”85 In other words, redemption is consistent with creation’s historical development of moving from a garden (i.e., the Garden of Eden) to a city (i.e., the new Jerusalem).86

This definition of redemption makes two interrelated points. First, it highlights what has already been stated about the features of creation and the fall. Creation is filled with intrinsic goodness from God its Creator. Nothing that was made in the beginning was crafted with a blemish or disorder. Everything was beautiful in the eyes of God and functioned as He saw fit. Yet the fall results from the entrance of sin into this created order. Sin and its ill effects ravage creation, never destroying its inherent goodness but certainly disordering and diluting its felt presence in the world. It is like a masterpiece painting whose surface has been tarnished. In its former state, the painting displayed vibrant colors and rich dimensions and evoked immense beauty.

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85 Wolters, 77.

86 Goheen and Bartholomew, 41.
appreciation for the handiwork and skill of its creator. But it has been left uncared for in an attic for many years. It has endured the waste of bugs and animals. It has been exposed to the extreme temperatures of changing seasons. It has developed layers of dust and soot. However, the master artist with an eye for renewal comes in and refurbishes the painting so as to allow it to redisplay its former glory; not a blank canvas but a stunning work of art. Now it can project the artist’s craftsmanship into the world again so that all who behold it may stand in awe at its beauty and wonder.

Second, this eschatological restoration is not the abandoning of what existed before in favor of something new. To continue use of the analogy above, renewal does not entail throwing away the old canvas and starting afresh in an attempt to repaint the same picture. It comprises returning the original work to its former glory so that it can display the magnificent work of its artist as was intended from beginning. In the Greek, the language of the New Testament, there are two different words for “new” which clarify this point. Neos (νέος) refers to something new in time or a new reality. Kainos (καινός) on the other hand connotes something new in quality or nature. This second newness, always used in the eschatological sense, does not necessarily disconnect a given thing from its origins, but it presents it in a fresh way. In other words, both continuity and discontinuity will be characteristics of this new creation wrought by salvation through Jesus Christ: “the universe will be renewed, but this transformation will be so complete as to introduce a radically new order of existence.”

87 Ibid., 70.
89 Ibid., 388.
As J. Richard Middleton points out, there are five consequential texts within the New Testament (i.e., Acts 3:17-21; Eph. 1:7-10; Col. 1:16-20; Rom. 8:19-23; and 2 Pet. 3:10-13) which express salvation in terms of this “restoration, reconciliation, renewal, and redemption.”

Most explicitly, the language of “new heavens and new earth” found in 2 Peter 3:13, which resonates with that of Revelation 21:1, utilizes kainos to convey the restorative and eschatological effect of Christ’s salvation on creation. In so doing, this passage in 2 Peter along with the other related texts combats two prevailing misconceptions about the eschatological telos of creation. First, these texts deny the legitimacy of an immaterial heaven as the final dwelling place of God’s redeemed people in Christ because God’s desire from the beginning was to dwell amongst His people in a “cosmic temple.” Heaven is only one piece of the eschatological puzzle. Second, these passages disavow any sort of annihilation or destruction of creation in favor of a completely new one. By his death and resurrection, Jesus has defeated the powers of sin and death and launched the renewal of all God’s creation. The goodness of creation will be restored, not destroyed. This is the second piece of the eschatological puzzle, which unites both heaven and earth in new creation as seen through the passages in 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 21.

And notice who performs the restoration. While it is chiefly accomplished by the artist Himself who crafted the masterpiece from the beginning, it is also realized by those whom Jesus has empowered to be His witnesses and image bearers. Throughout the Scriptures, God’s comprehensive restoration of creation and the establishment of His kingdom on earth as in heaven is disclosed gradually: first through the people of Israel, then through Jesus the Messiah,


92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.
via the Holy Spirit-empowered church, and finally through Christ’s return and the consummation of His kingdom.  

Also, what is the scope of redemption? Many of the texts just mentioned (i.e., Acts 3:17-21; Eph. 1:7-10; Col. 1:16-20) explicitly describe the comprehensive and holistic renewal of all things in Jesus. Just as all originally created things were determined by God to be good, and just as the fall has tainted all things in various ways, so too the redemption of God restores and reconciles all things to Himself. The scope of redemption fits the scope of creation and the fall, nothing more and nothing less. While humans certainly possess a unique and central role in God’s renewal of His creation, it is a gross demonstration of our pride to think that this redemption is ours alone. Plantinga, Jr. observes in Genesis 9 that God’s covenant promise to not flood the earth again and destroy all flesh extends not only to Noah and his descendants (i.e., the rest of humanity), but also to every living creature. Thus, it foreshadows the holistic and inclusive nature of God’s redemption of creation.

In contrast to an all-inclusive redemption, many prominent philosophies of the ancient world advocated for nonbiblical conceptions of cosmology. For example, Gnosticism exhibited a strict dualism which posited opposing material and divine realms. The material realm is relegated as evil or defective whereas the divine realm is the source of light and insight. Also, the Enlightenment form of Epicureanism vouched for a vast distance between heaven and earth (i.e., between the divine and the physical). Unfortunately, vestiges of these philosophies persist in

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95 Ibid.


97 Ibid., 26-27.
modern thought. As a result, Christians have been tempted to opt for “a detached spirituality (a heavenly-mindedness with a questionable earthly-use) and an escapist eschatology (leaving the world and going to heaven).”98 The byproduct then is not only a reduced eschatology but also a diminished doctrine of creation. If the created material world is fraught with evil, there is no sense in redeeming it. Instead, one can just leave it behind and start afresh. Yet as shown, that is not how the Scriptures speak of protology and eschatology. If what God created was and is good at an ontological level, then He will restore it so that it functions as He originally intended.

God’s plan for the redemption of His creation manifests itself throughout both the Old and New Testaments. It functions as a common thread which is woven into the biblical narrative. As has been stated already but is worth mentioning again, the purpose of God’s redemption is intimately tied to His purpose for creation. From the beginning, God’s desire was for His kingdom rule to be established on earth as in heaven via human beings so that His presence might dwell with them. As bearers of His image into the world, human beings were given the responsibility of filling the earth with other image bearers (i.e., procreation), contributing to the flourishing of all creation (i.e., royal stewardship of God’s grace and love), and orchestrating creation’s worship back to its Creator (i.e., priestly mediation of God’s praise). These elements comprise the meta-vocation of humanity. Therefore, redemption concentrates on the renewal of these basic components and all they entail.

While the fall makes evident that Adam and Eve forsook their responsibility of being God’s representatives to the world, God did not scrap His plan. He established His covenant with Abraham to make a people who would be a blessing to the nations, and He remembered it despite the unfaithfulness of the very people He chose to create for Himself. Time and time again

98 Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began*, 35.
the people of Israel failed to live up to their calling as God’s chosen possession. They asked for kings to rule over them like all the other nations, but in so doing they rejected God as their King (1 Sam. 8:4-22). Despite the pending consequences declared beforehand by the LORD through the prophet Samuel, the people of Israel expressed their desire for an earthly king. Their shortsightedness mirrored that of Adam and Eve in the Garden as they chose to seek their own will rather than God’s. They endured the reigns of flawed kings such as the likes of Saul, Ahab, and Jeroboam I. Eventually, they were split into the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah, respectively, rather than residing as a unified people under God’s rule. In the 8th century BCE the people of the northern kingdom of Israel were taken into captivity by the Assyrian empire. Later in the 6th century BCE, the Babylonians came to power, captured the southern kingdom of Judah, and took the people into exile. God sent prophets (e.g., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea) to guide His people to repentance, but their prophecies fell on deaf ears. After many excruciating years, the Persian king Cyrus defeated the Babylonians, released the people of God from exile, and allowed them to return to their land, something which not all of them did. All this turmoil and uprooting could have been prevented if the people had been faithful and holy amongst the nations. Still, God was faithful and delivered them despite their rebellion against this vocation. Thus, a pattern emerges which serves as a microcosm of the entire Old Testament: “God intending to live among His people, being unable to because of their rebellion, but coming back in grace to do so at last.”99 As explained briefly above, the Old Testament illustrates Israel’s call to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6) and their repeated failure to do so. Judges, kings, and prophets were appointed, but they were unable

99 Wright, How God Became King, 88.
to steer the people of God back to faithfulness to the meta-vocation. They failed in helping to establish God’s kingdom on the earth. They needed a Savior, a Messiah.

In his book, *How God Became King*, N.T. Wright argues that a puzzling relationship has developed between the “gospel” and “the gospels,” much like the relationship between the Christian creeds and the gospels.100 While the Christian church has focused on the gospel message and the creeds, it has largely overlooked the gospels themselves and how they ought to influence our understanding of these subjects and the Christian faith as a whole. We have read ideas of atonement and justification by faith (and other doctrines) into the gospels based on our readings of Paul’s letters rather than allowing the gospels to interpret our understanding of Paul. Wright believes this eisegetical interpretation is a significant mistake because it clouds the actual message of the gospels and thereby all Scripture: “how God became king of the world” in Jesus the Messiah.101 It is this very idea of God becoming king and establishing His kingdom in the world which runs throughout the whole canon of Scripture. From the meta-vocation of humanity established at creation, to God’s covenant with the people of Israel to make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, to redeeming them from exile, God has been about the work of inaugurating His reign on the earth as in heaven.

After the hopes and dreams of the judges, kings, prophets, and people of God are seemingly dismantled through the horrors of exile and period of silence from God, Jesus enters the scene. From the outset, Jesus disrupts the political and religious landscapes of His time. Herod is disturbed by this news of a King of the Jews. Jesus constantly ruffles the feathers of the

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100 Ibid., 10. Earlier on p. 6, Wright distinguishes the “gospel” from “the gospels.” He states that typically the “gospel” is defined as “a precise statement of what Jesus achieved in his saving death (‘atonement’) and a precise statement of how that achievement could be appropriated by the individual (‘justification by faith’).” On the other hand, “the gospels” are the first four books of the New Testament (i.e., Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) which give an account of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

101 Ibid., 19.
Pharisees and other Jewish nobility as He interprets and practices God’s law through the eyes of a new covenant and coming kingdom. He threatens the authority of Pilate even though He Himself is the one being questioned about His claim to kingship. Jesus seeks to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. His responses and actions seemingly always correspond with the words of the prophets. In particular, several of the servant passages found throughout the book of Isaiah shed light on not only the nature of Jesus’ kingdom-bringing ministry but also His taking up of the vocation of Israel, which they failed to accomplish.

Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations…He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not be disheartened or crushed until He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law. Thus says God the LORD…‘I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison (Isa. 42:1; 3-7).

He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make you a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’ Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and its Holy One, to the despised One, to the One abhorred by the nation, to the Servant of rulers, ‘Kings will see and arise, princes will also bow down, because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen you’ (Isa. 49:6-7).

‘Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the LORD will rise upon you and His glory will appear on you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising…No longer will you have the sun for light by day, nor for brightness will the moon give you light; but you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, and your God for your glory. Your sun will no longer set, nor will your moon wane; for you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, and the days of your mourning will be over’ (Isa. 60:1-3; 19-20).

The first two passages can lead the reader to question whether the “servant” in question is the nation of Israel or Israel’s representative. But as Wright argues, ultimately it is most

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102 Ibid., 181.
important to see that it should be both for the reason mentioned above. These passages highlight God’s call again and again to the people of Israel to act as bringers of justice and redemption so that the nations might be drawn to the kingdom of God. Their vocation is a creative and restorative role which secures their own prosperity while seeking the welfare of the nations, and principally, the praise of the LORD. Yet here a servant is referenced who will faithfully fulfill this vocation on behalf of Israel for both Israel and the world. “Nations will come to [His] light, and kings to the brightness of [His] rising” (Isa. 60:3) as Jesus leads the life that Israel was called to lead, a life filled with the attractive love and justice of God’s kingdom. Therefore, Israel’s vocation, which interrelates with broader humanity’s vocation, becomes Jesus’ vocation. Through Jesus’ fulfillment of this calling, His story becomes the apex of the story of Israel and the world.103 Thus, the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth is found within the life, indeed the very body of Jesus. Jesus is the true Temple, both fully divine and fully human, the place where heaven and earth meet perfectly.

Consistent with the tone of the servant passages in Isaiah, Jesus’ vocation is marked by suffering and sacrifice. His method of ruling, which was and is to be His people’s as well, is subversive to the governing practices of the nations of the world. Jesus’ death by crucifixion was another example of the very things for which Rome was best-known in the ancient world: death and silencing those who opposed Caesar.104 Where the Roman Empire maintained power through violence, fear, and intimidation, Jesus’s kingdom reigned through love, humility, and grace. More directly, Jesus’ vocation is fulfilled and He renders healing to the world ultimately through His suffering, but also in an ancillary way via the suffering of His people in His name. In

103 Ibid., 183.

104 Wright, The Day the Revolution Began, 3.
that way, Jesus’ vocation becomes the vocation of His people as they become agents of His
kingdom. This relationship parallels the meta-vocation in Genesis 1 where God fashions man and
woman in His image so that they might bear His image into the world. This remains a consistent
theme from the beginning of the Old Testament through the gospels and eventually to
Revelation.

Soteriology, or the understanding of the nature of Jesus’ salvation for the world, is vitally
important because it carries ethical and vocational implications with it. If, as Wright argues,
salvation is reduced to deliverance from sins so that we can go to heaven, it displaces the heart of
the gospels and thereby the gospel. It diminishes the scope of salvation such that it is intended
for individuals to receive eternal life rather than participation in cosmic new creation and the
launching of God’s kingdom on earth. In this way, life for Christians can go on as usual since
they will be saved for heaven, not the wedding of a renewed heaven and earth. However,
soteriology rightly understood is linked to eschatology. Recognized in a more cosmic measure,
of “God’s deliverance…[and] restoration to wholeness” of all creation, salvation influences the
daily lives of all believers who profess the name of Jesus. Human beings are both the
recipients and the agents of the resurrection life found in Christ. In Christ, believers are not
mere sideline spectators, but rather they are active participants in the new creation.

Because Jesus has reclaimed the vocation of Israel, now those within His body of
believers (i.e., the Christian church) can retrieve the meta-vocation which was appointed to
human beings at creation. While addressing specific conflicts between himself and other

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105 Wright, How God Became King, 42.

106 Middleton, A New Heaven and a New Earth, 79.

107 Wright, After Your Believe, 112.
believers there, Paul’s second letter to the church at Corinth also speaks to this meta-vocation which has been renewed through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:17-21).

In explaining the effects of the salvific work accomplished by Jesus, one gets the sense that Paul is stressing a connection between the redemption of the individual believer and the reconciliation of the world. Paul’s own life speaks to this very reality. Although he was once an overt enemy of the gospel of Christ, his salvation was truly life-altering such that the rest of his life was marked by the ministry and word of reconciliation referenced in vv. 18-19. As a believer is “in Christ,” he or she is reconciled to God and thereby committed (and commended) to be a minister of reconciliation and bear God’s image into the world. Again, within Paul’s immediate context, he is addressing reconciliation of relationships between believers in Corinth, including himself. But by extension, followers of Christ have received a call to be ministers of reconciliation in all relationships (i.e., God/human, human/human, and human/non-human creation).

The natures of both the ministry of reconciliation and participation in the meta-vocation coincide with the characteristics of the new creation as we know it now. While the full effects of these elements are promised to come to future fruition, “now we see in a mirror dimly” (1 Cor. 13:12). In this reality, Christians experience what is called “realized eschatology, the vanguard of a new world.”108 While the present world with all its evil, sin, and death persists in the

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meantime, the kingdom of God filled with His love, grace, and justice breaks in and manifests itself throughout creation. The in-breaking reality of God’s kingdom was inaugurated by Jesus through this death and resurrection, and it continues to pervade the world through His Spirit and the faithful witness and lives of those who follow Him. In this sense, the disciples of Jesus Christ participate in the new creation now, even if not yet fully, by serving as His agents of peace in the world. In this ministry sharing, Christians reflect the image of the incarnate God into the world and therein live more in unity with the second Adam than the first.

Admittedly, it is a bit strange that God would entrust the finished yet continued work of reconciliation to a people who are redeemed yet still sinful. However, this illuminates the tension of the realized eschatology to which Paul speaks here. Christ has redeemed the world and declared new creation, yet it is not fully present. Death and sin have been defeated but they have not been destroyed. On the other hand, it also accentuates the profound nature of Christ’s redeeming work. While we are still yet sinners, we are already a renewed creation in Him which can be leveraged in the work of establishing His kingdom on earth as in heaven. Further, like vocation, the ministry of reconciliation entails more than mere proclamation of what has been accomplished through Christ. It also possesses an ethical imperative to be reconcilers in accordance with the salvific work of Jesus. One is baptized into the ministry of reconciliation and assumes the meta-vocation when they submit their life to the kingship of Jesus.

One final, noteworthy facet for an understanding of humanity’s meta-vocation comes toward the end of the passage. Paul writes that Christian believers are “ambassadors for Christ,

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109 Ibid., 186.

as though God were making an appeal through us” (2 Cor. 5:20). In the ancient world, ambassadors served as proxies of the sovereign in their territory. More precisely, ambassadors were commanded to relay the specific messages and ideas of their king or ruler, never digressing into their own thoughts and actions. To do otherwise would be treasonous and an inaccurate representation of the government which sent them. Bearing this in mind, Paul makes the assertion that Christians are delegates of Jesus to the world. Christian believers are commissioned to relay the gospel truth into the world through their verbal and physical witness in a manner consistent with the kingdom of God. As Paul was Christ’s spokesman acting under His authority, so too are all Christians called to be such ambassadors. Likewise, in their vocation as God’s image bearers, humans are called to represent the Creator to the created order just as He is. As they do so in the power of Jesus through His Holy Spirit, the eschatological dimension is realized further, and new creation is unleashed.

Along with other biblical books such as Daniel, Revelation illustrates the eschatological reign of God and the summing up of all creation in Him. Royal priesthood language is utilized explicitly several times throughout the book of Revelation, particularly in 1:6 and 5:10. These instances echo the words of God in Exodus for the people of Israel: “you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6). Interestingly though, these two passages in Revelation contrast with the initial reference in Exodus in a significant way. Whereas the message from God in Exodus 19 is given in a future tense (i.e., something which will be realized through God’s people), the passages in Revelation 1 and 5 indicate that God has accomplished

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what He promised.\textsuperscript{113} Through the faithfulness of Jesus in brokering a new covenant via His
death and resurrection, God has shown Himself faithful as a covenant-keeping God. While the
kingdom and priesthood mentioned in Exodus were intended for the people of Israel, now the
participants in the royal-priestly role have been expanded.\textsuperscript{114} Not only are Jews able to share in
the inheritance of God’s people through Christ the Messiah, but Gentiles also are called into the
fellowship of believers. As the apostle Peter indicates, both Jewish and Gentile believers are “a
chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession” (1 Pet. 2:9).
By virtue of Christ’s death on the cross and His resurrection, believers are delivered from their
slavery to sin and death unto formation as God’s people. This formation also involves service
within and for the kingdom of God, thus upholding a holistic soteriology which asserts that
“salvation is not just what God saves us from but also what God saves us for.”\textsuperscript{115} All believers,
both Jewish and Gentile, share in the royal-priestly role with Jesus which entails reflecting the
 glory of God’s presence into the world.\textsuperscript{116} Consequently, the royal-priestly vocation which
dovetails with the meta-vocation in Genesis is intended for all humans who put their faith in
Jesus. It is a role which has been redeemed in Christ Jesus and will be realized to its fullest
extent in “the restored Eden” where God’s people “will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22:5) with
Him.\textsuperscript{117}

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\textsuperscript{116} Beale, \textit{The Book of Revelation}, 192-193.
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Vocation in Higher Education and Academic Advising

As has been shown, our understanding of vocation within Scripture is not pinned down to any one particular passage or book. Rather it is expressed throughout the narrative arc of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. Vocation has its roots in protology and God’s plan for human beings from the very beginning. Humans were meant to reflect the image of God into the world through their worship of Him and wise rule over all things. They were designed to be stewards of creation and nurture it such that it grows and flourishes. But while vocation has its origins in creation, it also is tethered to eschatology, which provides the renewed vision for human interactions with God, others, and the world. Protology without eschatology leads to an unclear understanding of God’s ultimate plans in creation, whereas eschatology without protology results in a disconnect between what God did in the beginning and what He will accomplish in due course. Both instances lack directional awareness and thereby prevent humans from knowing and participating in their vocations from God.

One crucial space in which the understanding and use of vocation has been lacking is within higher education. If it is used at all, typically it is done so either in reference to trade school training for a particular job (e.g., welding, healthcare, automotive) or as a buzz word when describing career services and their role in helping students identify what they want to do with their lives. More specifically, vocation is a term and framework which is nearly if not completely absent from academic advising, a discipline directly associated with helping students discover the intersection between who they are and what they (will) do in life. The nonexistence of vocation within academic advising is certainly a deficiency in terminology, but more importantly it is a deficit of meaning and direction. As a result, a disservice is performed to students and ultimately God’s kingdom.
Implicit within the discussion of vocation is an emphasis on mission. As mentioned thus far, the meta-vocation of humanity is to bear God’s image into the world such that His wise rule and stewardship is enacted, and He is able to dwell with His creation in its flourishing. At its most rudimentary level, the meta-vocation is the mission of humankind. This normative vocation guides all other vocations and callings that humans receive from God and others. Consequently, it seems that this meta-vocation or mission should also inform the missions of Christian colleges and universities and the academic advisors who work within them.

As an example, Baylor University, a Protestant Christian research institution, has the following mission statement: “The mission of Baylor University is to educate men and women for worldwide leadership and service by integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community.”118 While this statement encompasses the main calling of Baylor as an educating enterprise, it does not fully contextualize it within the kingdom of God, an aspect which serves to orient its mission, philosophy, and praxis. Education, leadership, and service are important and healthy elements of the human life, but what might be missing? To what end are they directed, and what is the point of education, leadership, and service?

In *Restoring the Soul of the University*, Perry Glanzer, Nathan Alleman, and Todd Ream argue that the university (in general) has lost its soul, its “shared identity, story, and purpose,” as a result of fragmentation throughout campus life.119 Competing ideals and narratives across departments, students, and curricula have led to division within the university rather than cohesion and adherence to a unifying mission. Ultimately, a failure to worship God has resulted


in an identity crisis (i.e., concerning not only who I am, but also whose I am), an incoherent narrative, and a lack of meaning. All these aspects are interrelated to one another such that if one breaks down then disintegration ensues with the others.

In line with Glanzer, Alleman, and Ream’s argument, it seems that a transformation is needed within Christian universities and colleges – and the faculty, staff, and students who constitute them – which reorients their identity, story, and purpose. First, just as Glanzer, Alleman, and Ream contend that theology is “the lifeblood of the university body,” so too should mission be integral to the thought and practice of Christian universities. Like theology, the mission or vocation of the Christian church (i.e., God’s people) is not an add-on feature; it is intrinsic to its nature. Human beings are created with an innate vocation to reflect God’s image into the world, and any person or thing which associates with the Christian faith, including colleges and universities, must surrender itself to this calling. Christian universities should be concerned with forming holistic God-image bearers in addition to educating minds, developing leaders, and promoting service. To accomplish this task, Christian universities need to align their missions more closely with the mission of God and His church. While Christian universities are not the complete church, they do function as an educational extension of it. As such, their mission should cohere with the mission of God and His church more than those of secular institutions. Hugh of St. Victor broached this idea of image-bearing when he addressed the purpose of education.

To restore within us the divine likeness, a likeness which to us is a form but to God is his nature. The more we are conformed to the divine nature, the more do we possess

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120 Ibid., 222.
121 Ibid., 276.
Wisdom, for then there begins to shine forth again in us what has forever existed in the divine Idea or Pattern, coming and going in us but standing changeless in God.\textsuperscript{122}

In this light, (higher) education is concerned with more than depositing knowledge into the minds of students; it is concerned with the redemptive development of students as human beings made in the image of God so they can faithfully live out their callings in and for the kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{123} This perspective on education views human identity in a much more holistic sense than just student, professor, or administrator. Humans might embody roles of student, professor, or administrator at various times in their lives, but their identity extends beyond the capacity of these roles just as the kingdom of God does.

Second, just as the meta-vocation is the calling which interprets all other vocations, so too is the meta-narrative of Scripture the narrative which drives and informs all other stories. As noted by Alasdair MacIntyre, stories are integral to human experience because they lend coherence to life through their teleological quality.

“Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’ We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters – roles into which we have been drafted – and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed.\textsuperscript{124}

Stories orient and shape human life by articulating its purpose, and any institutions (e.g., colleges and universities) devoid of a guiding narrative set themselves up for aimless toil. When this


\textsuperscript{123} Perry L. Glanzer and Todd C. Ream, Christianity and Moral Identity in Higher Education (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 183.

\textsuperscript{124} Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.)
meta-narrative fails to exist, students are left with good-paying jobs, career ladders, social status, and the like as the aspiring goals for their lives, all which often lead to a self-focused, performance-based, fragmented identity. To know how to direct the redemptive development of students, institutions of higher education must be guided by a meta-narrative. In the case of Christian colleges and universities, “an explicit articulation of the story of the Scriptures” serves as a formative measure for shaping both Christian worship as well as the philosophy and traditions of the institutions.125 Guided by the biblical narrative as well as the accompanying desire and practices of Christian worship, Christian institutions of higher education acquire their identities as “ecclesial institutions” which seek to foster holistic human formation in accordance with God’s kingdom.126 In so doing, they share an ecclesial identity with Christ’s church rather than the norms and narrative structures of secular society.

Third, Christian colleges and universities share a common purpose with the Christian church as they also express a communal identity and mutual story. As mentioned earlier, the mission of Christ’s church is central to its identity. His church fails to be what it is meant to be if it does not embody its vocation to be a light to the nations. In the same way, if Christian universities and colleges are connected to this calling for Christ’s church, then Christian mission comes to bear on both their identity and purpose. Who Christian institutions of higher education are influences what their vision is and what they do. Their purpose is to guide and educate (not just teach) students toward holistic, redemptive growth so that they can image God into the world. This purpose is accomplished through a communal commitment to Christian worship which is guided by the meta-narrative of the Scriptures and engendered by virtuous character


126 Ibid., 221.
formation and spiritual practices consistent with life in the kingdom of God. The pursuit of truth and Truth Himself must entail commitments to both orthodoxy and orthopraxy. In *Life on the Vine*, Philip Kenneson argues this very point. While many Christians contend that their beliefs set them apart from those outside the Christian faith, Kenneson cites several instances (e.g., divorce, pre-marital sex, family abuse) where the statistics show that Christian and non-Christian behavior is often indistinguishable. As a result, this reality leads to the conclusion that truth is not only intellectual but also moral in nature. Intellectual assent to truth is an integral component of growing in Christlikeness, but only if it is accompanied by faith-filled practices which produce the fruit of the Spirit and bear witness to the truth of God’s desire for the reconciliation of all creation unto Himself. Therefore, like churches, Christian universities and colleges have received a calling to lead students into orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The souls of these institutions are comprised of shared identities, beliefs, and purposes which should be interconnected just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are unified as one. While Christian institutions of higher education may not realize this ideal on this side of the new creation, they can seek earnestly to approximate it so that all involved (students, faculty, and staff) may glimpse and reflect the glory of God.

**Critique of Advising Theories**

A campus role which has been drastically affected by the fragmentation of the university’s soul described by Glanzer, Alleman, and Ream is that of academic advising. As suggested in the first chapter, along with the broader university, academic advising has become a

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128 Ibid., 17.

129 Glanzer, Alleman, and Ream, *Restoring the Soul of the University*, 323-324.
casualty of neoliberalism, hyper-individualism, and the commodification of higher education. Just as the soul of the university shifted away from a coherent, theocentric vision of purpose and identity, the modern discipline of academic advising has become increasingly secular and anthropocentric in numerous ways. It will be helpful here to analyze a couple prominent advising theories to show how they propagate this human-centered ethos. Then a theologically informed framework of vocation and calling will be offered as both a critique and solution to the problems that these advising theories pose.

First, appreciative advising is an advising model developed by Jennifer Bloom, Bryant Hutson, and Ye He, all who work within the University of North Carolina system. Appreciative advising takes its core inspiration from an organizational development theory created by David Cooperrider called *appreciative inquiry*, in addition to positive psychology. Drawing from these theories, appreciative advising utilizes positive questions to help students envision positive images and thereby achieve positive actions. Citing one of the key principles of appreciative inquiry advocated by Cooperrider and others, Jennifer Bloom and Nancy Archer Martin write that humans are responsive to positivity as it relates to their futures.

…we are by nature “heliotropic,” meaning that, “just as plants of many varieties exhibit a tendency to grow in the direction of sunlight (symbolized by the Greek god Helios),” there is a human tendency to “evolve in the direction of positive anticipatory images of the future.”130

According to this article, humans are more receptive to positivity, optimism, and affirmation. Adapted from these principles, Bloom, Hutson, and He created appreciative advising which comprises a “fully student-centered approach” to helping students achieve their dreams and goals.

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and contains six phases: Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, and Don’t Settle. Each of these six phases focuses on positive interactions with students so they can envision a dream and achieve it through a combination of positive thinking and action.

It is true that human beings do gravitate towards positivity over negativity and optimism is beneficial for mental and physical health; yet these truths miss a deeper reality about human life. Optimism can be defined as a propensity to anticipate good or positive things in the future. However, optimism rests upon events that may or may not happen and one’s personal confidence in those events occurring. Optimism can quickly change to pessimism if circumstances allow. In a world filled with sin and evil, this is not an uncommon occurrence. Referenced earlier in this chapter, the third codified tenet of MTD is that “the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.” But as the findings of Souls in Transition indicate, there are complexities and difficulties of life for which MTD fails to give an account or provide an effective response.

Christian hope, on the other hand, resides in the accomplished work of Jesus’ death and resurrection for the salvation and redemption of the world. Put another way, Christian hope possesses an intrinsic and secure eschatological reality. Therefore, Christian hope is immune to the rollercoaster of optimism and pessimism because it does not ebb and flow. By its root in the redemption of the world, it also contains an invariable connection to vocation. Humans made in

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133 Smith and Denton, Soul Searching, 163.

134 Smith and Snell, Souls in Transition, 155.
God’s image are designed to reflect His light and hope, as expressed through Christ, into the world as part of their meta-vocation. Whereas appreciative advising advocates for students to consider their hopes and dreams in light of their own personal interests, a framework informed by vocation relocates the focus from self to God in Christ. A theological understanding of vocation is not naïve to the struggles and weaknesses of human beings, but it takes those faults and vulnerabilities captive in the light of Christ’s eschatological redemption. The Holy Spirit empowers people to reach their highest potential for the glory of God as they faithfully live out their meta-vocation and secondary callings. Thus, their strengths and passions are recognized as gifts from God rather than self-developed traits.

A calling/vocation framework also offers a refinement of Cooperrider’s statement on the heliotropic nature of human beings. Humans do indeed “evolve in the direction of positive anticipatory images of the future,” but those images are not ends in themselves. At their core, they are indicative of something greater: Christian hope and redemption. Humans truly come alive and grow when they embody the redeemed meta-vocation because this vocation is designed for eternity and the kingdom of God. Lastly, the appreciative advising model, and particularly the Discover and Dream phases, can perhaps be misleading for students. These phases focus on identifying students’ strengths, skills, and abilities and then assisting students in articulating their hopes and dreams for the future based on these qualities. While these phases may implicitly address students’ weaknesses and/or barriers, the primary positive focus can potentially guide students into formulating visions of their future which are either not realistic or do not conform with their God-given meta-vocation. Consequently, students may tend to focus more on what they want out of life than what God wants for them. A helpful corrective to this paradigm is the

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vocational sweet spot model articulated by Michael Goheen and Jim Mullins, which they developed from Amy Sherman’s book *Kingdom Calling*. Enveloped within a theological framework of vocation/calling, the four categories (i.e., abilities, affections, aches, and anchors) of the vocational sweet spot model in figure 1 factor in the realities of one’s God-given giftings, instilled passions, perceived needs of the world, and limiting circumstances.136

![Vocational Sweet Spot](image)

Figure 1. Vocational Sweet Spot

It is not unaware of a person’s constraints or weaknesses but rather readily accepts them as discernment tools for one’s callings in life. As Goheen and Mullins acknowledge, the vocational sweet spot model is not a silver bullet which allows a person to identify the ideal job or cause which aligns with all four categories. Rather it is a tool which students and others can use to discern their callings in life and thereby connect to the work of God in their lives and the world.

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The vocational sweet spot offers a more holistic approach to academic advising which accounts for the realities of both a fallen world and the in-breaking kingdom of God. Perhaps it overtly concentrates on what a person is called to do, but it is undergirded by who a person is called to be because it is enclosed within a theological rationale of vocation/calling.

Next, strengths-based advising is a methodology developed primarily by Laurie Schreiner from Azusa Pacific University. Drawing from studies in areas such as business, positive psychology, and social work, strengths-based advising seeks to help students identify their natural talents and develop them further in order to actualize success in various areas of their lives, but foremost in their academic learning. Critiquing the theories of prescriptive and developmental advising for their use of a deficit-based philosophy, the strengths-based advising model focuses on a student’s strengths to foster positivity as it relates to academic advising as well as learning. In turn, studies have shown that emphasizing strengths over weaknesses results in greater intrinsic motivation and excellence sustained over longer periods of time when compared to a deficit-based approach.

This strengths-based approach possesses many similarities with the appreciative advising model including a student-focused process, development of positivity, and emphasis on self-efficacy. There are many advantages to this advising theory. First, a theory which does focus primarily if not entirely on a student’s deficits will inevitably lead to a demoralizing mindset and skepticism towards engaging in the learning process. Strengths-based advising turns the tables and allows students to identify and appreciate the talents which they possess. Second, in identifying a student’s giftings, strengths-based advising equips them to realize what they can

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achieve by using their innate skills and abilities. Third, this theory empowers advisors to work with a diverse group of students, especially those in marginalized populations (e.g., students with low socio-economic status, first-generation college students, underrepresented groups), and aid them in pursuing excellence and reaching their highest potential.

However, with all these merits, there are some potential shortcomings which can ultimately fail to develop students into holistic human beings. Akin to the accentuations of the appreciative advising model, strengths-based advising focuses on human talent and gifting. However, it is not the focus itself which is wrong so much as it is the degree of emphasis. Reflection on natural gifting and abilities is important because, when rightly performed, it allows a person to connect them to their source: God. Therefore, it is equally important to distinguish what is meant by natural. From a Christian theological perspective, that a person’s talent is natural means that it is innate to their being as a result of their creative formation by God in His image. It is natural to a human only to the extent to which it is natural to God. Human beings can make no claim to their strengths or talents as natural to themselves apart from Him.

Second, by its drastic response to a deficit-based philosophy, strengths-based advising moves from one extreme to the other while not holding strengths and weaknesses in balance. If an emphasis on strengths is indicative of greater motivation and sustained excellence, then it should be utilized. However, it should not come at the expense of negating or discounting a person’s weaknesses. This is precisely where strengths-based advising along with appreciative advising are not as holistic as they claim. The notion of vocation accounts for the initial meta-vocation given to humankind, its impairment as a result of human sin, and its restoration through the salvation wrought by Jesus. As stated previously, the aim for humanity was, has been, and always will be for male and female to reign in God’s name and bring worship to Him. To do this,
humans must reflect His holiness and character in their entire being: mind, heart, body, soul, and spirit. And to accomplish that task, humans must submit the entirety of themselves to Christ such that strengths and weaknesses are transformed and perfected for His glory.

Third, with the recognition of both strengths and weaknesses or talents and inabilities comes the realization that human power on its own is insufficient. While students may be able to leverage their own strengths enough to obtain a college degree or secure a lucrative job, it does not suggest that their abilities are self-made and/or self-sustaining. In *Work in the Spirit*, Miroslav Volf argues that the Holy Spirit “calls, endows, and empowers Christians to work in their various vocations.” Any strength which a Christian possesses is a direct working of the Holy Spirit to gift them for work within the kingdom of God. However, these gifts are not only intended for completion of a task but also for partnership with God and full formation of the human person who receives them. If humans are partnering with God then they must become more and more like Him and function in accordance with His ways. To fulfill these vocations, humans must submit themselves to spiritual formation and the development of Christian character. This framework is much more holistic than the appreciative or strengths-based advising models because it seriously considers the formation of the student as a complete human person. It considers a meta-vocation (image-bearing) from a meta-narrative (Scriptures) which extends beyond the context of education into all facets of human life. It relates to both human task and being and widens its scope of concern beyond the human individual to God, others, and creation.

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139 Ibid., 114.
If these examples of modern advising methodology are insufficient, then what does a vocation/calling methodology offer that fills in the gaps of these other models and/or hones their prominent points? The use of a vocation/calling model offers a thoroughly biblical framework which allows for the philosophy and practice of academic advising to be coherent with Christian faith and living. As mentioned in the first chapter, a biblical understanding of new creation is indispensable because it imbues the past, present, and future with an innate logic and unity. It creates what Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton call a “morally significant universe” which possesses “a telos, an end, goal, and standard, by which one knows where one is and to where one is headed.” What has happened and is happening correlate with the future eschatological reality when God’s kingdom comes in its fullness. Jesus’ death and resurrection have brought about this new reality in part in the present, and His Spirit empowers Christian believers to bear witness to it in increasing ways through the various aspects of their lives (e.g., education, work, and relationships). In this way, followers of Christ are co-participants in the bringing of God’s kingdom to earth as in heaven, and they fulfill their meta-vocation in the process. Considering academic advising as a framing practice which helps students to discern their callings from God creates opportunities for them to become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). Therefore, the understanding and practice of academic advising based in vocation/calling stands as a normative approach to academic advising. Thus, the aim of academic advising fits within the broader goal of Christian education to aid students in identifying,
preparing for, and pursuing their God-given vocations in accordance with God’s design for human beings.¹⁴¹

Implicit within this co-participation in God’s redemptive work in the world is the notion that God gifts each human person with a sphere of “responsible dominion.”¹⁴² This idea runs from Genesis 1 all the way through Revelation 22 and squares with the way in which God made humankind in His own image to reign with Him over all the earth. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. notes that Christian living consonant with the kingdom of God not only relies on “taking responsibility for our own realm and preserving it…[but it] also depends on meshing our kingdom with the kingdoms of others.”¹⁴³ In this way, the vocation/calling framework for academic advising functions as an pathway for helping students to realize this paradigm and then assists them with reorienting their thought and behavior to it. This idea runs contrary to most if not all other advising theories in that it actively promotes awareness of God and others alongside oneself. It entails fitting our own narrative and kingdom within the narratives and kingdoms of God and others.

If the thought and practice of advising within a vocation/calling model is concerned with working toward new creation equally as much as it is formed by it, then it is essential for it to care about the holistic growth of students into Christian disciples in ways which reflect the cruciform life of Jesus. Therefore, the goal of academic advising is not just helping students to earn a degree or secure a job, although these are noble tasks in themselves. The aim is to help students accomplish those tasks while learning about life in the kingdom of God and discovering

¹⁴¹ Plantinga, Jr., Engaging God’s World, 115.


¹⁴³ Plantinga, Jr., Engaging God’s World, 106.
how their own life can fit within it (i.e., discerning their callings). To do this, the lives of students must be transformed to greater harmony with the life of Christ and the life of His saints. If Jesus exemplifies the true aim of human beings as Joseph Kotva claims, then the process of sanctification or renewal into greater correspondence with the image of God is essential because “Christ-likeness is the goal or end of the process of sanctification.”144 Therefore, sanctification is not a supplemental element to student development but rather integral to it. A vocation/calling framework within academic advising can help to facilitate this sanctification process alongside the Christian church as advisors challenge and guide students in the ways of Jesus. In one way, this is accomplished by rejecting the status quo of higher education and its emphasis on hyper-individualism and careerism. Inspiring students to see their lives within the redemptive-historical narrative of God will help them to capture a grander vision for their lives and thereby relocate their focus from self to God and others. Additionally, advisors can model Christian discipleship and the importance of sanctification through their appointments with students by emphasizing their development as whole human persons alongside their growth as learners and budding professionals. Again, this approach emphasizes the significance of who a student is becoming just as much as (if not more than) what they do with their lives. This is something which is more transferrable (and transformative) than any skill or professional competency that a student might develop. Academic advising performed within a vocation/calling framework seeks to avoid creating a technocrat, “a person with no commitment and no point of view but with plenty of marketable skills,” and instead cultivate a person enriched in the life of Christ.145

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Conclusion

As indicated throughout this chapter, the nature and scope of academic advising as seen through NACADA and many prominent advising theories are considerably narrow. While advocating for the growth and success of students in their educational experiences, ultimately these approaches inhibit students in their holistic development as human beings more than they contribute to it. First, modern advising models are restrictive as they limit the focus largely to the realm of the individual. Effectively, the dreams, aspirations, and concerns of the student are elevated above all other matters or interests. This self-focus can lead to narcissism, an over-emphasis on one’s happiness, and a general lack of consideration for the well-being of others and broader creation. Additionally, these advising methodologies are reductive in how they address the needs of students as human beings. They fix much of their attention on the mental and emotional well-being of students, albeit from secular philosophical perspectives, while neglecting their spiritual and moral formation. This disregard seems to stem from the false assumption that religious matters are private whereas everything else is fair game.146 Hence, the significance of a vocation/calling framework for academic advising.

A vocation/calling model takes seriously the whole person as a human being made in God’s image. The stamp of God in each human person gives them intrinsic worth which in turn summons us to treat the entirety of their personhood with dignity and concern. When we fail to minister to the whole human person, we fail to embody God’s image and thus His kingdom. The vocation/calling model, directed by the meta-narrative of the Scriptures and informed by the meta-vocation of humanity, considers both protology and eschatology and how they frame human life. These key elements of the Christian faith shape human callings related to education,

work, and relationships so that they conform to Christ and fit within His kingdom. As creation
draws toward new creation, academic advisors, their students, and all humans are called to
participate with God in His renewal.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Introduction

Throughout their tenures at respective institutions of higher education, college students are challenged in the classroom to think critically, read carefully, and write thoughtfully. Also, often they are involved in a variety of ways on and/or off campus, whether with jobs, fraternities/sororities, campus organizations, or intramurals. They even are pushed to work on their personal brand and think about how they present themselves to future employers. All these activities assist them with growing as a human person, perhaps (and hopefully!) in significant and healthy ways. Yet frequently these same practices are siloed from one another and focused primarily on self-development. Consequently, this disjointedness can foster an incoherence amongst students and leave them questioning the purpose of all the activities with which they are engaged. Other than having a good time or learning something new, a sense of meaning can be lost. The purpose of this project was to guide college students through an introductory course undergirded by a vocation/calling framework. Through the implementation of a curriculum based on a theological understanding of vocation/calling, the study explored the impact of said curriculum on their character formation as well as their views on aspects of life such as education, work, and relationships.

Description of Intervention

Over the course of a sixteen-week semester, this project provided a theological construct of vocation/calling to first-year students enrolled in the researcher’s New Student Experience (NSE) course, students who were also discerning their directions in college specifically and life in general. This particular group of students functioned as the test group within this project. A
voluntary control group was utilized as well, which was formed by students taking a different NSE course that focused on major exploration without the use of a vocation/calling framework. The project was initiated with a pre-intervention survey (See Appendix B) in which each student was asked a series of open-ended questions related to their understanding of vocation/calling and its implications for their lives. Additionally, it explored their views on the purpose of higher education, work, and rest, as well as their perceived senses of responsibility to others and creation. This pre-intervention survey functioned as a baseline assessment. This initial assessment then allowed for a similar post-intervention survey (See Appendix C) to be administered which could gauge the impact of the vocation/calling curriculum on the test group in comparison to the control group, which did not participate in it.

Upon completion of the pre-intervention survey, the researcher commenced delivery of the vocation/calling curriculum through a sequence of weekly lectures (See Appendices F, G, H, I, and J). The focal points of the instructional class meetings were as follows: 1) (re)defining an understanding of vocation/calling; 2) building a vocational framework; 3) exploring the various types of callings; 4) seeing vocation/calling as a formational process; and 5) discerning vocations/callings. The chief aims of these sessions were to lay a theological groundwork for vocation/calling, assist students with seeing the implications of vocation/calling for life, and provide them with practical tools to help them discern their own vocations/callings. During the weeks of instructional sessions, students within the test group were asked to pick a piece of media which had contributed to their own sense of vocation/calling in life and present it to the class. This exercise offered the test group an opportunity to reflect on what they had learned thus far and how the media and culture around them had shaped (and possibly continues to shape) the direction of their lives, whether explicitly or implicitly.
After the instructional material was delivered to the test group over the first half of the semester, the test group participated in class discussions over a series of readings assigned by the researcher (See Appendix E). Each reading addressed one or more aspects of vocation/calling which the researcher had taught in the class lectures. The project concluded with a post-intervention survey and long-form interview (See Appendix D) administered to both the entire test group and volunteers from the control group. The final survey was identical to the pre-intervention survey apart from one additional question. The interview questions sought to gain a better understanding of how much the vocation/calling curriculum transformed the participants’ understanding and approach to the aforementioned topics such as education, work, and relationships (i.e., to God, others, and creation).

**Research Questions**

The focus of the project was driven by one principal question and a subset of correlated questions which delivered additional data points.

1. How does the use of a Christian understanding of vocation/calling affect how college students think about and embody life, particularly regarding education, work, and relationships?
   a. How does the employment of this vocation/calling framework contribute to Christian formation?
   b. How does the utilization of this framework affect one’s vertical relationship with God and/or one’s horizontal relationships with other humans and creation?

**Description of Method**

To evaluate the impact of the vocation/calling model on the thought and living of the participants, the researcher adopted a qualitative research model with both mixed and multimethod designs. A combination of research designs was integral to this project so that the data received from the pre-intervention survey could be investigated more extensively via long-
form interview. Thus, one method served to inform the other.\textsuperscript{147} Using the pre-intervention survey data, the researcher developed a set of interview questions which dug deeper into what was addressed in the pre-intervention survey, while also expanding to other relevant points of interest.

The pre- and post-intervention survey designs provided for the collection of data directly from the participants which the researcher knew would be utilized for further exploration in interviews. Given the context of the intervention, the researcher could “expect an adequate response rate” from the participants and was able to craft structured questions which allowed for relatively brief answers.\textsuperscript{148} The use of long-form interviews at the conclusion of the pre- and post-intervention surveys was critical because it made possible the collection of more “subjective knowledge.”\textsuperscript{149} Additionally, while perhaps the surveys provide for casting a broader net on data collection, interviews typically produce more in-depth answers.

\textit{Role of the Researcher}

The researcher took part in the project as both a participant and an observer. The researcher functioned as a participant in a variety of ways, including the following: delivery of lecture content, leading of group discussions, designing and distributing pre- and post-intervention surveys, conducting interviews, collecting and evaluating data, assessing the study’s impact, and conveying the outcomes. The researcher also served as an observer through class interactions, group discussions, and interviews.


\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 29.

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 47.
**Obtaining the Sample**

In conversation with their respective academic advisors at New Student Orientation, all participants in this project voluntarily registered for either section N4 or N7 of STL 1102. While new students are required to register for a New Student Experience (NSE) course during their first semester at Baylor University, STL 1102 is one of many course options available to them. NSE courses, like STL 1102, are designed to help new students “flourish in a community…of academic rigor…of personal growth…of faith formation…[and] of cultural humility.” All participants were first-time college students at Baylor, but there were two students who transferred to Baylor from another institution. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 20 years old.

As part of the class requirements, all student participants in section N7 (test group) were required to complete surveys before and after the vocation/calling curriculum was presented throughout the course of the semester. The student participants in section N4 (control group) were recruited by the researcher to answer the same pre- and post-intervention survey questions as completed by the test group. The researcher emailed the course instructor for section N4 and requested that she share about the survey opportunity with her class. All participants, both from the test and control groups, were sent weblinks to Qualtrics surveys for completion at the onset of the study and at its conclusion. All eleven participants in the test group completed the pre- and post-intervention surveys, whereas nine participants in the control group finished the pre-intervention survey and only three filled out the post-intervention survey.

Additionally, at the beginning of the study, students in both sections N4 and N7 were recruited on a voluntary basis to sit down for a one-on-one interview with the researcher. To

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garner participants, the researcher offered an incentive of a $10 Starbucks gift card to each student who agreed to an interview. Two students participated from the test group and one student participated from the control group.

**Entering the Field**

The domain for this project was a New Student Experience (NSE) course, STL 1102, offered at Baylor University during the Fall 2021 semester. This NSE course was provided as a general elective option for undergraduate students’ degree plans and designed with first year students at Baylor in mind. The researcher has served as an academic advisor at Baylor University for over six years and worked solely with undergraduate students. Prior to this project, the researcher assisted with teaching a similar STL 1102 course. For this project, the researcher assumed sole leadership and teaching responsibilities for the class. Interactions and discussions with students both in the researcher’s work as an academic advisor as well as the previous STL 1102 course led to the development of this project. The project was conceived in an effort to contribute to the holistic formation of college students during their tenure in a university or college setting. This project was approved jointly through the Doctor of Ministry Office at Truett Seminary and the Institutional Research Board at Baylor University.

**Data Collection**

The researcher of this project gathered data through two methods: pre- and post-intervention surveys and long-form interviews. The pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys were developed within online Qualtrics forms and then disseminated to the test group participants via Canvas and the control group participants via email in the form of a weblink. The pre-intervention survey was administered during the first week of class and the post-intervention survey was distributed during the final week of class. The pre-intervention survey
presented a sequence of questions which asked the participants to reflect on their understanding of vocation/calling and its implications for their lives. A sample of some of the questions asked are as follows.

1. How would you define calling/vocation?
2. What do you understand your calling(s) or vocation(s) to be?
3. Why have you decided to attend college/university?
4. Who do you believe you were created to be?
5. What responsibility do you believe humans have to others?

A similar survey was administered at the conclusion of the semester with one additional question (i.e., Overall, what did you learn about vocation/calling from taking this class?). The pre- and post-intervention surveys were kept nearly identical to measure the impact of the intervention on each participant from the beginning of the semester to the end. The survey results were housed primarily within the online Qualtrics database, a system which is password-protected with Duo two-factor authentication. As a result, only the researcher had access to the collected data on this platform. Additionally, copies of each participant’s survey responses were sent via email to the researcher, the co-instructor for STL 1102.N7, and each respective participant. No students in sections N4 and N7 had access to other participants’ responses.

The long-form interviews with each voluntary participant were conducted on the Zoom video conferencing platform after completion of the post-intervention surveys. These interviews gave an opportunity for the participants to further describe the impacts of the vocation/calling curriculum on their thought, behavior, and formation as human beings. Each interview was recorded in video/audio and audio only formats as well as transcribed and saved. All recording files were saved to a Box folder, which is password-protected with Duo two-factor authentication. As with the surveys, the researcher was the only person with access privileges to these files.
Data Analysis

The data collected from the pre- and post-intervention surveys as well as the long-form interviews was analyzed as it was received from the individual participants. The data received from the pre- and post-intervention surveys was indexed within the Qualtrics platform and made available for immediate viewing by the researcher. Utilizing a function entitled “Text iQ,” the Qualtrics program was able to identify correlations of participant responses within each respective survey as well as between the pre- and post-intervention surveys. Further, the researcher used this data analysis to denote any common words or themes that were mentioned across all data samples in the pre- and post-intervention surveys. A similar analysis was performed on the interview transcripts to discover prominent words and themes utilized by the participants.

Data Reporting

The data collected from both the pre- and post-intervention surveys as well as the long-form interviews are presented in Chapter 4 of this project. Any departure from the aforementioned project methods or designs are documented and explained. Chapter 5 presents the primary and secondary conclusions drawn from the data yielded by this project. Additionally, the fifth chapter offers the theological, real-world, and wider implications of this project’s findings as well as potential opportunities for future research in relation to the use of a vocation and calling curriculum with college/university students.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure valid and reliable data collection for this project, the researcher began by mirroring the questions asked in the pre- and post-intervention surveys. The one exception was the final question asked in the post-intervention survey, which sought to learn more broadly what
the participants learned about vocation/calling throughout the STL 1102 course. The similarity in questions between the pre- and post-intervention surveys allowed for continuity such that the researcher could better gauge the impact of the vocation/calling curriculum on the lives of the participants.

To assist in eliminating bias in responses to the surveys and interviews, the researcher followed several deliberate measures. First, for the test group, the surveys were listed as assignments for the STL 1102 course, but they were considered voluntary in the sense that students were not required to take that particular course for their degree plans. Another NSE course option would have sufficed. For the control group, participants chose voluntarily to complete the pre- and post-intervention surveys, and they were not tethered to any assignment within their respective STL 1102 course. Lastly, the interviews for both the test and control groups were purely voluntary. For the test and control groups, no assignment was attached to the interview. However, to incentivize random participation, the students were informed that whoever participated in the interviews would be given a $10 Starbucks gift card upon completion.

The data collected also is reliable because it was processed through sophisticated software which captured the experiences of the participants through surveys and audio/video recordings. The pre- and post-intervention surveys were collected through Qualtrics software which accurately stores and provides various insights into the participant responses. The participants’ survey responses were recorded exactly as they responded. The long-form interviews were recorded and transcribed via Zoom. Most of the wording in the Zoom transcriptions was accurate; however, the researcher carefully listened to each interview multiple
times to revise the transcriptions such that they more precisely reflected the questions of the researcher and answers of each participant.

The researcher knew the participants in the test group since he also served as the instructor of record for their STL 1102 course. The researcher assured these participants that their responses within the surveys and interviews would not affect their grades on those assignments, which were based on completion rather than substance. Likewise, the instructor of the control group’s STL 1102 course communicated that their participation was voluntary and would not affect their outcome in her course.

Ethical Issues

To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, there was only one risk involved with taking part in this study – the loss of confidentiality. All participants received two methods of communication which explained the expectations for involvement in the study as well as the purpose of the research, study activities, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality, compensation, and contact information for the researcher and his faculty advisor. The researcher verbally explained these protocols at the beginning of the semester to the test group. Additionally, both the test and control groups provided their approval to participate in the surveys via consent form (See Appendix A) and the interviews by responding to the researcher’s request.

The identity of everyone who participated in the surveys and interviews was altered and codified by supplying a pseudonym. In turn, the pseudonyms were utilized in providing a summary of the study’s findings. Every effort was made by the researcher to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. This was achieved through storing the pre- and post-intervention survey responses in Qualtrics as well as the long-form interview recordings in a Box
folder. Both content storage sites were password-protected with Duo two-factor authentication and only accessible by the researcher. The data collected through the surveys and interviews will be kept in perpetuity. There is no plan for the uncodified data collected from this research to be shared with other researchers in the future.

Conclusion

The goal of this research project was to teach college students a theological framework of vocation/calling, discuss its implications for their lives, and assess its impact on the same. In higher education, students are challenged in a variety of ways to think about their own ambitions and goals in life. However, less often are they guided to see their life stories, experiences, thoughts, and behavior in view of God. This study sought to help students reflect on what God has called them to do and, more importantly, who God has called them to be. By design, the participants were able to reflect on and discuss their own vocations and callings with one another as part of the study. The ensuing chapter provides a summation of the primary and secondary conclusions drawn from the data yielded by this project.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The years spent attending college or university are replete with some of the most significant demands on a (traditionally) young adult while at the same time allowing him or her some of their greatest freedoms. This seemingly paradoxical time in a student’s life functions as a formative experience as each college student considers who they are both individually and with respect to their communities, while also contemplating what they want to do with the next phase of their life. The objective of this project was to lead college students through an introductory course which focused on the biblical concept of vocation/calling. Vocation/calling is implicitly woven throughout the narrative of the Christian Scriptures and lends itself as a foundational tool for considering one’s life in view of God and His creation. This research project investigated the effect of a vocation/calling curriculum on character formation in college students in addition to their beliefs on various facets of life including education, work, and relationships.

The participants in section N7 of STL 1102, which comprised the test group, were initially led through an explanation of what is and is not meant by the usage of terms like vocation/calling. Then the student participants went through a series of teachings, readings, and discussions which provided them with a basic understanding of the following: the narrative arc of Scripture and its relationship to vocation/calling; the multiple categories of calling; vocation/calling as a formative process; and discernment of one’s vocations/callings. In contrast, the students within the control group (section N4) were not introduced to the vocation/calling curriculum.
This project was designed to provide college students with a new perspective through which to interpret their lives in relationship to God, others, and creation. Instead of using their own stories or the stories of others as their primary reference points, students were challenged to consider everything in the light of God’s normative story (i.e., the narrative and message of the Christian Scriptures). The study sought to determine whether this theological framework of vocation/calling would impact the thought and behavior of the test group participants when compared to the control group.

The primary and secondary questions which served as the impetuses for this research project are as follows.

2. How does the use of a Christian understanding of vocation/calling affect how college students think about and embody life, particularly regarding education, work, and relationships?
   a. How does the employment of this vocation/calling framework contribute to Christian formation?
   b. How does the utilization of this framework affect one’s vertical relationship with God and/or one’s horizontal relationships with other humans and creation?

The pre- and post-intervention surveys along with the post-intervention long-form interviews served as the data collection tools which allowed the researcher to determine whether the proposed intervention had any impact on the student participants. The ensuing sections provide reports of the primary and secondary findings from the pre-intervention surveys as well as the post-intervention surveys and interviews.

**Biographical Data**

The participants which comprised the test and control groups fit within a rather narrow window with regard to their age: 18-20 years old. Therefore, all participants would be classified
as “emerging adults” according to Christian Smith and Patricia Snell.151 The majority of the participants were first-time freshman, but there also were two students who had transferred to Baylor University from another institution. Additionally, it is important to note that 17 of 20 students reported a Christian affiliation of some kind. Two participants reported as Agnostic on both the pre- and post-intervention surveys. One participant reported as Baptist on the pre-intervention survey, but then reported as Agnostic on the post-intervention. That same participant self-disclosed an Agnostic affiliation in a separate interaction with the researcher.

Pre-Intervention Finding One: Nearly All Participants Conceived of Vocation/Calling in Terms of Doing Rather than Being

When asked how they would define vocation/calling on the pre-intervention survey, all but one of the participants from the test and control groups either implicitly or explicitly expressed their answer in terms of what a person does rather than who a person becomes. For almost all respondents, vocation/calling was related to actions that a person is led to perform, which on several occasions was linked overtly to a task, occupation, job, or career. Peter, the participant who represented the exception to this statistic, mentioned that “I know the type of person I would like to be and what vague directions to getting there are.” His response could be taken loosely to refer to a particular job, but also it may very well be that he has envisioned a quality of character that he would like to exemplify as a human being.152 Regardless, the emphasis on vocation/calling as doing over being corresponds with Douglas Schuurman’s claim

151 Smith and Snell, Souls in Transition, 4.

152 To this point, often when people are asked to share a bit about themselves, they state their name and then proceed to explain what they do for a living (i.e., their job/occupation). Thus, what humans do is often deeply interwoven with their understanding of who they are. Also, it should be noted that all names utilized from the test and control groups are pseudonyms assigned by the researcher.
that “the most common understanding of vocation today is the secularized one where vocation refers to one’s paid work.” Thus, this result conveys the modern negation of a relational aspect of vocation/calling and the propagation of a career- or work-oriented understanding. The prevalence of vocational or trade schools speaks to this very reality.

The perception of vocation/calling as a feeling of being led to do something was not uncommon amongst the respondents. Of the 10 participants who referenced vocation/calling as some sort of feeling or sense, 50% of them did so from an internalized perspective which stood apart from any sense of direction from God or other external source. For example, Peter defined vocation/calling as “an internal feeling of suitability or innate desire for something (non material).” This response is similar to Deborah’s: “Vocation and calling is you’re [sic] intuition and feeling for you to engage in a curtain [sic] act.” 30% of the same 10 participants made explicit references to feeling led by God to a particular task or lifestyle, whereas 20% made connections to both external (i.e., God) and internal (i.e., self) motivators.

**Pre-Intervention Finding Two: Participants Tended to Think of Vocations/Callings in Utilitarian Terms**

The participants expressed a propensity to consider vocations/callings in a largely utilitarian manner, or in other words, as means to some other end. This result was evident especially when participants were asked about the purposes of vocations/callings such as higher education and work. When asked about the goal of higher education, 95% of the participants responded that it was a means of obtaining skills or knowledge to use in a given job or career.

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Only one participant, James, acknowledged the pursuit of higher education for the sake of learning and gaining knowledge “in all directions.”

As it relates to the purpose of work, 100% of the participants stated that it is a means to another end such as providing for oneself and one’s family. James mentioned that “work is a means to an end” while also admitting that “very few people work for work’s sake.” While all participants referred to work as a means to some other end, it was not necessarily connected to a selfish outcome. In fact, 12 of 19 participants (63%) also noted that work is meant for helping others in some way. Therefore, while oneself may have been the primary focus of the purpose of work, it was not exclusively seen in a self-centered manner.

*Pre-Intervention Finding Three: Participants Often Connected a Sense of Purpose to What A Person is Called to Do*

Over half the participants (i.e., 11 of 19) associated a notion of purpose with vocation and what a person is called to do. Laura defined vocation/calling as “why you are here,” and Valerie described it as “a mission or a task” for a given person. 7 of the 11 participants who linked purpose with vocation/calling also articulated their purpose as stemming from God rather than some other external or internal stimulus. Yet, rather consistent with the modern understanding of vocation as one’s compensated work (and in a related way, their major or degree path), 5 of the 8 students who expressed uncertainty about their vocation/calling were listed as Undecided majors at the time in which they completed the pre-intervention survey. Interestingly, all 11 participants who connected purpose to vocation/calling articulated a calling to serve and love other people through their passions or giftings. Even if they could not comprehend their major or future career, they sensed a calling to contribute to the well-being of others. This result makes sense
given that 10 of those participants had a religious affiliation with Christianity, a faith which espouses love of God and neighbor.

**Pre-Intervention Finding Four: Participants Tended to See God or Some Other Power as the Source for Vocation/Calling Rather than Self**

From the test and control groups, approximately 58% of the 19 participants named God or some other power as the source of one’s vocation or calling. The other 42% expressed a belief that a vocation/calling stems from within the individual self. Of those who named God or another power as the source of vocation/calling, 100% of them identified their religious affiliation somewhere within the Christian tradition. Conversely, of those who acknowledged the self as the origin of a vocation/calling or did not explicitly state another source, 63% affiliated themselves with the Christian faith, whereas 37% identified as Agnostic.

This overall finding is a bit more balanced than the researcher expected given the Christian theological conviction that God is engaged with His people and therefore not wholly removed from them. If questioned further, perhaps the Christians who did not explicitly mention God as the source of vocation/calling might say that it is a given reality due to the Holy Spirit of God residing within each believer. Yet the evidence remains from the responses that nearly one third (i.e., 5 of 16) of those who expressed a religious affiliation with the Christian faith did not connect the source of vocation/calling to God.

**Post-Intervention Finding One: Test Group Participants Began to Express Vocation/Calling in Terms of Being and Detach it from Relating Exclusively to Career, Work, or Major**

After the implementation of the vocation/calling framework, the majority of participants still tended to define vocation/calling in relation to something that a person is summoned to do. However, the participants did begin to articulate their understanding of vocation/calling in terms
of being as well, something which was almost entirely absent from the first survey results. Carly, Stephanie, Christina, and Heather all held sentiments that vocation/calling is not solely attached to a person’s professional career, work, or area of study in school. Heather, a participant who identified herself as Agnostic with regard to religious affiliation, defined vocation/calling as “what I was created to do and what career/life goal that I should pursue.” However, despite her struggle with faith and belief in a divine calling from God, she also noted the following.

I now am better able to understand that I am meant to pursue what will both help me become the best person I can and to also help others become better people and the best versions of themselves.

However simple her insight, Heather demonstrated that a proper understanding of vocation/calling influences who a person becomes alongside what a person does. This realization is consistent with other comments that she made regarding impacting others’ lives while also fulfilling her own potential as a human being.

Additionally, there was a commonality expressed amongst those who participated in the long-form interviews that vocation/calling is not tied solely to one’s focused area of study, work, or career. It was also tethered to who a person is and is becoming, and how they live their lives. For example, Emily from the test group stated that the vocation/calling curriculum presented in the STL 1102 class “really made me think about how vocation/calling pertain to like things that were not just my future job, like what I wanted to be in the future.” When asked if the use of terms such as vocation or calling are helpful, Emily gave the following answer.

Vocation, calling is, it’s deeper than just talking about like your career because it involves like what you personally feel like you should be doing in the world and it involves other aspects not just like your career. Like we talked about how you should be to other people and how you should approach education and all those things.
Emily, who self-identified as Agnostic, also provided an interesting response when asked how the ideas taught through the vocation/calling curriculum impacted her relationship to God or other divinity.

Umm, I think that, well through the class, I’ve definitely started to incorporate like faith into how I see like my vocation and like how I’m thinking about like future jobs, which I haven’t, hadn’t really thought about before. Like I had thought more of like church and career as separate things, and I hadn’t really thought about like incorporating that into whatever I’m doing.

While Emily’s statement did refer to her vocation as a future job (i.e., something that she does), she also stated the influence that faith and the sacred (i.e., church) can and should have on one’s vocation (i.e., in her view, the secular). She also implied the impact that the sacred can have on how one embodies or lives in their vocation.

Lastly, while Ainsley was part of the control group and did not go through the vocation/calling curriculum, she did articulate a similar understanding of the significance of vocation/calling. When asked if terms such as vocation and calling are helpful, she gave an affirmative reply.

I think the words, like vocation and calling, put more power into, into what we’re actually doing...you know like, saying vocation and calling is not just looking into a career or major. It’s looking into who you are and, therefore, finding a career and a major.

It is evident then that Ainsley had given prior thought to vocation/calling and its importance for human life. For her, it seems that it is the lens through which to see and approach aspects of life, such as one’s education or work.

Post-Intervention Finding Two: The Association of God (or Other Divine Power) versus Self as the Source for Vocations/Callings Did Not Change

The post-intervention survey results showed no shift in the number of test group participants who connected the basis of a person’s vocations/callings with God or other divine
source versus oneself. From the test group, 7 out of 11 participants still expressed God as the source of a person’s given vocation/calling, and the other 4 either implicitly or explicitly located the root of one’s vocation/calling in the self. 3 of the 4 who associated the source of a person’s vocation/calling with oneself identified as Agnostic in both the pre- and post-intervention surveys. Therefore, it is not surprising that their responses did not change. The other participant, Laura, identified herself as Baptist and Non-Denominational respectively on the pre- and post-intervention surveys. However, her responses to the surveys and engagement with the intervention were smallest of any participants. Further questioning of the participant might have helped to clarify her stance.

*Post-Intervention Finding Three: Test Group Participants Showed a Movement towards Greater Selflessness*

Spanning from completion of the pre-intervention surveys to the conclusion of the post-intervention surveys and long-form interviews, a noticeable trend which developed amongst the test group participants was a greater impression of altruism. Nearly 73% of the test group participants demonstrated movement towards a more selfless understanding of vocation/calling. Further, 6 of 8 of the participants that displayed this altruistic movement conveyed a shift from thinking about their career or job solely in terms of themselves to considering how it can contribute to the well-being of others. For example, Emily made the connection that she can use her passions for advice-giving and counsel as a pathway for helping “others better understand themselves,” “form meaningful relationships with other people,” and “be a part of a community.” She is also the participant who communicated the personally newfound idea that she can integrate her faith with everything she does. As a result, she expressed discovering a greater amount of grace and patience for others with whom she comes into contact.
For Haley, her stated purpose of work changed from achieving goals or “reach[ing] a certain point in life” to “gain[ing] skills such as perseverance, determination, and diligence…ultimately to glorify God.” Additionally, regarding the responsibility that human beings have to other humans and broader creation, Haley communicated the importance of virtues such as love, gentleness, kindness, and stewardship in fulfilling those responsibilities. This recognition of the need for virtues is a starting point for Haley in the cultivation of the same.

As mentioned earlier, Laura was the least engaged of any participants from the test group, particularly as it pertained to her class attendance, involvement in discussion, and engagement with the pre- and post-intervention surveys. While she did provide especially brief and rather surface-level responses to each question, she did show some signs of movement towards selflessness between the two surveys. However elementary, her articulation of who she was created to be moved from uncertainty (i.e., “I don’t know yet”) to being a “good person.” Additionally, she was able to state more clearly what responsibility human beings have to broader creation. Initially, she wrote, “We were put here for a reason,” but in her post-intervention response she stated, “I think humans are supposed to create and love what they create.” While not explicitly stated in her response, the content of her assertion matches up with what the researcher taught during the lecture entitled, “Building a Vocational Framework.”

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154 Haley utilized the word “skills” when referring to perseverance, determination, and diligence, but they could be interpreted as virtues instead. Asking Haley a follow-up question about her response would have helped to delineate more clearly what she meant.
Post-Intervention Secondary Finding: Control Group Participants Showed No Noticeable Change in Their Responses

In contrast to the test group participants, the post-intervention survey responses from the control group participants did not exhibit much change. James provided more slightly nuanced answers in comparison to his pre-intervention survey responses, but it was largely due to the addition of Scriptural passages as supportive elements. Substantively, nothing changed between his pre- and post-intervention survey responses. It is worth noting that only 3 of the initial 8 participants from the control group completed the post-intervention survey. As such, it could be that the other participants might have produced different responses had they completed the post-intervention survey.

Conclusion

Overall, the project intervention accomplished what it set out to do. It provided a new framework to college students based on a theological understanding of vocation/calling which impacted their thoughts on various aspects of life such as education, work, and their relationships to other human beings and broader creation. The survey responses were rather effective in measuring changes to their thoughts on these subjects over the course of the intervention. Most participants within the test group showed evidence of positive spiritual growth and a clearer articulation of how vocation/calling affects the approach to their lives both individually and communally. The control group assisted in affirming the positive impact of the vocation/calling curriculum through the relative lack of change which they experienced through their respective STL 1102 course, a course which did not entail use of the same curriculum. However, more prolonged research via surveys or interviews would have been helpful in gauging its impact on the behavior and thought of the test and control groups.
The vocation/calling curriculum utilized by the researcher aided the test group participants in moving away from thinking about vocation/calling solely in terms of their future work, especially as connected to their area of study in school. This framework provided a new way for students to consider all aspects of their lives as being informed by their vocations/callings. Thus, it infused their lives with deeper meaning as they consider both their thoughts and behavior and their implications for relationships to God, other human beings, and the wider creation. As with many of the participants, the researcher was reminded again of the significance of the biblical narrative for shaping people’s lives. By contextualizing human narratives within the meta-narrative of God as understood through the Christian Scriptures, humans are oriented to the true telos of restored life in the new creation. In turn, the biblical narrative provides a framework for helping humans to live meaningful lives in greater cohesion with the kingdom of God.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

Summary of Significant Findings

The aim of this Culminating Project was to take college students through an introductory course, which focused on a biblically and theologically informed understanding of vocation/calling, with the intention of helping them grow in Christian character that can impact the entirety of their lives. The student participants became acquainted with the concepts of vocation/calling through the implementation of a curriculum developed by the researcher. The curriculum itself focused on several key topics: 1) a (re)interpretation of what is or is not meant by vocation/calling; 2) the Christian meta-narrative which supports and drives vocation/calling; 3) an examination of the various categories of vocations/callings; 4) the understanding of vocation/calling as a formative process; and 5) the discernment of one’s vocations/callings. Thus, the project intervention sought to provide the student participants with a framework for thinking about an approach to their lives as well as how they actually ought to inhabit them. The project was steered by one primary research question: Does the use of a Christian understanding of vocation/calling affect how college students think about and embody life, particularly regarding education, work, and relationships? Additionally, there were two secondary questions which assisted with deepening the investigation.

1. Does the employment of this vocation/calling framework contribute to Christian formation?
2. Does the utilization of this framework affect one’s vertical relationship with God and/or one’s horizontal relationships with other humans and creation?

The student participants for both the test and control groups completed pre-intervention surveys before implementation of the vocation/calling curriculum. The overall results of the pre-intervention surveys indicated what the researcher suspected from the beginning based on the
pervasive post-modern ethos of neoliberalism. College students, like the dominant culture of the West, tend to focus on self above anything or anyone else, especially as it relates to education, work, and relationships. The initial survey revealed that nearly all participants thought of vocation/calling in terms of what they feel led to do as opposed to who they should become as a person. This sense of being called to do something was often linked explicitly to a task, job, or career. Additionally, the participant responses showed that they were prone to consider vocations/callings in utilitarian terms, as means to some end(s). Education was seen as a means for gaining the requisite skills and expertise for a particular career, and in turn work was perceived as a way of providing for oneself and perhaps others. Lastly, the initial survey showed that the participants tended to comprehend God or some other power as the source behind one’s vocation/calling rather than oneself. This finding also led to discovering that students often expressed a sense of purpose with what they felt they were called to do in life.

Upon going through the vocation/calling curriculum, the participants began to define vocation/calling in terms of who a person is called to be more so than they did prior to the intervention. Consequently, their responses showed evidence of separating vocation/calling singularly from its relationship to one’s educational major, work, or career to considering how vocation/calling relates to how a person should behave towards other people and creation as well as seeking to worship God. While the percentage of students who explicitly connected God or another divine power to the source of a person’s vocations/callings did not change after the intervention, the test group participants’ responses did manifest a shift towards greater selflessness. These participants began to consider their work less in terms of how it can benefit themselves and more with regards to how it can contribute to the welfare of others and exaltation of God.
One secondary finding indicated that the control group participants (i.e., those who did not undergo the vocation/calling curriculum) did not display any noticeable change in their responses from the pre-intervention surveys to the post-intervention surveys and/or interviews. While the lack of vocation/calling curriculum did not seem to contribute to an enhancement of self-interest amongst the students in the control group, it certainly did not lead to any noticeable decrease in the same area. Thus, it can be concluded that the vocation/calling curriculum was effective in fostering altruism and a greater attention to God and others.

**Theological Significance**

As evidenced through the argument laid out in the second chapter of this project, a theological understanding of vocation/calling is essential for helping to stem the tide of neoliberalism, especially as it manifests itself within the contexts of higher education and academic advising. A theological framework of vocation/calling assists with introducing college students to a meta-narrative which guides and informs all other narratives, including their own story. This meta-narrative is the story of the Christian Scriptures, which speaks to both the protological and eschatological realities of all God’s creation. This meta-narrative is chiefly God’s story because He is its origin and author. Everything created is ultimately from God and for God. This reality fights against the postmodern ethos of individual relativism by articulating an overarching account of the world. God’s story, not our own or that of others around us, orchestrates our lives. This truth is especially significant for college students, who perhaps are living apart from the direct supervision of their parents for the first time. It provides coherence during a time in which their assumptions and convictions about life and the world are challenged more than ever. The meta-narrative of the Christian Scriptures, as understood through a
theological framework of vocation/calling, offers a compass of sorts by which students can orient their lives. Therein lies one aspect of the theological significance of this project.

Another aspect of the theological significance of this project lies in the conveyance of image-bearing and being the royal priesthood, interconnected motifs found within the biblical narrative. As argued in Chapter 2 of this project, the underlying problem of humanity, and thereby neoliberalism and any other secular philosophy, is “idolatry and the distortion of genuine humanness it produces.”155 The meta-vocation of humanity is bearing God’s image in the world such that they function as priests and kings on God’s behalf in His created order. The deformation of this calling from God is ultimately then a failure of worship and responsibility.156 This project demonstrated that students who see image-bearing as integral and relevant to every area of their lives will grow in Christian character. As they grow in godliness, they learn to love God, others, and broader creation above themselves. Therefore, the idea of vocation/calling as bearing God’s image into the world has cosmic implications as it attunes itself to the redemption of all things in Jesus and the inauguration of new creation. In this way, students can begin to see their education, work, and relationships as callings from God to participate in His redemptive work on earth as in heaven.

Practical Significance

As stated within the first chapter, a significant problem has developed within the sphere of higher education which is symptomatic of something that has been at work within the wider culture. Neoliberalism, one of the manifestations of postmodernity, has taken root and produced a culture which has become increasingly focused on the individual at the cost of mindfulness

155 Wright, The Day the Revolution Began, 74.

156 Ibid., 100.
toward others and community. Within higher education, this neoliberal philosophy is expressed through a heightened emphasis on things such as careerism, materialism, and productivity. One key aspect of all these elements is the preoccupation with what is quantifiable and tangible. Philip Kenneson notes that Western culture has created the “new virtue” of productivity, which is the measurable amount of work completed within a given time frame.\(^{157}\) In other words, movement up the career ladder, acquisition of things (e.g., loaded bank account, multiple cars, extravagant homes), and a measurable list of accomplishments are elevated above virtues such as patience, humility, and selflessness, all of which require a movement of attention away from the individual to God and others. Within higher education, modern advising theories also propagate these things as ideals worth the investment of one’s education.

Therefore, the theological basis of vocation and calling laid out within this project is significant for practitioners within higher education, especially academic advisors, because it offers a more holistic framework for interpreting the true ideals of the Christian life. First, it provides a more robust terminology which in turn imbues education, work, relationships, and other aspects of life with deeper meaning and a more profound sense of direction. The use of vocation/calling invites students into a story much bigger than their own and helps to connect their studies, work, and inter-relational connections with what God is doing in creation. In essence, the concept of vocation/calling relocates the locus of attention away from the individual self to God and then others. In effect it orders our loves to relate all things including our careers and relationships in and toward God. Within this framework, education and work are not seen in purely utilitarian terms. Education is not just a means to the end of obtaining gainful employment, and a job or work is not merely the means to securing financial security and a

future without work. Rather, education and work carry intrinsic value worth relishing in and of itself, while they also function as pathways for the realization of God’s kingdom on earth as in heaven.

Additionally, the theological notion of vocation/calling emphasizes being over doing. In other words, vocation/calling is interested more with who a person is becoming (i.e., the Christian virtues and character they are fostering) than what specifically he/she is doing with their life (i.e., what major they are pursuing or in what field they are working). This understanding helps to release students from the shackles of doubt and fear which can manifest when they do not feel a particular sense of direction regarding their education or work. Rather than becoming psychologically or spiritually paralyzed, students can be freed up to pursue holiness and bear God’s image no matter the context.

The significance of what a person does lies more in how their life is contributing to the establishment of God’s kingdom than what specific task or job they are performing. This is where a theological understanding of vocation/calling, undergirded by Goheen and Mullins’s “vocational sweet spot” model, is particularly helpful for students discerning direction in life. Discernment of vocations and callings rather than careers helps students consider their passions, abilities, and limitations within the context of God’s desire for restoration in a broken world. In this way, students learn to orient their lives to life in the kingdom of God (being) while also recognizing their limitations, developing their interests, and growing in their giftings.

**Broader Significance**

Throughout the course of this project, it became evident that there are two areas for which this project’s subject and content bear broader significance. First, as noted within the first
chapter, to the researcher’s knowledge no Christian theological reflection has been performed within the field of academic advising on its very philosophy and practice. While attempts have been made to analyze the models of academic advising utilized within faith-based institutions of higher education, no one has offered a theologically informed philosophy and rationale for praxis. Therefore, this project bears potential significance across the entire landscape of academic advising, but especially for Christian colleges and universities. By using a Christian understanding of vocation/calling as a guiding methodology within academic advising, there are newfound opportunities within the field.

First, the use of a vocation/calling framework can offer a fuller perspective of academic advising which promotes the formation of Christian virtue in students and the holistic flourishing of creation. Also, it can highlight the fragments of truth found within secular models, while also helping to reshape and reorient them towards the kingdom of God. The use of vocation/calling with academic advising broadens scope of concern regarding student development. While secular understandings of student development tend to remain at the individual level, the transformative infusion of vocation/calling into the conception of student development inevitably takes it from the individual level and shows its relation to God, others, and creation. Intrinsic is the notion that one’s vocations/callings are not self-isolating or self-focused because their source is God, whose concern is for His glory in all aspects of creation. Thus, the use of vocation/calling within the context of academic advising contains the opportunity for a trickle-down effect. If students become captivated by the idea that their vocations are callings from God to grow in His likeness and reflect His image into the world, their thought and practice related to education, work, relationships, and more will change for the glory of God. As they acquire the virtues of the

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Christian life, the classroom, the workplace, the home, and the world become environments for God’s redemption.

The use of a Christian understanding of vocation/calling also carries significant implications for local churches and the empowerment of the people of God. Historically, most medieval Christians conceived vocation as a calling to serve God in the role of a priest, nun, or monk, and taking on formal commitments to prayer and the contemplative life. A person had a vocation only so far as they assumed one of those positions within the church. However, during the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther redefined vocation and extended its relevance outside the walls of the church. Any person could pursue their calling from God in whatever “Stand” or station of life in which they found themselves, whether as a monk, ordained minister, farmer, mother, husband, etc. While Miroslav Volf notes some of the problems that the dynamics of our current society present for Luther’s thinking on vocation, nevertheless his interpretation of vocation was and is important for the life of the church. This understanding of vocation/calling which is relevant for both ordained ministers and lay people allows for the equipping of all saints in God’s kingdom, the priesthood of all believers. Just as every Christian has the authority to read, comprehend, and employ the truths of Scripture, so too do they possess the calling to be God’s kings and priests in the world. Like Christian colleges/universities and

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161 See Miroslav Volf, Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 106-110. Volf argues that the industrial- and information-centric natures of our modern society have resulted in both the diachronic and synchronic plurality of employments or jobs. People in today’s world are more likely to be employed in multiple jobs over their lifetime as well as perhaps numerous jobs at one time. Luther’s model of vocation is rather static as it connects one’s external vocation (i.e., station of service to God and others in the world) with their spiritual vocation (i.e., call to salvation and faithful living as a Christian). The latter does not change, so the former cannot either. Thus, his concept of vocation does not cohere with modern society’s dynamic natures regarding jobs or employments.
academic advisors do with students, local churches have opportunities to guide believers by using a vocation/calling framework. Churches can provide in-house training and biblical counsel led by both ordained ministers and lay persons to demonstrate how Christians can live out their vocations or callings from God wherever they find themselves. They can highlight the importance of seeing vocation/calling in terms of both being and doing and thereby its relevance to all aspects of life. Moreover, leading the people of God through a theological framework of vocation/calling helps them to see the eternal significance of their own vocations/callings, most notably through their connection to the eschatological redemption of God’s creation.

Future Research

Several opportunities for future research became apparent at the conclusion of this research project. First, the course which the researcher taught was offered as one credit hour, which only met one day per week. A greater set of data could be gathered if the course was increased to three credit hours and thereby had 2-3 class meetings per week. This expansion would allow the researcher to offer more lectures, introduce other readings related to vocation/calling, and foster additional discussions. Also, a prolonged exposure to and deeper immersion into the vocation/calling curriculum over time would help to further shape the minds, hearts, and behaviors of the students who take the class.

A second prospect for future research lies in carrying out longitudinal studies. This research project focused on the impact of the vocation/calling curriculum on college students through the course of their initial semester at Baylor University. Similar to sociological studies that Christian Smith, Melinda Lundquist Denton, Patricia Snell, and other scholars have performed, extended research could be done which tracks the impact of the vocation/calling curriculum on a group of people as they experience and transition through various stages of life.
Sustained research could be undertaken which assesses the effect of a vocation/calling framework on the thought and behavior of people. For example, studies could be performed to see its impact on both those who attend college or university and those who do not receive formal higher education. This research would allow for measuring the variety of factors which contribute to growth and change in these participant groups.

A third opportunity for further research would include increasing the range and diversity of participants who are involved in the study. While out of his control, the sample size for this researcher’s project was rather small. Securing a larger sample size would allow for a greater amount of data collection and thereby a deeper understanding of the intervention’s influence. This enlargement of sample size would be helpful for both the test groups and control groups so that the results can be more broadly compared to one another. Also, all participants within this researcher’s study comprised the same race (i.e., White). For future studies, it would be important to capture the thoughts and experiences of participants across an array of racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

Lastly, further research studies could be performed across an assortment of different contexts to gauge the impact of a vocation/calling framework. While this research project was conducted at a Baptist university in the southern United States, other studies could be launched at colleges/universities from other Christian denominations or affiliations in varying locations across the United States as well as throughout other parts of the world. In addition to college/university students, a vocation/calling curriculum could be taught within local churches.

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or denominational conventions throughout the United States and around the world to measure its impact on ordained ministers and lay people. Finally, parachurch organizations could also utilize a vocation/calling framework within their respective ministries, and studies could be conducted to capture its impact on an array of other people groups which might not be encapsulated in those other settings (e.g., the homeless, the incarcerated, professional athletes).

**Conclusion**

A biblical understanding of vocation is important for the contexts of Christian higher education and academic advising not merely because it offers a historically rooted yet fresh vocabulary and way of thinking in an increasingly secular society. It is vital because it underscores the intrinsic significance of human endeavors such as education and work and orients them to their proper end, namely the glory of God and the establishing of His kingdom on earth as in heaven. Through the lens of vocation and calling, education is not just a means for a person to obtain a high-paying job, and a person’s work is not just an avenue for amassing wealth so that one can cease from working as soon as possible. Instead, a theological understanding of vocation sees callings like education and work as both environments for growth in the fullness of Christian character and arenas for bearing God’s image into the world. In this light, vocations from God are contexts for both the discernment and the embodiment of who we are called to be and what we are called to do as stewards of God’s grace in the world. In other words, these callings are opportunities for the realization of our meta-vocation of bearing God’s image into the world so that His wise reign is represented throughout all creation. Anything less will fail to realize the fullness of God’s image in which all humans have been created, but a proper understanding and the power of God working through faithful expression of our callings will provide the context for true human flourishing and the redemption of creation.
From the beginning, God’s desire has been to dwell with the people which He created for Himself and for His glory. The attunement of each person’s heart, mind, and body to humanity’s meta-vocation is consequential for the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth precisely because God designed it in such a way. Through faithful embodiment of our vocations and callings in life, we humans fulfill the will of God and are refined in deeper ways into His likeness, or as Hugh of St. Victor put it, “there begins to shine forth again in us what has forever existed in the divine Idea or Pattern, coming and going in us but standing changeless in God.”

The vocation/calling curriculum implemented over the course of a sixteen-week semester served to (re)frame the test group participants’ understandings of many significant areas in their lives, which included education, work, and relationships to God, others, and broader creation. They were taught, they read, and they discussed many pertinent aspects of a theological construct of vocation/calling. In the end, the results of this research project showed that the test group participants began to express their understanding of vocation/calling more in terms of being than doing and detach it from an exclusive relationship to career, work, or major area of study in college/university. The kind of person that God is calling them to be carries greater significance than the job which they have or the field that they study within higher education. The test group participants also demonstrated a movement towards greater selflessness. They expressed the importance of cultivating virtues such as patience, love, gentleness, and kindness which aid in serving others and caring for creation. Lastly, the control group participants did not exhibit any noticeable changes in their thought or behavior as it relates to vocation/calling, which highlights the effect that a theological understanding of vocation/calling can have on peoples’ lives, such as

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163 The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor, 61.
those who participated in the test group. At the center of every vocation exists the God who calls His people to be partakers and proclaimers of His grace into the new creation.
APPENDIX A

Baylor University

Consent Form for Research

PROTOCOL TITLE: Vocation/Calling as a Framework for Christian Character Formation in College Students

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Bryan DeVries

SUPPORTED BY: Baylor University

Purpose of the research: The purpose of this study is to understand and explain how vocation/calling impacts college students’ perceptions of various life elements (e.g., education, work, relationships) and thereby determine if it can be a helpful model for academic advising.

Study activities: If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete the following survey.

Risks and Benefits: To the best of my knowledge, there is only one risk to taking part in this study – the loss of confidentiality – which is discussed below. You may or may not benefit from taking part in this study. Possible benefits include having the opportunity to contribute to strengthening Baylor’s education and academic advising. In addition, others may benefit in the future from the findings produced from this study.

Confidentiality: A risk of taking part in this study is the possibility of a loss of confidentiality. Loss of confidentiality includes having your personal information shared with someone who is not on the study team and was not supposed to see or know about your information. The researcher plans to protect your confidentiality. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person’s everyday use of the Internet, which could include illegal interception of the data by another party. If you are concerned about your data security, contact the researcher to schedule a time to complete a printed survey with the same questions. We will keep the records of this study confidential by storing them in encrypted and password protected computers. We will make every effort to keep your records confidential. Authorized staff of Baylor University may review the study records for purposes such as quality control or safety. If any part of your survey responses is quoted in subsequent research articles or books, any identifying characteristics will be changed to protect your confidentiality.

Compensation: You will not be paid for taking part in this survey. If you are participating in an interview, a $10 Starbucks gift card will be provided to you after completion of the interview.

Questions or concerns about this research study: You can call the researcher with any concerns or questions about the research.
Principal Investigator
Bryan DeVries
Institution(s): Baylor University
Address: One Bear Place #98000 Waco, TX 76798-8000
Phone #: 254-710-1237
Email: Bryan_DeVries@baylor.edu

Faculty Advisor
Dr. John White
Institution(s): Baylor University
Address: One Bear Place #97126 Waco, TX 76798-7126
Phone #: 254-710-6586
Email: John_B_White@baylor.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher, you may contact the Baylor University IRB through the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at 254-710-3708 or irb@baylor.edu.

Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free not to take part or to stop at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential. Information already collected about you cannot be deleted.

By continuing with the research and completing the study activities, you are providing your consent.
APPENDIX B

PRE-INTERVENTION REFLECTION SURVEY AND MATRIX

Name

Baylor Email

Age

Religious Affiliation

1. How would you define calling/vocation?
2. What do you understand your calling(s) or vocation(s) to be?
3. What is the goal of higher education?
4. Why have you decided to attend college/university?
5. What is the purpose of work?
6. What is the purpose of rest?
7. What do you believe you were created to do?
8. Who do you believe you were created to be?
9. What responsibility do you believe humans have to others?
10. What responsibility do you believe humans have to creation?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Related Survey Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Does the use of a Christian understanding of vocation/calling affect how college</td>
<td>1. How would you define calling/vocation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students think about and embody life, particularly regarding education, work, and</td>
<td>2. What do you understand your calling(s)/vocation(s) to be?</td>
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<td>relationships?</td>
<td>3. What is the goal of higher education?</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Why have you decided to attend college/university?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. What is the purpose of work?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6. What is the purpose of rest?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Does the employment of this vocation/calling framework contribute to Christian</td>
<td>7. What do you believe you were created to do?</td>
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<td>formation?</td>
<td>8. Who do you believe you were created to be?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. And does its utilization affect one’s vertical relationship with God and/or</td>
<td>9. What responsibility do you believe humans have to others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one’s horizontal relationships with others and creation?</td>
<td>10. What responsibility do you believe humans have to creation?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

POST-INTERVENTION REFLECTION SURVEY AND MATRIX

Name

Baylor Email

Age

Religious Affiliation

1. How would you define calling/vocation?
2. What do you understand your calling(s) or vocation(s) to be?
3. What is the goal of higher education?
4. Why have you decided to attend college/university?
5. What is the purpose of work?
6. What is the purpose of rest?
7. What do you believe you were created to do?
8. Who do you believe you were created to be?
9. What responsibility do you believe humans have to others?
10. What responsibility do you believe humans have to creation?
11. Overall, what did you learn about vocation/calling from taking this class?
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. What is the goal of higher education?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. What is the purpose of work?</td>
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<td>6. What is the purpose of rest?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11. Overall, what did you learn about vocation/calling from taking this class?</td>
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<td>7. What do you believe you were created to do?</td>
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<td>8. Who do you believe you were created to be?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. And does its utilization affect one’s vertical relationship with God and/or one’s horizontal relationships with others and creation?</td>
<td>9. What responsibility do you believe humans have to others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. What responsibility do you believe humans have to creation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Drawing from the content of your STL 1102 course this semester (e.g., lectures, discussions, readings), what things have caused you to consider your vocations/callings? How so?

2. What experiences outside of your STL 1102 course (i.e., other experiences on or off campus) have caused you to think about your vocations/callings over the course of this semester? How so?

3. How have you grown (i.e., think in terms of spiritually, mentally, socially, etc.) this semester as a result of taking your STL 1102 course? What contributed to that growth?

4. How have you grown (i.e., think in terms of spiritually, mentally, socially, etc.) this semester outside of your STL 1102 course? What contributed to that growth?

5. How have these ideas and experiences (i.e., those mentioned in answers to questions 1-2) changed the way you interact with the world over the course of this semester?
   a. Particularly regarding your relationship to God or other divinity (if applicable)?
   b. Particularly regarding your relationship to other human beings (e.g., family, friends, roommates)?
   c. Particularly regarding your relationships to other aspects of creation (e.g., environment, animals)?

6. If applicable, explain to me what else gives you meaning/purpose in life.

7. What would you say is helpful or unhelpful about the use of terms such as vocation/calling?
   Would you propose different terms or a different framework? If so, why?
<table>
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<td></td>
<td>2. What experiences outside of your STL 1102 course (i.e., other experiences on or off campus) have caused you to think about your vocations/callings over the course of this semester? How so?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. If applicable, explain to me what else gives you meaning/purpose in life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. What would you say is helpful or unhelpful about the use of terms such as vocation/calling? Would you propose different terms or a different framework? If so, why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Does the employment of this vocation/calling framework contribute to Christian formation?</td>
<td>3. How have you grown (i.e., think in terms of spiritually, mentally, socially, etc.) this semester as a result of taking your STL 1102 course? What contributed to that growth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. How have you grown (i.e., think in terms of spiritually, mentally, socially, etc.) this semester outside of your STL 1102 course? What contributed to that growth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. And does its utilization affect one’s vertical relationship with God and/or one’s horizontal relationships with others and creation?</td>
<td>5. How have these ideas and experiences (i.e., those mentioned in answers to questions 1-2) changed the way you interact with the world over the course of this semester?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Particularly regarding your relationship to God or other divinity (if applicable)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Particularly regarding your relationship to other human beings (e.g., family, friends, roommates)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Particularly regarding your relationships to other aspects of creation (e.g., environment, animals)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New Student Experience

New Student Experience is designed to assist Baylor’s incoming students with the transition to college by providing opportunities to form meaningful connections with each other and faculty in an academic community while discovering strategies for academic success. NSE courses introduce you to the values of critical thinking, the integration of faith and learning, and social responsibility. Through self-discovery, NSE courses support your success by engaging you academically, socially, and spiritually in identifying strengths and values which align with your educational goals.

In their first year, new students at Baylor are called to flourish in a community . . .

- . . . of academic rigor
- . . . of personal growth
- . . . of faith formation
- . . . of cultural humility

Course Overview

Exploring Vocation and Calling is a course aimed at preparing students for success in their academic journey, future work, and other aspects of life by examining these things through the framework of vocation and calling. Students will be introduced to reading assignments that will challenge and encourage their understanding of what it means to be a faithful student presently, and what it will mean as a person of faith in relationships, the workplace, and other elements of life. The students will engage in group discussions for each assigned reading with the intention to deepening peer-to-peer relationships and fostering a good personal work ethic in a group setting. In addition, students will be introduced to additional aids and offices around campus that can help clarify future goals in their major field and following career path. The integration of a more developed understanding of God's role and desire for the student will give perspective to the assessment results. Finally, students will be asked to reflect (via survey) on their initial understanding of God's callings for their lives (or in general) and will complete
another survey at the conclusion of study to measure the impact of readings and exercises. In doing so, the students will articulate their personal responsibilities in light of the work that God is doing in them and through them.

**Materials/Text**

No textbook is required for this course, but pen and paper are useful materials to bring to class. You are expected to arrive on time to EVERY session with a willingness to participate in class discussion. Each student is expected to read every article. The following readings can be found on Canvas:

- *Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies* – Simone Weil
- *What Shall I Do with My Life?* – Howard Thurman
- *Consumer Culture and the Deformation of Work* – Darby Kathleen Ray
- *Called Through Relationship* – Elizabeth Newman
- *Go with God* – Stanley Hauerwas

**Assignments:**

1. **EXPLORING RESOURCES – Late Night at the SLC** – Explore the resources offered through the variety of offices on Baylor Campus. You can research on-line or in person. Submit the contact info (person/point of contact) for 3 offices or organizations that you may find interesting or beneficial to your academic, spiritual, physical, or social experience at Baylor University. Tell why you are interested in these particular offices or groups. The document/PDF should be uploaded to Canvas by midnight, August 29th.

2. **1st Reflection Survey** - Due August 31st (15 points)
   Complete the Qualtrics survey provided through Canvas. You will be asked a variety of questions which require reflection on your understanding of God’s call either in general or specifically how you understand God’s calling in your life.

3. **One-on-One Appointment** - Due the week of September 27th – October 1st (10 points)
   Attend one-on-one appointment with instructors to discuss your career path, vocation and calling. One-on-one sessions will be held during the week of September 27th. These appointments can be on Zoom.

4. **Media Reflection Presentation** - Due October 5th – 12th (10 points)
   Reflect on a piece of media (book, movie, TV, streaming episodes, YouTube, etc.) and how it has affected your thoughts about pursuing your calling or vocation. This 3-5-minute oral presentation should highlight how this piece of media has been influential in your life.

5. **Class Discussions on Articles** (25 points – 5 pts per discussion) – Sessions 10-15
   Each week an article will be discussed. The student is expected to have read the article and have 2 talking points and 2 questions developed from the article. Students will engage in discussion from each others’ points/questions – Points are awarded for participation.

6. **Final Reflection Survey** - Due November 30th (20 points)
   Review your first reflection survey and then complete the second survey. Think about how your understanding of the call of God has shifted or been informed through your study this fall. Complete Qualtrics survey in Canvas. Submit by midnight, November 30th.

7. **Overall Class Discussion and Participation** (10 points)
   Students are expected to read all assignments and participate in the class conversations. Cell phones and tablets are to remain out of sight. Use of cell phones will result in a first warning, and then for every following instance, the student will be counted absent. Points are awarded for attendance, participation in class conversation, and interaction with the material.
# COURSE CALENDAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Grade Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Late Night Assignment</td>
<td>8/29/21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Reflection Survey</td>
<td>8/31/21</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Reflection Presentation</td>
<td>10/5/21 – 10/12/21</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>One on One Appt</td>
<td>9/27/21-10/1/21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Discussions</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Reflection Survey</td>
<td>11/30/21</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Class Discussion and Participation</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total: 100</strong></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grades:**

- 100-95/A+  
- 90-94/A  
- 85-89/B+  
- 80-84/B  
- 75-79/C+  
- 70-74/C  
- 65-69/D+  
- 60-64/D  
- Below 60/F

Session 1  
August 24  
Introduction and Expectations  
Course purpose  
Review syllabus  
Reflection survey discussion

Session 2  
August 31  
Vocation & Calling – (Re)defining an Understanding  
Assignment: Initial reflection survey is due

Session 3  
September 7  
Additional Resource Conversation  
Offices around campus to know and connect

Session 4  
September 14  
Building A Vocational Framework

Session 5  
September 21  
The Various Contours of Calling  
Assignment: Set appointment by e-mailing your availability to Bryan_DeVries@baylor.edu

Session 6  
September 28  
Vocation & Calling as Formation  
Assignment: One on One Appointment (Week of Sept 27-Oct 1)

Session 7  
October 5  
Media Reflection Presentations

Session 8  
October 12  
Media Reflection Presentations

Session 9  
October 19  
Finding the Thread - Vocational Discernment

Session 10  
October 26  
CLASS DISCUSSION #1  
Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies – Simone Weil
Session 11  CLASS DISCUSSION #2  
November 2  What Shall I Do with My Life? – Howard Thurman

Session 12  CLASS DISCUSSION #3  
November 9  Consumer Culture and the Deformation of Work – Darby Kathleen Ray

Session 13  CLASS DISCUSSION #4  
November 16  Called Through Relationship – Elizabeth Newman

Session 14  NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK!!!  
November 23

Session 15  CLASS DISCUSSION #5 AND FINAL REFLECTIONS  
November 30  Go with God – Stanley Hauerwas  
FINAL REFLECTION SURVEY DUE

Session 16  NO CLASS – GO STUDY!!!  
December 7  ****INTERVIEWS****

Academic Integrity
Plagiarism or any form of cheating involves a breach of student-teacher trust. This means that any work submitted under your name is expected to be your own, neither composed by anyone else as a whole or in part, nor handed over to another person for complete or partial revision. Be sure to document all ideas that are not your own. Instances of plagiarism or any other act of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Honor Council and may result in failure of the course. Not understanding plagiarism is not an excuse. I expect you, as a Baylor student, to be intimately familiar with the Honor Code at: [http://www.baylor.edu/honorcode/](http://www.baylor.edu/honorcode/)
COVID Related Health & Safety
Throughout the pandemic, Baylor’s commitment has been to the health and safety of our family. Since the spring of 2020, the University has chosen to take actions that align with the most up-to-date health recommendations. Guidelines for the Fall 2021 semester include:
Everyone is required to wear a mask in classrooms and labs.
Everyone who is unvaccinated is required to be tested twice weekly throughout the semester. For more information about Baylor’s testing program, please visit Baylor’s COVID site at www.baylor.edu/coronavirus. To confirm your exemption from this testing, upload your vaccination record to www.baylor.edu/vaccine.
Vaccinations are available at the Baylor Health Center. Please call 254-710-1010 to make an appointment or https://www.baylor.edu/healthservices/.
The symptoms for the Delta variant look very similar to the original COVID symptoms but include headaches, sinus congestion, sore throats, and a runny nose. If you feel sick, please contact the Baylor Health Center to be tested as soon as possible, at 254-710-1010 or https://www.baylor.edu/healthservices/.
Please have a plan in place in case you get sick with COVID or are asked to isolate or quarantine.
Baylor will provide limited assistance, but it is in your best interest to have your own plan in place.
We all want to return to a normal fall semester with more in-person events and traditions; vaccinations and face masks help the entire Baylor community to stay healthy.

Office Hours
One of the best ways to take full advantage of learning in my course is by coming to my office hours. I look forward to guiding you in your academic pursuits. Take advantage of the hours listed above or email me for an appointment.

Baylor University Equity, Civil Rights, and Title IX

Civil Rights Policy and Sexual and Interpersonal Misconduct Policy: Baylor University does not tolerate unlawful harassment or discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, race, color, disability, national origin, ancestry, age (over 40), citizenship, genetic information or the refusal to submit to a genetic test, past, current, or prospective service in the uniformed services, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal, Texas, or local law (collectively referred to as Protected Characteristics).

If you or someone you know would like help related to an experience involving:

1. Sexual or gender-based harassment, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, stalking, intimate partner violence, or retaliation for reporting one of these types of prohibited conduct, please visit www.baylor.edu/titleix, or contact us at (254) 710-8454, or email TitleIX_Coordinator@baylor.edu.

2. Harassment (excluding those issues listed in #1) or adverse action based on Protected Characteristics, please visit www.baylor.edu/civilrights, or contact us at (254) 710-7100 or Civil_Rights@baylor.edu.

The Office of Equity and Title IX understands the sensitive nature of these situations and can provide information about available on- and off-campus resources, such as counseling and psychological services, medical treatment, academic support, university housing, and other forms of assistance that
may be available. Staff members at the office can also explain your rights and procedural options. You will not be required to share your experience. **If you or someone you know feels unsafe or may be in imminent danger, please call the Baylor Police Department (254-710-2222) or Waco Police Department (9-1-1) immediately.**

Except for Confidential Resources, all University Employees are designated Responsible Employees and thereby mandatory reporters of potential sexual and interpersonal misconduct violations. Confidential Resources who do not have to report include those working in the Counseling Center, Health Center and the University Chaplain, Dr. Burt Burleson.

**RESOURCES FOR STUDENT WELLBEING AND SUCCESS**

**Students Needing Accommodations**

Any student who needs academic accommodations related to a documented disability should inform me immediately at the beginning of the semester. You are required to obtain appropriate documentation and information regarding your accommodations from the Office of Learning Accommodation (OALA). Stop by the first floor of Sid Richardson, East Wing in the Paul L. Foster Success Center or call (254) 710-3605 or email OALA@baylor.edu.

**Academic Success**

I believe every student who has been admitted to Baylor can be successful and I want to partner with you to help you thrive academically. Be sure to take advantage of the many resources available for academic success, including coming to see me during my office hours. Students who regularly utilize the great resources in the Paul L. Foster Success Center such as tutoring, Learning Lab, and Academic Mentoring are among my most successful students. If your academic performance in this class is substandard, I will submit an Academic Progress Report to the Success Center so that the team of coordinated care professionals can ensure that you get the help you need.

**University Writing Center**

I encourage you to visit the University Writing Center (UWC) this semester and get feedback on your writing for this course. Located in Moody Library 2nd floor West, the UWC offers free assistance to you at any stage of the writing process (brainstorming, researching, outlining, drafting, revising, editing). In their feedback, the consultants focus on higher order concerns, such as content, thesis, evidence, and organization, before grammar or style. The UWC tutors will not proofread, edit, or write your paper for you, but they will equip you with a toolbox of strategies to improve your writing, research, and editing skills. Please take the assignment prompt, your paper/text, and other materials you might need with you to your appointment. Please include my name as the professor, and a report will automatically be sent to me after your session. Go to the website [www.baylor.edu/uwc](http://www.baylor.edu/uwc) to schedule an appointment, call the UWC at (254)710-4849, or stop by in person.

**First Generation College Students**

Baylor University defines a first-generation college student as a student whose parents did not complete a four-year college degree. The First in Line program at Baylor is a support office on campus for first-
generation college students to utilize if they have any questions or concerns. Please check out First in Line, visit us in the Basement of Sid Richardson West Wing or email firstinline@baylor.edu.

Military Connected Students

Veterans, active duty military personnel, and dependents are encouraged to connect with the VETS program, a space dedicated to supporting our military-connected students. Please communicate, in advance if possible, any special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployment, drill requirements, disability accommodations).

Health Resources for Students

Baylor University is strongly committed to addressing the mental health and wellness needs of students by providing access to on-campus healthcare resources. Access to quality and convenient healthcare is crucial to maintaining college students’ overall wellbeing. Students are welcome and should feel free to make use of these resources so as to make informed decisions regarding their health; the resources for several kinds of needs are listed below.

Crises and Emergencies: If you are in crisis and need help, please call 911.

**BUCC Crisis Line**: (254)710-2467 (Business Hours/Non-Business Hours/Weekends)

**Baylor Police Department**: (254)710-222

**MHMR Crisis Center**: (254)867-6550

**MHMR 24-Hour Emergency/Crisis Number**: (254)752-3451

When home during academic breaks, when the counseling center is closed, please call your local resources. Some national numbers for support during a crisis:

**National Hope Network Hotline**: 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**: 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

General Guidance for struggling students: Baylor University CARE Team Services

Located on the second floor of the Student Life Center, suite 207.

The Department of CARE Team Services is a team of case managers who work with students who are struggling with mental health issues, financial struggles, and anything else affecting a student’s ability to be successful in the classroom. This team connects students to resources both on and off campus and offer holistic care.

Contact Information: (254) 710-2100; CareTeam@baylor.edu.

Students’ Basic Needs (Food & Housing)

Food insecurity is defined as “a lack of consistent access to enough food for you to live an active, healthy life.” Food insecurity has been found to negatively impact college students’ physical and mental health, leading to poorer academic performance and attainment. At Baylor, we want all students to have access to food resources that will support their holistic well-being and success. There are several food support options across Baylor’s campus and in the larger Waco community. If you or
someone you know experiences food insecurity at any time, you can find information on campus and community food resources by visiting The Store. You can also contact Store staff at 254-710-4931. For additional basic needs assistance, please reach out to CASE or the Care Team.

**Physical Health and Wellness, Psychiatric Evaluations, Pharmacy: Baylor Health Services Department**

Baylor Health Services includes Primary Care, Psychiatry, Physical Therapy and Pharmacy and is staffed with fully certified and licensed physicians and nurse practitioners, as well as nurses and administrative staff. Appointments may be made by calling our main number or by logging into the health portal located on our website.

Contact Information: (254) 710-1010; Health_Services@baylor.edu.

**Wellness: Baylor University Department of Wellness**

Through programming, services, education, and research, the Department of Wellness seeks to promote holistically healthy lifestyles among Baylor students. Our aim is to provide Baylor students with the tools and resources that promote positive behavior change. Experiences offered through the Department of Wellness are organized into three functional areas: Fitness and Nutrition, Recovery Services, and Education & Outreach.

Located on the second floor of the Student Life Center.

Contact Information: (254) 710-7092; wellness@baylor.edu

**Baylor University Counseling Center**

The Counseling Center seeks to foster wholeness for every student through caring relationships, cultural humility and integrated mental health services.

Located on the second floor of the Student Life Center.

For an appointment, go to our website to schedule an Initial Assessment or call (254) 710-2467.

**Substance and Behavioral Addiction: Beauchamp Addiction & Recovery Center (BARC)**

The Beauchamp Addiction Recovery Center aims to support students in recovery from substance and behavioral addictions through an all-encompassing level of support approach that includes one-on-one mentorship, support groups, and social events open to all Baylor students.

Located in the East Village Residential Community (bottom floor of Teal Residential College).

Contact Information: (254)-710-7092; BARC@baylor.edu

**Spiritual Life: Baylor University Office of Spiritual Life**

The Office of Spiritual Life offers programs, persons, and resources to nurture theological depth, spiritual wholeness, and missional living.

Located on the corner of 5th and Speight Street in the Bobo Spiritual Life Center. Contact Information: (254) 710-3517; Spiritual_Life@baylor.edu
Vocation and Calling

- What comes to mind when you hear those words?
- What do you associate with them?
- How are they used in society? Church? School? Family/friends?
Myths of Coming to College

- Everyone knows what they’re doing.
- I have to know what I’m going to do right now.
- I can’t change my mind.
- My degree will dictate what I do.
- My job has to be my calling.
- There is only one path for my life.

What feelings do we experience when considering career and calling?

- Excitement – anticipation
- Doubt
- Anxiety/Fear
- Feeling Lost
- Apathy
- Too nonchalant
Consider the Path Metaphor

Are you following God’s path for your life or are you creating your own?

Consider the Path Metaphor
What are we doing here?

- (Re)defining the terms
  - Calling(s)/Vocation(s) - general/missional/direct
  - Career/work
  - Education

- Some goals
  - Help in starting the journey
  - Build confidence and courage
  - Build toughness and perseverance
APPENDIX G

STL 1102.N7 – PRESENTATION #2

Building a Vocational Framework
UNDERSTANDING THE NARRATIVE

SEPTEMBER 14, 2021

Reformational Worldview

Creation ➝ Fall ➝ Redemption
Creation

- Genesis 1-2
- God created everything and it was good
  - After humanity, it was very good
- *Imago Dei* – Image of God
  - Genesis 1:26-27
- Cultural mandate
  - Genesis 1:28
- Rest
  - Genesis 2:2-3

Fall

- Genesis 3
- Corruption which touches all of creation, human and non-human
- Work and toil
- Failure of vocation/calling
- Need for restoration
Redemption

- Equally as pervasive as the Fall, touching all human/non-human creation
- Foreshadowed in the Old Testament and realized in the New Testament
  - Jesus sent by God the Father as the Incarnate Word, the good news of salvation
  - Holy Spirit – the seal and promise of eternal life
- New creation – new heaven, new earth

Structure and Direction

- Structure – creational goodness
- Direction – fallen distortion or redemptive renewal
What does this have to do with vocation and calling?

- Humans are narrative creatures
- All stories are oriented towards something; they have a *telos* (aim)
- All human life has an ultimate goal in mind
- Vocation and calling relate to our participation in the grand narrative and ultimate goal of life
- Vocation and calling = participation in the life of God’s kingdom

Exercise

- Break up into groups of 3-4
- Analyze sports using the CFR model
  - What elements display the good of Creation? (Structure)
  - In what ways are the Fall manifested? (Direction)
  - How might Redemption be embodied in this space? (Direction)
- Discuss various elements
The Various Contours of Calling

General, Missional, and Direct

September 21, 2021

Types of Callings

General  Missional  Direct
General Calling

- God's desire for all people, but especially his people, the Church (e.g., prayer, mercy, justice, studying Scripture, and other spiritual formation practices)
- Greatest Commandment (Matt. 22:37-40)
- No seeking required

General Calling

- Taught and supported by community of faith (Scriptures—knowing; Church → doing)
- No guarantee of comfort; tension is present
- Does not necessarily line up with your gifttings or passions; can be hard work
• Missional calling refers to the main contribution that your life makes to God’s Kingdom – Doug Koskela, *Calling & Clarity*

• “mission statement” of your life – distinctive direction in which you aim to spend the bulk of your time, gifts, and energy

Avoid 2 mistakes:

1. Associate vocation exclusively with your job or career.
2. Think of vocation only in terms of one particular situation or task.

• **Aligns with your gifts**
Natural talents & Spirit-endowed gifts

• **Passion**
What are you passionate about and what gives you joy?

• **Takes time to discern**
Process for discernment

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.
Missional Calling - Reflection

- What are your gifts?
  Natural talents & Spirit-endowed gifts
- What are your passions?
  What are you passionate about and what gives you joy?
- Takes time to discern
  Who can you talk to?
  Where can you retreat?
  What do you do with silence?

Direct Calling

Direct calling...

1. Does not necessarily line up with your gifts or passions (e.g., Moses, Paul)
2. Is to a specific place and/or role
3. Is from God in some direct manner (e.g., audible, dream, vision, others)
4. Is usually clear, but confirmation is still good
5. Varies in duration and scope
6. Is more the exception than the norm, but it does happen
Biblical Examples

- Old Testament – Adam/Eve, Abraham, Noah, Moses
- New Testament – John the Baptist, Jesus, Disciples/Apostles, Paul
APPENDIX I

STL 1102.N7 – PRESENTATION #4

VOCATION & CALLING AS FORMATION

September 28, 2021

VIRTUE, VICE, AND CHARACTER

• Virtue – tendency, disposition, or capacity to do good
• Vice – tendency, disposition, or capacity which hinders realization of the good
• Habituation – a repetitive process which takes time but becomes second nature (e.g., language, playing an instrument)
• Character – habituation towards a life of virtue or vice
  • https://youtu.be/TEpfly7V0LZw
VIRTUE

- Virtue – tendency, disposition, or capacity to do good
- Examples related to vocation/calling
  - Love
  - Perseverance
  - Faithfulness
  - Integrity
  - Authenticity
- Who and/or what allows for the growth of virtue in your life?

VICE

- Vice – tendency, disposition, or capacity which hinders realization of the good
- Examples related to vocation/calling
  - Hate
  - Arrogance
  - Fear
  - Despair
  - Futility
- Who and/or what allows for the growth of vice in your life?
COMMUNITY

- Discerning vocations and callings is a relational, communal practice
- Others (e.g., family, friends, mentors) help you in the process and call out the activity of God in your life
- From and for community
  - From – Triune God (three in one; eternal community; each person fulfilling their role)
  - For – Edification of the body of Christ; one body, many parts

IMPORTANCE OF FRAMEWORK FOR FORMATION

- The meta-narrative provides the context for where we are going (i.e., the goal)
- Formation is (eternally) significant because it anticipates the renewed life to come in the here and now
  - Signposts of the already/not yet fully reality
TAKEAWAYS

• Vocation/calling as what we do = a privilege

• Everyone can explore who they are called to be

• One of your present callings is to be a student
  • Higher education is a preparation for both livelihood and life
FINDING THE THREAD

VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT

OCTOBER 19, 2021

Vocational Sweet Spot

- Abilities
  - What am I good at?
  - What do I care about?
- Aches
  - Where have I encountered the brokenness of the world?
- Affections
  - What are the realistic circumstances of my life?
- Anchors
Abilities

- You can be whatever you want to be = MYTH
  - Honesty is key
- Seek many (and a variety of) counselors
  - “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.” Proverbs 15:22
- Tests and Assessments
  - E.g., Strengthsfinder, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, DISC Assessment, Traitify, and Super Strong Interest Inventory
- Practical Questions
  - What are my natural gifts?
  - What experiences and training have I received?

Aches

- Seeking satisfying work that uses your strengths is a good start
  - Participation in the mission of God (i.e., redemption) requires using our gifts to engage the brokenness of the world
- Knowing what you know, and experiencing what you have experienced, what are you going to do?
Affections

- What do you deeply enjoy?
- What makes you angry? Sad? Happy?
- Emotions should not dictate your life, but they can be an indicator
- With maturity and growth in Christlikeness, you can harness your emotions in service to God and others

Anchors

- Account for the realities of one’s life
  - E.g., Chronic pain, needs of young children, community, level of education
- Circumstances often keep us from drifting in just any direction
  - They keep us anchored in particular places and rooted in particular things
    - E.g., Paul
- Practical Questions
  - What are your anchors or real circumstances of life?
  - What are your commitments or responsibilities?
Vocational Wisdom

- Your calling is not (just) about you
- Don’t get trampled by the herd mentality
- Articulate a clear vision for your life, but write it in pencil
- Employment that fits your vocational sweet spot is a privilege, not a promise
- There’s no back door to Eden
- Do something

In their first year, new students at Baylor are called to flourish in a community ...

- . . . of academic rigor
- . . . of personal growth
- . . . of faith formation
- . . . of cultural humility

- What are your callings in these areas?
- How can you discern callings in these areas?
Vocational Sweet Spot

Abilities:
- What am I good at?

Aches:
- What do I care about?
- Where have I encountered the brokenness of the world?

Affections:
- What are the realistic circumstances of my life?

Anchors:
BIBLIOGRAPHY


