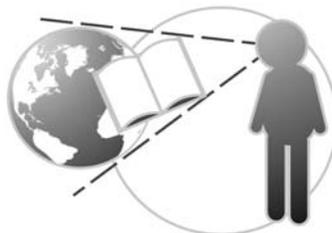


WORLDVIEWS AT WORK

Most adults in the Western world spend half of their waking hours at work. In many developing countries, the number of hours spent at work is even higher. Yet for all the time we spend working, we seldom reflect on the questions, What is work? Why do we work? We live largely unexamined lives; we do the things our mothers and fathers have done, in some countries for generations, without explanation. To simply begin to take seriously these questions could create a radical reordering of our lives.

As with all questions, the answers are ultimately determined by one's worldview.¹ Our worldview determines how we see the world, the kinds of lives we live, and the kinds of societies we create. Our worldview shapes how we will answer the metaphysical questions we all face—basic questions about the nature of reality. There is an objective worldview, the worldview of the Bible. All other worldviews, to a greater or lesser extent, are a distortion of the reality that God has made.

THE POWER OF STORY

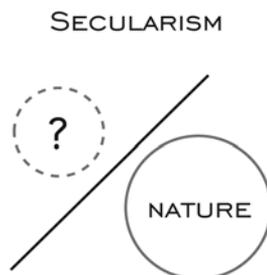


All humans are social beings. We assimilate our mindset, our way of seeing the world, from our culture. We tend to think the way our culture thinks and value what our culture values. This is part of what it means to be human. When we come to Christ, we need to begin to have our minds renewed. The word *repent*—the Greek word *metanoeo*—literally means to change one’s mind. To repent is to begin to see the world the way God made the world and then to live and act within that framework. We are to have the mind of Christ; we are to bring every thought captive to Christ; we are no longer to be conformed to the world but are to be transformed by the renewal of our minds.² In coming to Christ, we need to begin to think “Christianly.” We need to increasingly have the mind of Christ, not the mind we inherit from our culture.

To the extent that the worldviews of our cultures distort reality, they are inadequate to show us the nature of God, the world, and ourselves as they and we really are. Unless we have been intentional about renewing our minds according to the worldview of the kingdom, our cultural worldview will determine, consciously or unconsciously, our concept of work. In addition to biblical theism, there are two major worldviews: secularism, which assumes that reality is only physical, and animism, which assumes that the universe is ultimately spiritual. Sadly, the worldview of much of the evangelical, charismatic, and Pentecostal world today is not biblical theism but rather a subset of the animistic worldview, a Greek dualism that divides reality between the physical and the spiritual and assumes that the spiritual is more important. Each of these worldviews leaves us with an impoverished view of the universe, which in turn impoverishes individuals and whole nations and societies. We see this in both “developed” and “developing” countries, though the trend unfolds in very different directions. How might these worldviews be shaping your own understanding of your life and work?

SECULARISM: THE COST OF CONSUMPTION

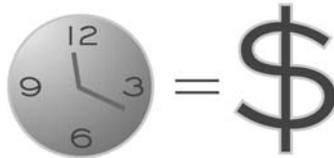
Mother Teresa, visiting the city of New York from her home city of Calcutta—perhaps one of the most physically poor cities in the world—said she had never seen such poverty as she faced in New York. She understood the sad truth: Western society has largely exchanged material development for moral and spiritual bankruptcy.



The concept of work held today in much of the Western world, including Canada and the United States, has been framed by the materialistic or secular paradigm. In this worldview, there is no spiritual reality, only physical reality. From this perspective, what does work do? It gives us access to material things. The purpose of work is to allow us to consume. Man is an animal, a highly evolved animal, but he is basically a consumer. In this paradigm, man has no intrinsic worth. There is no God in whose image we are made, giving our lives value. Instead our value as human beings is determined by what we have. According to this worldview, the more we consume, the better life is. As the modern proverb reads, “Whoever dies with the most toys wins!” Accordingly, success in the workplace means moving higher up the career ladder, accumulating more money or power for the purpose of affording greater consumption.

Falling far short of God’s intentions, work in the West is largely utilitarian and self-serving; money, power, leisure, and self-fulfillment are the goals. Hedonism reigns: “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die!”

THE COST OF CONSUMPTION



The consequences of this view of life and work are systemic for both individuals and whole societies. Home and community are diminished as work becomes the primary social environment. Because life is reduced to having things, people sacrifice what money can’t buy—their spiritual identities, their marriages and children, their friendships and families—for success in the marketplace, doing whatever it takes to get ahead. Truth and virtue give way to pragmatism. Professionalism replaces character as the primary virtue. There is no metaphysical foundation for creativity. The future disappears for present consumption. Service to community is lost in service to self. Stewardship of creation is replaced with a rape of resources for opulent consumption. Ultimately, people miss their purpose in life, spending not only their dearly earned money but also the very days of their lives on what can never satisfy the human soul.

Social critic Os Guinness describes this shift away from a biblical worldview in Western societies as a move from a “calling economy” to a “commercial economy.”³ Since medieval times, however, there has been a broader purpose to education: to enrich and form the inner person in terms of both faith and the ability to think rationally and comprehensively about life and its many elements—to grow in wisdom as

well as stature. The very first universities, in Europe, were founded as church schools, in fact, with an intentional, clearly Christian perspective on the gathering of knowledge and study. In earlier America, schools were founded not only to teach the three Rs but also to shape better citizens of God's kingdom. Curricula had frequent reference to biblical information and forthright moral instruction. This extended to higher education as the first American universities were founded by the churches, just as their European predecessors had been. They were places of training for new clergy as well as preparation of young men for other pursuits, most of the same subjects and training of the mind being seen as a good grounding for any worthy direction in life.

By the twentieth century, however, a shift began taking place in our society's understanding of life purpose and the significance of work. Whether or not individuals acknowledged it consciously, the purpose of life was reduced to working so that one could be productive, ensuring that there would be wealth in society for consumption. The marketplace became critical for determining self-worth. People who could make a lot of money were considered more valuable than those who couldn't. So the reason one went to school, even to college or university, was not to learn and grow as a person but to be able to have a job when one graduated.

When our life purpose is stunted in this way and when our worth is based on how much money we make, on how big our paychecks are, we become bankrupt in the ways that truly matter. In this paradigm, work becomes a god, an idol; humankind's good impulse to diligent work is distorted when work is separated from the Creator and from the kingdom of God. Work becomes an escape from the pressures of a broken or meaningless life. People become addicted to work as a means to escape hollow, unexamined, purposeless lives and societies that are morally, intellectually, and spiritually impoverished. But the tragic element of our workaholic society is that because work is separated from God, it becomes equally meaningless. What is promised to give us fulfillment ends up adding to the despair.

As Western Christians we experience the despair and impoverishment of the new commercial economy to varying degrees, depending on how acclimated we are to the surrounding culture. Some of us may be living just like our neighbors to an extent that we don't realize, judging others and ourselves by the affluence of our lifestyles and unconsciously placing undue value on what money can buy. We may place great pressure on ourselves to measure up to others with the prestige of our career or the way we can build a desirable lifestyle or provide amply for our families. We may find ourselves continually dissatisfied, always thinking life will be better—indeed that life will finally *start*—if only we could buy our own home, add the extra room onto the house, move to a better neighborhood, pay off the mortgage, take that dream vacation, or retire early. In short, without realizing it we may be basing our goals, priorities, and

plans on a false premise, unmindful of the irreconcilable culture clash between the worldview of Scripture and the worldview of our society.

Alternatively, we may experience a great deal of dissonance, recognizing these cultural tendencies in ourselves and feeling dismayed at the gap between what we believe to be true and how we actually live at this foundational level. We struggle to truly *hear* Jesus saying to us, “I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?” (Matt. 6:25). We have a good idea of where we ought to be and want to be and are distressed to see the extent to which we are not just in the world but of it. About our own material necessities, Jesus said, “The pagans run after all these things” (Matt. 6:32), and sometimes we find ourselves not much different. In a culture where material expectations run high, we, too, can find our families struggling, our connection to our communities squeezed out, our identities in Christ unsure, our very selves blown here and there. We, too, can find ourselves despairing at the gulf between how we think life is supposed to be and the meaninglessness we sometimes experience, whether deeply or fleetingly, over the repeating mechanics of sustaining the status quo, all the while knowing that so many around us are suffering—that we and the world need something radically different.

It’s not just Christians experiencing this dissonance. Many others we know in our communities, universities, workplaces, and children’s schools realize that life is more than consumption. They are seeking to live purposeful, intentional lives, according to a set of deeper values. Many are committed to living simply, in a head-on rejection of the materialism of the culture. Many are going green. Many are working to build a healthier community in their own city or across the world. They are volunteers. They are activists. They are concerned. They are zealous. While they do not know that the kingdom of God is what will make sense of their desire and address the brokenness radiating through every aspect of human life, they feel the need acutely.

So many of us experience this dissonance because the need—the lack—is *real*. God created us for a very different kind of life. Life as we experience it, and all we know about ourselves, simply does not fit with the secular materialistic paradigm.

As Christians in the midst of a materialistic culture, we share with many seekers a rampant hunger for the countercultural invitation of the Maker of the universe, who knows how and why he created us. “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live” (Isa. 55:1–3).

ANIMISM: THE CURSE OF FATE

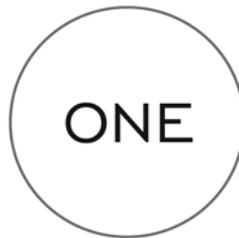
Billions of people in the developing world are also dying to hear this open invitation from the Creator and Savior of the universe. Unaware of their true identity and the true character of God and his creation, they, too, are experiencing the death of the soul of man, and not only that, but also the death of their very bodies.

In many of the countries of the world where people are materially impoverished, some people are lazy, as there are lazy people everywhere. But the vast majority put in long hours of backbreaking work with little return. Even bright young college graduates find stagnant economies with little opportunity for work. Others find jobs in the public sector that do not take advantage of this immense pool of talent.

Much of the blame for these stagnant economies can be laid at the feet of the greedy and corrupt behavior of government officials and those mercantilists and tribal chiefs who control the economy. This behavior is institutionalized in laws and structures that are against freedom and either strip the poor of the fruits of their labor or rob them altogether of the opportunity to work. Autocratic leadership styles squash initiative, innovation, and creativity. Controlled economies and rampant corruption sap economic initiative. Lack of property rights and copyright protections prevent hardworking people and artisans from enjoying their rightful reward.

All this springs from a culture of corruption where bribery is a way of life, where there is no moral or metaphysical challenge. Undergirding such cultures is often a traditional animistic belief system in which spirits animate nature. In such an outlook, moral responsibility is removed from humankind; people are left in the hands of “the fates” or disinterested or even hostile spirits. Seen through this fatalistic lens, reason and efforts to increase understanding and the ability to affect or use natural resources have little apparent value. According to this worldview, work is a curse of fate; work only compounds man’s misery. It is drudgery. We work in order to survive.

ANIMISM: THE NEW PAGANISM



I remember meeting a young man from West Africa after he heard me talk on this subject. He said to me, “I have an illustration for you. In my country all the young

people want to go to the university so that after they graduate, they can get a ‘tie job.’” They mean a government job where they can work in an air-conditioned office, drive a car that’s air-conditioned, and draw a paycheck for not really working. He was serious. In much of the developing world, this is how people see work—as a curse to escape.

THE CURSE OF FATE



In some developing countries you will find men with very long fingernails on their pinky finger as a sign of their disdain for work. Because one cannot do hard physical labor and at the same time grow long fingernails, they are broadcasting to the world that they are above manual labor—that they are elite. When work is a curse, what you want to do is get other people to work for you. In many countries where there is an aristocracy, the aristocrats exist because there is a low view of work. Believing that work is bad, aristocratic people have slaves and servants to do the work for them. This culture of poverty is found in the former Soviet Union. Two Russian proverbs illustrate this: “Labor loves fools” and “Smart people don’t work.”⁴

I was discussing this with a friend from Venezuela, Xiomara Suarez. She said, “Darrow, I have a song for you,” and sang it for me. A year later we were at a conference, and I asked Xiomara to sing this song because it illustrated the attitude toward work in her country. As she began to sing in Spanish, people from four or five other Spanish-speaking countries all immediately joined in. I thought it was just a Venezuelan song, but it is obviously a song known all over the Spanish-speaking world. The song is “The Black Man of the Batei.”

I’m called the black man of the Batei
 Because for me “WORK” is like an enemy
 All work I’ll leave it to the ox
 Because God made work as a punishment [italics added].

Now can you imagine if the culture as a whole sings this song all the time? Work is punishment? What is work made for? For the animals, not for man.

I like to dance this merengue music
 To dance it with a black good-looking lady
 I like to dance it, all night, from side to side
 To dance it hugging closely my nice good-looking lady.

I like to dance merengue,
Merengue's better than work
Because having to work
It causes me a great pain [italics added].

Why are some nations poor? When you believe that work is a curse, you avoid work and don't respect the work of others. Work and labor are demeaning. If you have whole nations where the goal is to avoid work and where those with power corruptly live off the efforts of those who are less powerful, what will that tend to produce? It will produce poverty, not productivity. At the root of the poverty is a moral and spiritual impoverishment just as tragic as that of the West, with millions cut off from the true story about themselves and the world.

Even if we live in affluence and think we have no relation to animism, we still can find reflections of ourselves in the animistic worldview. The words to "The Black Man of the Batei" and the crowd's identification with them are really not that shocking to a lot of us. With a different cultural flair, the same sentiments are flying back and forth across the tables of a million restaurants, pubs, and family dining rooms every Friday afternoon. Most everyone knows the familiar acronym TGIF. There's even the restaurant T.G.I. Friday's, where we can duly celebrate the end of the workweek. Like kids released by the school bell, when work lets out we thank God that it's finally Friday, when our time is our own, when "real life" happens. Of course, we can be happy about work well done and happy to rest as God intends us to do. But the sentiment doesn't usually run on that wavelength.

For years the American country-music legend George Jones ushered in every weekend on radio stations all over America with the hit "Finally Friday."⁵ Like those of "The Black Man of the Batei," the words of "Finally Friday" are a window on how people think and feel about work. The lyrics contrast the "workin' blues" of a barely survivable workweek with the good times of the free "wild weekend" flush with money and time to burn. While most of us probably don't rush out after work on Fridays to exercise our freedom with booze and women as this song describes, we may be all too familiar with the dread of Mondays... and Tuesdays and Wednesdays and Thursdays. We might identify strongly with the contrast between the working blues and the anticipation and sweetness of freedom. Even though its exact images may be as foreign to

some North Americans as those of the Latin folk song, this country classic resonates even in the midst of the workaholic culture of the West. This anthem could be our own: *It's finally Friday; I'm free again.*

In this, too, Christians are not immune from the thought life and emotional landscape of their cultures. Just as we experience a tug-of-war with the self-serving materialistic elevation of work, we may feel a great dissonance between what our Christian faith says about the sacredness of our work and what we may experience as the drudgery of work. Even though we know better, there are times we act as if work is a curse. Even though we may sometimes enjoy our work and on our best days even experience it as a calling, other times we catch ourselves acting or thinking as if we are slaves to it, as if we would abandon it at first chance, as if it has no intrinsic value and no inherent connection to who we really are or what we're really about.

We may know that God didn't institute work as a curse; we may know that God created us in his own image—made us to work as he does with great purpose and reward. But to our disappointment and unease, in our actual experience work is often more about survival than the fulfillment of our destinies. We may work solely to provide the necessities for ourselves and our families, even as we're not sure exactly what *is* necessary, but surely food and shelter and clothing are. We may work simply to get by. On some level we may feel trapped, as a true animist does, at the mercy of forces beyond our control. For the sake of these necessities, because of these hard facts of life, we sacrifice the working hours of our lives—but no more than that. When the weekend comes, or our days off, we greet it with sweet relief.

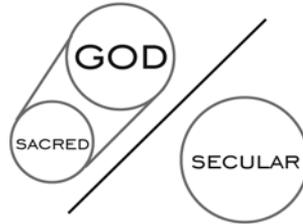
Sadly, the sweetness often doesn't last. When we've spent all week being dissatisfied and waiting for life to start, we often continue in the same mindset, stuck in a rut. Our days off, and all our hopes pinned on them, are often a disappointment. Our view of work is impossible to separate from our view of life. We find that our expectations for a happy and meaningful life cannot be met in a few days to the exclusion of the others. We run into the truth: rather than a curse, or what we do to get by, work is at the center of our identity and foundational to our purpose.

AN UNBIBLICAL DUALISM: THE PLACE OF SPIRITUAL OUTREACH

The modern evangelical church, instead of providing a worldview that will challenge the tragic impoverishment of the animistic and materialistic paradigms, has largely withdrawn from public life and abandoned the culture and the marketplace. In reaction to the advancement of the secular worldview into modern society, much of the leadership of the church in the early twentieth century abandoned the biblical worldview for

a Christian version of an ancient dualistic worldview that divides the universe between the spiritual realm, which is good and holy, and the physical realm, which is evil and profane. (We'll trace how this dualistic thinking infected the church in chapter 2.) The results are familiar to most of us.

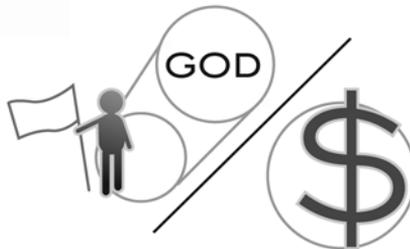
EVANGELICAL DUALISM



The perceived split between heaven and earth, between the spiritual and the physical worlds, has taken on two forms in Christian thinking about work: the “higher calling” and the “place for spiritual outreach.”

The first manifestation of this dualistic thinking among Christians is a desire for a higher calling. According to this mentality, it is best to leave the secular arena and go into the spiritual arena so we can be “full-time Christian workers.” Only evangelists, church planters, pastors, missionaries, and theologians are doing full-time Christian work according to this view, because only these kinds of work are spiritual. The “helping professions” (social workers, charity workers, counselors, etc.) rank a close second to “full-time ministry.” On the other hand, accounting, carpentry, filmmaking, the arts, farming, and homemaking are secular activities and thus lower activities. They are less spiritual. So Christians will leave the workplace because their desire is to be more spiritual. When Christians don’t go out as missionaries but remain in their communities to do the “secular” work they did before they were Christians, they are often made to feel guilty.

A HIGHER CALLING



The second concept holds that the secular workplace is a place for spiritual outreach. The idea is that if we can't be full-time Christian workers, we should do spiritual activity in our workplaces. According to this mindset, having Bible studies and prayer meetings in the workplace justifies our existence as Christians who are not in missions. It allows us to function in this lower realm because we are bringing the higher realm into the lower realm. But this reasoning is still framed by the unbiblical dichotomy, the sense of living in two worlds.



It is not only in the area of profession that Christians struggle with living in two worlds but also in the area of deployment. When we see a division between so-called spiritual and secular work, working overseas becomes the higher deployment. Working at home is the lower deployment. Many Christians feel guilty for not working overseas, because that is the higher calling. Staying home is to be a second-class Christian. But really we can't win. When we accept this unbiblical thinking, going overseas isn't enough. According to some, working in the 10/40 Window or among unreached people groups is the most spiritual, while other cross-cultural missions are only second best.

All of this teaching is a reflection of an unbiblical paradigm that has left individuals mere shadows of what God intends, the church largely disengaged from culture, communities mired in poverty, and nations undisciplined. There have never been more Christians or churches in the world than there are today. Over the past fifty years there has been an unprecedented push on evangelism, church planting, and church growth. In many parts of the world we have been very successful at what we have set out to do: save souls, plant churches, and develop megachurches. But to what end? Material poverty still reigns in developing countries that have been evangelized; meanwhile, moral and spiritual poverty reign in the "Christian" West.

In many parts of the world where the church is growing, the growth is "a mile wide and an inch deep." It has forgotten its function of being salt and light in society,

of bringing the kingdom of God to life and light in the everyday street and marketplace, and when needed, to be a prophetic voice. In this forgetting, the church has become largely impotent.

We are faced with this dire situation in the moment of unprecedented opportunity. Communism has collapsed around the world. The materialistic paradigm has been found seriously wanting in the West, feeding the body but not the soul, so that amidst all of our relative wealth, even luxury, there are increasing signs of human distress. Meanwhile the church is facing great challenge, even to its existence in places, and Islam is growing around the world. The world is longing for a vibrant Christianity, one that addresses the profound moral, spiritual, social, economic, and political crises facing much of the world.

Why is the church unprepared to respond? Because the Christian's life and work have been separated both from their foundation in the biblical worldview and from the end to which all of life moves—the kingdom of God. Without a transcendent framework that speaks to all areas of life, our life purpose is truncated to dying to go to heaven. We've lost the larger framework in which it is understood that our lives and work are in relationship—in relationship to God through worship, to others through service, and to creation through stewardship. Our lives and work have largely been separated from their mission, and this ultimately stems from a loss of the biblical worldview. When we've succumbed to dualistic thinking, the majority of each of our lives—the supposedly "secular" part—is informed by the impoverishing worldviews of our culture, by elements of the materialism and animism described above, rather than by the truth witnessed to in Scripture.

How has the church of Jesus Christ, and so many of us individually, arrived in this powerless place? In the next chapter we'll trace the roots of dualism in our Christian heritage so that we can move beyond this damaging paradigm once and for all and truly hear God when he says to us and all humankind, "Come to *me*; hear *me*, that your soul may live" (Isa. 55:3; italics added). Life—every aspect, every day of the week, personally and corporately—is found in the God who created and sustains *heaven and earth* and *all* that is in them. Dualism, as we'll see in the next chapters and throughout this book, is antithetical to the Christian faith and untrue to reality.