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CALL AND RESPONSE: HOW CHRISTIAN MUSICIANS  
CAN GLORIFY GOD IN THEIR WORK

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Religion and Philosophy Division

Pepperdine University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Sergio Gallardo Palma

April 2021

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This thesis, written by

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under the guidance of a faculty committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to  
and accepted by the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

April 2021

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# CALL AND RESPONSE: HOW CHRISTIAN MUSICIANS CAN GLORIFY GOD IN THEIR WORK

by

Sergio Gallardo Palma

April 2021

Dr. Daniel A. Rodriguez, Chairperson

## ABSTRACT

While many Christian musicians take up their work in the world in the context of formal ministry or by pursuing a career in worship music, there are also many musicians who are devout Christians who do not necessarily feel called to express their vocation in such contexts. Nonetheless, they can take up their work in the world through their craft and glorify God in countless ways that do not necessitate making overtly Christian music or leading worship at their church. This thesis will first explore a pneumatological theology of work. It will then explore the calling of the musician, focusing on the work of the Spirit in the musical calling, and on the concept of vocational integrity and stewardship. To conclude, this project will provide three examples of Christians in the music industry—in different capacities and genres—who have sought to glorify God through their work. Whether it is by making career choices that are congruent with kingdom-living, using their platform to share the gospel with others, or creating music with theological themes woven into the lyrics and even the sounds themselves, Christian musicians who do not feel called to formal ministry or worship music-making, can—and should—seek to glorify God through their work.

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

When asked whether it is better for Christians to become pastors or missionaries or to live out their faith in their workplace, Barna research shows that 64% of those surveyed think that neither option is inherently better than the other. However, when the question is which professions are better suited—or have the most potential—to serve the common good or to be considered a calling, the preference for “missionary” and “religious leader” is clear.<sup>1</sup> This preference is often the result of an ill-conceived theology of work, which results in a two-realm theory, where one is *sacred* and the other one is *secular*. When we conceive of some forms of work as “sacred” and others as “secular,” we risk implying that God’s hand is absent from some professions.

Many Christians have callings that can be expressed through professions that do not necessarily have a clear path to formal ministry roles or overtly Christian practice. Consider Christian fashion designers, for example: while they might indeed live out their faith in their work and perhaps even design clothing for causes that will serve the common good, they will likely work in a secular environment, or for a secular company or brand. They might not necessarily experience the tension portrayed in the Barna research—the question of which professions have the most potential to serve the common good or be considered a calling—since they have found their calling in a line of work that does not have a clear “religious equivalent.” “Fashion designer” is not usually a staff position at church. However, there are some callings that can more easily be fulfilled through work in the realm of church or formal ministry.

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1. Barna Group, *Christians at Work* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2018), 32.

Christians who have such gifts might feel the tension described above, and might even feel guilty if they opt to take on a career in the “secular” world instead of taking up their work in the context of ministry. That is certainly the case with many Christians who have found their calling in music.

For Christian musicians, there is a clear path to work in formal ministry or making overtly Christian art. Churches are constantly in need of worship leaders and worship band members, and the Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) genre is alive and thriving in the industry. However, while many Christian musicians choose to take up their work in the world in the context of ministry or by pursuing a career in worship music, there are also many musicians who are devout Christians who do not necessarily feel called to express their vocation in such contexts. For musicians who find themselves in this group, the tension described above can be significant. Whether it is because of contextual pressure or because of an inadequate theology of work, musicians in this group might feel pushed—perhaps even obligated—to engage in “sacred” work. They might then carry the burden of assuming a role or responsibility that is not truly their own, and the burden of not embracing the work that God has *truly* called them to do.

With the above in mind, the aim of this project is to provide Christian musicians with a basic theology of work, a deeper understanding of the calling of the musician, and examples of musicians—past and present—who found ways to glorify God through their craft. In this effort, chapter 2 will lay a strong foundation on the topic at hand by exploring a pneumatological theology of work in order to, then, in chapter 3, delve into the calling of the musician and the features that characterize kingdom-oriented work, such as vocational integrity and stewardship. chapter 4 will then present three examples of the lives and careers of Christian musicians who



sought to glorify God in their work taking very different approaches. It is my hope that, by reflecting on the theology and examples provided in this work, musicians who feel called to glorify the Lord outside of the context of formal ministry or overtly Christian music might find themselves inspired, curious, encouraged, and filled with a desire to take up their work in the world in creative, kingdom-oriented ways which will bring about foretastes of the kingdom—regardless of the career path on which they end up embarking.

It is important to point out, before we embark on this journey of theology, work, and music, that it is not my intention to discourage any musicians from using their gifts in service—serving one’s church or community using one’s talents and engaging in gainful employment outside of the church context are not, by any means, mutually exclusive. Christian musicians should certainly strive to use their talents in service of their churches and communities whenever they are able to do so, be it by leading or performing during worship or by joining in any other service activities that involve using one’s gifts. The focus of this project, however, is on musicians’ primary jobs and careers, and on showing that they can take up their work in the world and glorify God through their craft in countless creative, kingdom-oriented ways.

## CHAPTER 2

### **A Pneumatological Theology of Work**

The purpose of a theology of work is to interpret, evaluate, and facilitate the transformation of human work.<sup>2</sup> As such, developing a theology of work is a vital first step in our pursuit of finding ways to glorify God through our work. Without a deep understanding of work as a key element of the Christian life, our quest to find ways to take up our work in the world through our craft will be much more difficult. We ought to think deliberately about the concept of work, about why we must glorify God through our work, and about what that really means before looking for specific ways to express it through our musical calling. With that in mind, in this chapter, we will explore a pneumatological theology of work as laid out by Miroslav Volf in his work, “Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work.” It is worth pointing out that Volf does not explore artistic or musical work specifically as he develops his pneumatological theology of work, and, as such, this chapter seeks to provide a strong foundation on a theology of work in general, rather than focusing on the work of the Christian musician.

#### Miroslav Volf and Work

Miroslav Volf is a Croatian theologian, author, and educator who has written or edited more than 20 books, over 100 scholarly articles, and whose work has been featured in several world-renowned journals and outlets—both Christian and secular.<sup>3</sup> Volf is a member of the Evangelical Church in Croatia and the Episcopal Church in the United States, and is actively involved in international ecumenical and interfaith dialogues, such as the Vatican’s Pontifical

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2. Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 7.

3. “Miroslav Volf,” Yale Center for Faith & Culture, <https://faith.yale.edu/people/miroslav-volf>.

Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the C-1 World Dialogue. He is also an active participant in the Global Agenda Council on Values of the World Economic Forum, and was the lead author of the Christian response to the historic open letter, “A Common Word Between Us and You,” which identified some core common ground at the heart of the Christian and Muslim faiths, and which was signed by 138 Muslim scholars, intellectuals, and clerics.<sup>4</sup>

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, having become increasingly dissatisfied with the vocational understanding of work dominant in Protestant circles at the time, Volf set out to develop a pneumatological theology of work based on the concept of *charisma*—a theology of work which, in Volf’s view, provides a more fitting, dynamic understanding of work which modern, dynamic societies require.<sup>5</sup> His theology of work is developed around the core belief that, since the whole life of a Christian is a life in the Spirit, work cannot be an exception.<sup>6</sup> This endeavor culminated in the publication of his book, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, published first in 1991 and again in 2001.

It is important to note that Volf develops this pneumatological theology of work in critical dialogue with Martin Luther’s notion of vocation—that is, the vocational understanding of work with which Volf contrasts his pneumatological theology of work is *specifically* that of Luther. In Volf’s view, Luther’s notion of vocation, in which *every type of work* performed by Christians can be a vocation and depends on each individual’s “standing” or “station” (condition or stage in life), has serious limitations, both in terms of its theological persuasiveness and its applicability to modern work.<sup>7</sup> He considers Luther’s notion of vocation to be indifferent toward

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4. Ibid.

5. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, viii.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., 105.

alienation, easily misused theologically, inadequate when applied to the modern diachronic and synchronic plurality of employments or jobs (holding different jobs at different times, or holding more than one job at any given time), and reducing the concept of vocation to just gainful employment.<sup>8</sup> We will explore how a pneumatological understanding of work overcomes such deficiencies at the end of this chapter. However, as we will explore in chapter 3, more modern understandings of vocation—such as Amy L. Sherman’s and Steven R. Guthrie’s—are compatible with Volf’s pneumatological theology of work, making the use of the terms *charism* and *vocation* essentially interchangeable.

Before delving into the main task of developing a theology of work, Volf provides a brief overview and definition of *work*, as well as the dominant understandings of work. For the purpose of this chapter, we will closely follow the structure of Volf’s book and, as such, we shall start there as well.

### What is Work?

Similarly to *time*, *work* is a concept that is so close to us that it might seem straightforward to grasp, yet we are never quite able to define it. Moreover, the concept is ever-evolving, given that new types of work are constantly rising to prominence. Volf proposes that, in order to avoid confusion, one must specify the understanding of work that underlies one’s reflection.<sup>9</sup>

Colloquially, what we generally mean by “work” is either gainful employment or toil and drudgery. However, Volf considers both meanings to be inappropriate as components of a formal

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8. *Ibid.*, 109.

9. *Ibid.*, 8.

definition of work.<sup>10</sup> On one hand, a person can be gainfully employed without actually working, or work without receiving any compensation. On the other hand, since people are capable of enjoying their work, drudgery is certainly not a necessary characteristic of work. In order to arrive at a more appropriate definition of work, then, we must aim to identify the characteristics an activity *must* have in order to be considered work, as well as what differentiates work from other activities.<sup>11</sup> With that in mind, the comprehensive definition that Volf proposes—and which we will use throughout this thesis—is the following:

Work is honest, purposeful, and methodologically specified social activity whose primary goal is the creation of products or states of affairs that can satisfy the needs of working individuals or their co-creatures, or (if primarily an end in itself) activity that is necessary in order for acting individuals to satisfy their needs apart from the need of the activity itself.<sup>12</sup>

In regards to his proposed definition, Volf makes a few clarifications. First, it is a *formal* definition of work which indicates the features an activity must have in order to be considered work—it does not aim to define the *character* of work. This definition alone does not intend, for example, to answer which kinds of work are compatible with human dignity, and which kinds are not.<sup>13</sup>

Second, while this definition paints work in such a way that it is opposite to leisure, work and freedom are not mutually exclusive—work, at its best, is an exercise of freedom. When done at one's own pace, using one's own skill, and from an inner need, one can be as free in work as in any other significant human activity.<sup>14</sup> The essential characteristic of work that makes it

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10. Ibid., 9.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 10.

13. Ibid., 11.

14. Ibid., 12.

different from leisure is not coercion or lack of freedom, but its *instrumentality*—it is a means to an end that lies outside of the activity itself. To be different from a useful hobby, pleasant work must not be done primarily for its own sake. It must be necessary to satisfy needs other than one's need for the activity itself.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, work must satisfy not only the needs of working individuals themselves, but also the needs of their co-creatures (the whole human race as well as nonhuman creatures), which makes this definition both socially and ecologically responsible.<sup>16</sup>

Third, this broad definition of work as an instrumental activity which satisfies the needs of human beings and their co-creatures implicitly determines the scope of Volf's discussion. The theology of work outlined in Volf's book deals with the question of how one should responsibly live one's life in relation to work *in general*. While he acknowledges the need for specific reflection on different types and spheres of human work—such as political, industrial, medical, agricultural, or artistic work—Volf's book does not aim to delve into each of such work spheres, as previously stated. He states that insofar as each of such types of work is *work*, general theological reflection on work, its meaning, nature, and purpose, applies to all of them equally.<sup>17</sup> Naturally, since the focus of this thesis project is on the work of Christians who are *musicians*, specific reflection on that sphere of human work will be drawn from other sources and authors, such as Amy L. Sherman and Steven R. Guthrie, in the next chapter.

### Dominant Understandings of Work

For a theology of work to be relevant today, it must not only consider the character of work and its role in our lives, but also the way we have come to *understand* our work. For this

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15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 13.

17. Ibid., 14.

reason, Volf follows his definition of work with a brief analysis of the dominant philosophies of work in modern societies. He focuses on Adam Smith's and Karl Marx's theories of work, which, while developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, have influenced the reality and understanding of work in today's world more than any other thinkers in the past or present.<sup>18</sup> Of course, over the years, economists have significantly modified these theories. Nevertheless, while acknowledging that all such theories have strengths and weaknesses—and that theory does not necessarily translate well into practice—we can gain great insight into the dominant contemporary understandings of work by looking at Smith's and Marx's concepts of work and learning from their mistakes and their valuable insights, given that such modifications often incorporated elements of one economic system into the other, and later modifications are often refinements of particular aspects of the original theories, leaving their main features untouched.<sup>19</sup>

### *Adam Smith's Understanding of Work*

For Smith, work is not only the main source of economic wealth—it also provides the structure for the whole fabric of society. He holds that economic activity is what creates wealth and fosters civilization—making “the good life” possible—and political and intellectual activity are subservient to it.<sup>20</sup> *Material production*, specifically, is the most economically and socially important form of labor, since it is the labor “that fixes and realises itself in some particular subject or vendible commodity, which lasts for some time at least after that labour is past.”<sup>21</sup> Whether by manual or intellectual work, material production has arguably become the most

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18. *Ibid.*, 46.

19. *Ibid.*, 47.

20. *Ibid.*, 49.

21. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Ransom House, 1937), 314.

significant form of work in today's world, given the widely held assumption that economic activity holds the key to happiness.<sup>22</sup>

Smith believes that “man was made for action and to promote by the exertion of his faculties such changes in the external circumstances both of himself and others, as may seem most favourable to the happiness of all.”<sup>23</sup> In regards to the purpose of work, while the first half of this statement makes it seem as though Smith thinks that work is the great end for which human beings were created, the second half makes it clear that labor is just a means to satisfy “the desire of bettering our condition”—which Smith thinks is one of the distinguishing characteristics of human beings.<sup>24</sup> Work is merely a means for achieving the “happiness of all.”

It is important to note that, despite work's centrality in Smith's economic theory, it is merely a means to an end. Remaining close to Smith's valuation of work, modern economic analysis takes work to be a necessary evil in order to obtain purchasing power over goods and services.<sup>25</sup>

Since work facilitates consumption—the “sole end and purpose of all production” in Smith's theory<sup>26</sup>—increasing efficiency becomes a priority. The most fundamental way to increase efficiency is the division of labor. Smith's understanding of the division of labor has been very influential in regards to three distinctive emphases. First, division of labor shapes human nature—it is not only who people are that determines what they do, but also what they do that determines who they are.<sup>27</sup> Second, with Smith, division of labor is practically the only

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22. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 49.

23. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1966), 153–54.

24. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 49.

25. *Ibid.*, 50.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*, 51.



factor in economic progress. Third, in Smith's view, division of labor is the principle that structures and sustains modern societies—human beings divide labor and exchange goods and services in order to better the condition of each individual.<sup>28</sup> However, while these emphases imply that division of labor is the main way in which individuals assist one another, Smith points out that they do so out of self-interest rather than out of self-sacrificial love. One of his most frequently quoted statements emphasizes this: “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.”<sup>29</sup> Smith does suggest that “to restrain our selfish, and to indulge our benevolent affections, constitutes the perfection of human nature,”<sup>30</sup> but he nevertheless maintains that there is no need for the exercise of this perfection in economic activities—there is no need for virtue to realize the common good, as it realizes itself through the work of industrious, self-interested individuals.<sup>31</sup>

For Smith, the alienation resulting from his theory of work and proposed economic system is not accidental—alienation is the price that societies have to pay for being economically advanced and civilized.<sup>32</sup> Alienation presents itself in three interrelated ways. First, in Smith's view, in regards to disputes with employers, the speed or length of time of work in hourly labor, and deciding the form of payment, the worker is effectively powerless. Second, alienation happens in the form of exploitation of the worker.<sup>33</sup> Smith points out the “oppressive inequality” in the existing conditions of workers, and attributes it at least partly to exploitation—oftentimes

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28. *Ibid.*, 53.

29. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 14.

30. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 11.

31. Volf, 53.

32. *Ibid.*, 54.

33. *Ibid.*

“those who labour most get least.”<sup>34</sup> Third, Smith notes that workers are estranged from their true selves. Spending one’s life performing a few simple operations has severely detrimental effects on one’s self. Smith claims that, since the faculty of reason is the distinctive characteristic of human beings, the “drowsy stupidity” resulting from a life of repetitive simple tasks causes all the nobler parts of human character to be “obliterated and extinguished” for the majority of the population.<sup>35</sup>

Of course, Smith does not claim that *all* work must be alienating as described above. He acknowledges that the division of labor results also in some “superior employments”—characterized by their complexity, their demand for creative thinking, and shorter hours which allow for a greater deal of leisure—which escape the alienating consequences of the division of labor. However, most of the population hold the “inferior employments” which face alienation. Smith believes that this is a burden that must be endured because the division of labor is the key to the progress of civilization.<sup>36</sup> Smith’s writings do not provide any suggestions on how to overcome alienation.<sup>37</sup>

### *Karl Marx’s Understanding of Work*

While Marx’s and Smith’s views might be similar in regards to the centrality of work in individual and social life, their perspectives on the purpose of work, the division of labor, and the resulting alienation in capitalist societies are different.<sup>38</sup>

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34. Adam Smith, *An Early Draft of Part of the Wealth of Nations*, in W. R. Scott, *Adam Smith as Student and Professor* (Glasgow: Jackson, 1937), 327.

35. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 55.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*, 49.

For Marx, work is a process between nature as an object, and human beings as acting subjects. As such, work has four distinguishing features. First, work is a purposeful activity, given that humans are rational beings. Second, the object on which work is performed can be provided either directly by nature or “be filtered by previous work” (agriculture versus manufacture, for example). The third essential element of work is the objects or tools with which work is performed. And fourth, all work is an “appropriation of nature on the part of an individual within and through a specific form of society,” given that human beings are essentially social beings. With those distinguishing features in mind, Marx understands work as a *“purposeful, social activity through which people, helped by tools, manipulate nature.”*<sup>39</sup>

The primary purpose of work, in Marx’s view, is that it “mediates the metabolism between man and nature, and therefore human life itself.”<sup>40</sup> For Marx, self-realization and the creation of a human world through the humanization of nature are essential functions of work. Naturally, the act of “creation” that Marx talks about does not imply that human beings are capable of creating nature *ex nihilo*, like God. What he means is that human beings leave imprints of themselves on nature—so that nature becomes, in a sense, their extended self—through their work.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, while the primary purpose of work is to secure human existence, it also functions as a means by which human beings develop their own potentials and create the world in their own image.<sup>42</sup>

In regards to alienation, Marx thinks that Smith’s proposed division of labor, along with the whole structure of a market economy, have to go in order to avoid the alienating

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39. Ibid., 57. Emphasis added.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., 58.

42. Ibid.

consequences they bring about. The backdrop for Marx’s analysis of Adam Smith’s capitalist society and the alienation that results from it is his expectation that a “higher mode of production” evolving out of capitalism will overcome all alienation in work.<sup>43</sup>

Marx’s theory of work holds that, when it is only a means to an end, work is alienating for two reasons. First, human beings are able to enjoy work when and only when they, at least to some extent, do it for its own sake. While Marx considers work to be “an eternal necessity,” he believes that humans should work because they like to work—not only because they have to work.<sup>44</sup> Second, since Marx believes that the whole character of a species is defined by the type of life activity, which for humans consists in work as a “free, conscious activity,” work as only a means to an end becomes alienating because then a person’s very “being [becomes] only a means for his existence,” rather than one’s “life expression.”<sup>45</sup>

Lastly, Marx critiques the division of labor and the capitalistic use of machinery because they take away part of the human being’s essence—Marx maintains that freedom and creativity are essential characteristics of human beings that need to be expressed also, and above all, in human work.<sup>46</sup>

### Developing a Theology of Work

Having explored two of the dominant theories of work in the West and thus placing the object of study in focus, we will now lay a foundation for a theology of work and its basic characteristics as proposed by Volf. Since Volf sets his theology of work within the broad theological framework of the concept of *new creation*, we will begin by discussing the

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43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., 59.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., 61.

significance of work in light of its continuity or discontinuity between the present and eschatological orders. Then, we will explore the fundamental meaning of work, arguing for an understanding of work as cooperation with God. We will end this section by laying out Volf's argument for a pneumatological understanding of work based on a theology of charisms, which suggests that work should be viewed from the perspective of the operation of God's Spirit.

### *Work and New Creation*

That Volf develops a theology of work within the broad theological framework of *new creation* means that he follows the basic principle that, at its very core, Christian faith is eschatological. Christian life is life in the Spirit of the new creation. As such, the Spirit of God should determine the *whole* life (spiritual as well as secular) of a Christian. Christian work is no exception—it must be done under the inspiration of the Spirit and in light of the coming new creation.<sup>47</sup>

In developing a theology of work within the framework of new creation, the question of continuity or discontinuity between the present and future orders—and the implications for work—becomes a key issue to tackle, since the answer to this question will determine the ultimate significance of human work. The answer to this question will determine whether work has any value in *vita activa*, or exclusively in *vita contemplativa*—that is, whether it has an *inherent value* as occupation with transitory things and relationships, or whether it only has instrumental value as a means to prepare us for the world to come.<sup>48</sup>

Leaving aside the more modern ethical and existential interpretations of the cosmological eschatological statements—which Volf considers not to be very persuasive, both theologically

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47. *Ibid.*, 79.

48. *Ibid.*, 89.

and religiously—theologians have held two main positions in relation to the eschatological future of the world. One view, *annihilatio mundi*, maintains a radical discontinuity between the present and future orders, believing in the creation of a fully new world at the end of the ages, after the complete destruction of the present world. The other view, *transformatio mundi*, postulates the continuity between the present and future orders, believing in the transformation of the present world into the new heaven and earth. From these basic eschatological models, follow two radically different theologies of work.<sup>49</sup>

On one hand, under the presupposition of *annihilatio mundi*—that the world will be annihilated and a new one will be created *ex nihilo* (cf. 2 Pet. 3:10)—human work is devoid of any direct ultimate significance.<sup>50</sup> While human work can naturally, albeit indirectly, serve purposes whose importance transcends the end of times—for example, one can view work as a school for the purification of the soul in preparation for heavenly bliss—its results are eschatologically inconsequential outside of its direct or indirect influence on people’s souls.<sup>51</sup> That is not to say, of course, that one cannot strive to improve the lives of others, to generate edifying social change, and to care for nature, and at the same time believe in the annihilation of the world at the end. However, while belief in *annihilatio mundi* and responsible social involvement are logically compatible, Volf holds that they are theologically inconsistent.<sup>52</sup> It is hard to ascribe intrinsic value and goodness to something that God will ultimately destroy entirely. Expecting the eschatological annihilation of the world is not congruent with the belief in the goodness of creation, as it implies that the world is either so bad that it cannot be redeemed,

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49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid., 90.

52. Ibid.

or so insignificant that it is not worth redeeming.<sup>53</sup> So, without a theologically grounded belief that creation has intrinsic value and goodness, positive cultural involvement hangs theologically in the air.<sup>54</sup>

On the other hand, under the presupposition of *transformatio mundi*—that the world will end in eschatological transformation rather than in apocalyptic destruction—human work has inherent value and gains ultimate significance (cf. Isa. 11:6-10; 65:17-25; Rom. 8:21). The results of the cumulative work of human beings are *directly* related to the eschatological new creation, not only indirectly through the service and sanctification they facilitate.<sup>55</sup> Whatever is beautiful, true and good in human cultures, the noble products of the ingenuity of human beings, will be cleansed, perfected, and transfigured to become a part of God's new creation. The expectation of eschatological transformation gives ultimate significance to human work, since, through it, human beings, in their modest and broken way, contribute to God's new creation.

In addition to ascribing intrinsic value and ultimate significance to positive cultural involvement, developing a theology of work within the framework of the eschatological continuity of *transformatio mundi* has the benefit of providing us with important inspiration for action when our efforts at doing good deeds, finding truth, creating beauty, and bringing about edifying change through our work are not appreciated. Belief in *transformatio mundi* gives us hope that our noble, oftentimes unappreciated efforts are not in vain—that God values everything good, true, and beautiful that we create, and that human beings in the new creation will appreciate it.<sup>56</sup>

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53. Ibid., 91.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid., 92.

Scripturally, while the New Testament does not provide us with a cultural mandate or an explicit “gospel of work”—the passages that talk explicitly about work view it as a means of securing sustenance rather than as an instrument of cultural advancement (Matt. 25:34ff.; 2 Thess. 3:6ff.; Eph. 4:28)—Volf thinks that the Old Testament view of work “should caution us against concluding too hastily that a positive valuation of cultural development is incompatible with a New Testament understanding of Christian faith.”<sup>57</sup> In the Old Testament, the purpose of work is not merely sustenance—its purpose is also cultural development, which includes activities ranging from perfecting building techniques, to the refinement of musical skills (Gen. 4:17ff.).<sup>58</sup> While this argument from the Old Testament is important, the implicit significance of work in the New Testament—beyond mere sustenance—depends ultimately on the nature of New Testament eschatology, since the value of creation determines the significance of work, and the value of creation depends on its final destiny.<sup>59</sup> With that in mind, if the final destiny of creation is the eschatological transformation of *transformatio mundi*, then we must ascribe inherent value to human work, independent of its relation to the proclamation of the gospel, in spite of the lack of explicit exegetical support.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the search for a broader significance of work in the New Testament leads us back to the discussion about the continuity between the present and future orders.

One can adduce both explicit and implicit theological arguments for the idea of the eschatological *transformatio mundi* in the New Testament. For example, there is an emphasis on the *earthly locale of the kingdom of God* in the New Testament that is not only congruent with

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57. Ibid., 93.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.



the earthly hopes of the Old Testament prophets (Isa. 11:6-10; 65:17-25), but more importantly, with the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Volf holds that it makes little sense to expect a non-earthly eschatological existence while believing in the resurrection of the body.<sup>61</sup> The resurrection of the body implies a corresponding glorified—but nevertheless material—environment.<sup>62</sup> Other examples are statements in the New Testament that support the idea of *transformatio mundi* explicitly by indicating that the apocalyptic language of the destruction of all things should not be taken to imply the destruction of creation, but rather the *liberation* of creation.<sup>63</sup> Paul writes that “creation itself . . . will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). The liberation of creation can only occur through its transformation, not through its destruction.<sup>64</sup>

The biblical statements that support the continuity between the present and future orders are theologically inseparable from the belief in the goodness of divine creation—it makes little sense to expect the eschatological destruction of creation and, at the same time, affirm the goodness of creation.<sup>65</sup> While it is naturally possible to believe that the goodness of material creation is instrumental—in which case eschatological destruction of creation would not deny its goodness—Volf maintains that material creation is much more than a means to an end; it is also an end in itself.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, he holds that, anthropologically, we ought to maintain that humans do not only *have* a body, but also *are* a body. Thus, it follows that the goodness of material creation is not merely instrumental, but *intrinsic*. This belief in the intrinsic goodness of

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61. Ibid., 95.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., 96.

66. Ibid.

creation is compatible only with the belief in the eschatological continuity of *transformatio mundi*.<sup>67</sup>

### *Work as Cooperatio Dei*

Belief in *transformatio mundi* gives human work special significance because it ascribes independent value on the results of work as “building materials” of the glorified world—through their work, human beings *contribute* to the world to come. However, Volf asks, “is it not a contradiction to ascribe eternal permanence to what corruptible human beings create?”<sup>68</sup> After all, most of the results of the work of human beings is destined to waste away before the day of eschatological transformation. In light of this question, Volf proposes that we should think about the cumulative work of the whole human race—not only in terms of the work of isolated individuals. The work of each human being ultimately contributes to the master “project” in which all of humanity is involved. Furthermore, much of human work leaves a permanent mark on natural and social environments, as well as an indelible imprint on human beings’ personalities.<sup>69</sup> Most importantly, however, we must keep in mind that both the individual and collective good work of human beings does not happen independently of *God’s* work. There is an agreement today, in both Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions, that the ultimate significance of human work lies in the *cooperation* of human beings with God.<sup>70</sup> Belief in the

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67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid., 98.

70. For Protestant example, see Jürgen Moltmann, *The Right to Work*, in *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 38–45, 53–57. For Roman Catholic examples, see *Laborem Exercens, Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on Human Work* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1981), nos. 85ff., and *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium Et Spes*, promulgated by Pope Paul VI (Vatican City: 1965), nos. 67ff.

eschatological transformation of the world is not only compatible with the view of work as cooperation with God—it *requires* it.<sup>71</sup>

Depending on how we conceive of work as human cooperation with God, we find two different theologies of work. The first one views human work as cooperation with God in the *preservation* of creation and focuses on the creation accounts in the Old Testament, which portray humans in their work as partners with God in His creative activity, while stressing the *uniqueness* of God’s original act of creation and that no human work corresponds to divine creation *ex nihilo*.<sup>72</sup> This view also emphasizes the partnership portrayed in the second account of creation, in which the growth of vegetation is made possible by the cooperation between God and human beings—God providing the rain, and humans cultivating the ground. This partnership implies a mutual dependence between God and humans in the task of the preservation of creation. Human beings depend on God in their work, and God *chooses* to become “dependent” on humans’ helping hands, making human work a means of accomplishing His work in the world.<sup>73</sup> In this view of *cooperatio Dei*, human work does not need to be done subjectively as God’s will for it to objectively correspond to God’s will.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, this view holds that, as long as the results are in accordance with God’s will, cooperation with God can occur even through alienated forms of work. While striving to overcome alienation in work is required in the concept of new creation, non-alienated work is not necessarily a precondition for the cooperation between God and human beings.<sup>75</sup>

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71. Volf, 98.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid., 99.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

The other way of viewing work as human cooperation with God focuses on humans' proleptic cooperation in God's eschatological *transformatio mundi*. This view welcomes the main elements of the other view (cooperation in *preservation* of creation), and places them in the eschatological light of the promised new creation.<sup>76</sup> While 2 Pet. 3:12, Matt. 6:10, and Rev. 22:17 imply that the new creation as a whole is fundamentally a gift in relation to which the primary human action is not *doing* but "*waiting*," such waiting should not be confused with inactivity. "Kingdom-participation" is not contrary, but complementary to—and a necessary consequence of—"kingdom-expectation."<sup>77</sup> Placed within the framework of kingdom-participation, human work for the betterment of the world—although imperfect, limited, and in need of divine purification—becomes a contribution to the eschatological kingdom, which will come through *God's action alone*. Humans are "co-workers in God's kingdom, which completes creation and renews heaven and earth," in their daily work.<sup>78</sup> And while the consummation of the new creation is a work of God alone, because His divine work does not destroy but transforms the historical anticipations of the new creation in which humans have participated, it is not a contradiction to say that "human work is an aspect of active participation of the exclusively divine *transformatio mundi*."<sup>79</sup>

Volf holds that both the protological and the eschatological understandings of human work as cooperation with God—cooperation in *preservation* versus cooperation in *transformation*—are valid theologically. However, as a proponent of an eschatological theology of work and a believer in the need for change in work to fight alienation, Volf prefers the latter.

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76. Ibid.

77. Ibid., 100.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid.

Nonetheless, Volf maintains that we should not treat the two understandings of *cooperatio Dei* as alternatives, but rather, as complementary to each other. Since the transformation of the first creation results in the new creation, the preservation of the world must be an integral part of the transformation of the world—both in cooperation with God.<sup>80</sup> Modern work, specifically, “transforms the world as much as it preserves it, and it preserves it only by transforming it.”<sup>81</sup>

### *Work in the Spirit*

Another—perhaps the main—pillar of Volf’s theology of work is that it is a *pneumatological* theology of work. He maintains that we cannot talk about the new creation without mentioning the Spirit of God. As we can see in Matt. 12:28, the Spirit is the agent through which the future new creation is anticipated in the present. Thus, if a theology of work portrays human work as active anticipation of the *transformatio mundi*, it must be, by necessity, a *pneumatological* theology of work.<sup>82</sup>

One might wonder what the Spirit of God has to do with the everyday work of human beings—especially in Protestant circles, given that most of Protestant theology tends to “restrict the activity of the Spirit to the spiritual, psychological, moral or religious life of the individual.”<sup>83</sup> In response to this question, Volf proposes that, since the Spirit’s sphere of operation encompasses the *whole* creation, it is both the Spirit of religious experience *and* the Spirit of worldly engagement. Thus, not only is it not strange to connect mundane human work

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80. Ibid., 101.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid., 102.

83. A. I. C. Heron, *The Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit in the Bible, the History of Christian Thought, and Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 96.

with the Spirit, but an adequate understanding of human work *requires* recourse to pneumatology.<sup>84</sup>

Volf's pneumatological theology of work emphasizes *charisms* over Luther's understanding of vocation, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. That being said, the pneumatological understanding of work that he proposes is "an heir to the vocational understanding of work, predominant in the Protestant social ethic of all traditions."<sup>85</sup> Volf presents *Gaudium et Spes*, a document of the Vatican II, as perhaps the most notable example of a charismatic interpretation of the service of Christians to their fellow human beings through work: "Now, the gifts of the Spirit are diverse. . . . He summons . . . [people] to dedicate themselves to the earthly service of men and to make ready the material of the celestial realm by this ministry of theirs."<sup>86</sup> Volf explains that as Christians follow their general calling to follow God and bear the fruit of the Spirit, their calling to live in accordance with the kingdom of God branches out in the multiple gifts of the Spirit to each individual.<sup>87</sup>

Volf proposes that a theology of charisms provides a stable foundation for a theology of work that is both relevant to the modern world of work and faithful to divine revelation.<sup>88</sup> If we understand the functions and tasks of every member of the Body of Christ charismatically, then everyday work cannot be an exception. Volf holds that the Holy Spirit "calls, endows, and

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84. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 104.

85. *Ibid.*, 105.

86. *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium Et Spes*, promulgated by Pope Paul VI (Vatican City: 1965), n. 38. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

87. Volf, 113.

88. *Ibid.*, 110.

empowers Christians to work in their various vocations.”<sup>89</sup> Thus, the charismatic nature of all Christian activity provides the theological basis for a pneumatological understanding of work.<sup>90</sup>

*Charisma* is the carefully chosen term in the New Testament to denote the multiple callings of every Christian to particular tasks. Volf cautions, however, against defining *charisma* so broadly that it encompasses the whole sphere of Christian ethical activity, or so narrowly as to include in the term only ecclesiastical activities. It is also important to differentiate between the *fruit* and the *gifts* of the Spirit—the fruit of the Spirit denotes the general character of Christian existence and the lifestyle of those indwelt and energized by the Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit have to do with the specific tasks or functions to which God calls and fits each Christian.<sup>91</sup> Charisms are related to the latter.

Looking at individual charisms as examples, one can easily see that limiting the operation of the gifts of the Spirit to the Christian church *exclusively* is a mistake. For example, in Eph. 4:11, we see that the whole purpose of the gift of an evangelist is to relate the gospel to non-Christians. As another example, it would be incongruent to view the act of contributing to the needs of the destitute (Rom. 12:8) as *charisma* when it is done in relation to Christians, but simply as benevolence when it is done in relation to non-Christians.<sup>92</sup> The Holy Spirit desires to make an impact on the *world* through Christian fellowship—not only on Christian fellowship itself. Whether they are directed inward to the Christian community or outward to the world, all the functions of Christian fellowship are the result of the operation of the Spirit, and are thus

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89. Ibid., 113.

90. Ibid.

91. Ibid., 111.

92. Ibid.

charismatic.<sup>93</sup> Charisms include both liturgical and secular activities in the world, and, looking at 1 Cor. 12:28 and Rom. 12:7, there seems to be no hierarchical ordering of charisms that corresponds to “spiritual” tasks on the one hand, and to “secular” tasks on the other.<sup>94</sup> Charisms are defined by the manifestation of the Holy Spirit for the divinely ordained purpose—they are not defined by the place of operation.<sup>95</sup> Without denying the need for specialization, the pneumatological understanding of work stresses that every member of the Body of Christ can simultaneously have different charisms and contribute to the edification of the church and the transformation of the world.<sup>96</sup>

Similarly, charisms are not in the possession of an elite group within the Christian fellowship. The passages in the New Testament that deal with charisms emphasize that they “are found throughout the church rather than being restricted to a particular group of people.”<sup>97</sup> As the Spirit is poured out upon all flesh (Acts 2:17ff.), it also imparts charisms to all flesh. Therefore, all members of the Body of Christ, regardless of existing distinctions or conditions, have a function, and thus no member lacks a *charisma*.<sup>98</sup>

It is also important to point out that we must aim to overcome the tendency to ascribe an elite character to charisms. “Charismatic” is frequently taken to mean “extraordinary,” especially in certain ecclesiastical traditions that identify the word with the spectacularly miraculous. Since all the members of the Body of Christ have a *charisma*, and since the gifts of the Spirit call Christians to countless tasks through which they can glorify God and serve the world, Volf

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93. Ibid.

94. Ibid., 138.

95. Ibid., 111.

96. Ibid., 156.

97. Ibid., 112.

98. Ibid.



maintains that it is of great importance to keep the term “*charisma*” as a generic term for both the spectacular and the ordinary.<sup>99</sup>

Volf emphasizes that Christians should not merely passively receive the gifts of the Spirit—the gifting of charisms requires a response by the recipient, an attitude of active receptivity. Moreover, as we see in 1 Cor. 14:12 and 2 Tim. 1:6, every Christian ought to seek new charisms and to constantly develop existing charisms—whether during or outside the work experience.<sup>100</sup> In the New Testament, we see that the reception, development, and use of such gifts must be accompanied by the nurture of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22f.). The fruit of the Spirit—which encompasses the values of the new creation—determines how the gifts of the Spirit ought to be used. Therefore, in a pneumatological understanding of work, the development of human beings through their work does not flow from an individualistic search for self-actualization, but rather from a concern for God’s new creation.<sup>101</sup> Care for the new creation, by necessity, includes care for one’s own development. The personal development of Christians, as essentially social and natural beings, is, at the same time, a means of benefiting others. For this reason, we should not focus on the development of our capabilities and charisms while disregarding their use for the well-being of the natural and social world we inhabit.<sup>102</sup>

In regards to *cooperatio Dei*, if the work of the Body of Christ is work in the Spirit, then we must understand it as cooperation with God. Not only does God call us to perform a particular task through our *charisma*, but He also inspires and gifts us to accomplish the task—we cannot separate the gift of the Spirit from the enabling power of the Spirit. When Christians,

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99. Ibid.

100. Ibid., 131.

101. Ibid.

102. Ibid.

through the gifts and fruit of the Spirit, exhibit the values of the new creation in their work, the Spirit is at work *in* them and *through* them.<sup>103</sup>

#### Alienation and Humanization of Work

By “alienating work,” Volf means the vast difference between what work *should* be as a fundamental element of human existence and how it *actually is* performed and experienced by workers in today’s world.<sup>104</sup> As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, while their approach to the issue is vastly different, the dominant understandings of work in the modern world are keenly aware of the existence and the consequences of alienation in work. Alienation persistently accompanies most of human work, as indicated by the unabated dissatisfaction with work worldwide. Volf examines some of the principal forms of alienating work in today’s world and places them against the backdrop of humanized work as the goal toward which all Christians should strive.<sup>105</sup>

It is important to point out that alienation in work should not be reduced or equated to the problem of job satisfaction. Work is alienating when it *does not correspond to God’s intent for human nature*, so the transformation of the character of work is required in order for it to correspond to workers’ nature, not primarily in order for it to match their feelings. Nevertheless, a negative affective response to work is an unmistakable indicator of alienation, even when there is no discord between the character of work and the nature of the worker.<sup>106</sup>

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103. Ibid., 114.

104. Ibid., 157.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid., 161.

*Why Should We Be Concerned About Alienation in Work?*

The humanization of work anticipates the new creation, since it portrays the values of the new creation as the fruit of the Spirit. That is certainly a good reason why Christians should be concerned about alienation in work and should strive to humanize it.<sup>107</sup> However, alienation in work is also—and perhaps mainly—problematic because, above all, it is an assault on human nature. It is concerning not because of what it does to production and economic growth, but because of what it does to the producer.<sup>108</sup> Volf explains that, in Christian anthropology, since it is human beings’ relationship with God (not human work) that constitutes them *as* human beings, then it is not alienating work but alienation from God that is the fundamental form of alienation. Hence, for work to be humanized, workers themselves must be “humanized,” not least by nurturing their right relation to God.<sup>109</sup> With that in mind, alienating work is concerning due to the intercausal relationship between alienating work and the personal relationship between humans and God—which constitutes the center of the Christian understanding of salvation.<sup>110</sup> Volf provides an example of alienating work from Exodus, where we see that the Israelite slaves, who were oppressed and exploited, “did not listen to Moses on account of their . . . cruel bondage” (Exod. 6:9). Volf argues that, on the one hand, the economic alienation and oppression hindered the Israelites’ belief in God and the promises of liberation, and on the other hand, the work of the oppressors deepened the alienation from God that they already experienced themselves, because their sin against their fellow human beings was, as such, a sin against

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107. *Ibid.*, 165.

108. *Ibid.*, 162.

109. *Ibid.*, 163.

110. *Ibid.*, 165.

God.<sup>111</sup> Similarly, types of work in today's world which involve oppression, sin, and go against Christian values, are by their nature alienating in relation to God.

There is not only a partial overlapping of alienating work and alienation from God (some forms of alienating work *are* forms of alienation from God), but also a causal relationship between them, since some forms of alienating work *cause* alienation from God, and vice versa. This causation, however, is asymmetrical, because alienation in work is ultimately a result of the basic alienation from God. Nonetheless, the fact that alienating work has the potential to cause alienation from God is certainly a good reason for concern.<sup>112</sup>

#### *Causes of Alienation Work*

So, what precisely is the problem with alienating work? What should humanized work look like? Volf argues that we must answer these questions in terms of the relationship between human nature and work—work is alienating to the extent that it negates human nature, and it is humane to the extent that it corresponds to it.<sup>113</sup>

One of the primary forms of alienation in work consists in the lack of self-directedness and opportunity for development in work.<sup>114</sup> Freedom and responsibility are necessary implications of human beings' divinely conferred personhood, since they are created in the image of God and are meant to have personal fellowship with God. In work, if we exclude the individual's conscious acceptance of the goals we expect that individual to accomplish (whether that is oneself or anyone one may supervise), we are treating that person as a mere means.<sup>115</sup>

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111. *Ibid.*, 166.

112. *Ibid.*, 168.

113. *Ibid.*

114. *Ibid.*, 170.

115. *Ibid.*, 172.

While having full freedom and ownership of the enterprise's mission and individual tasks might seem like an unreasonable expectation in many, if not most work contexts, Christians ought to strive to foster work environments in which workers are able to set goals in their work role and pursue them—or, at least, where they are able to identify with the goals set for them. In order to treat people (ourselves and others) as ends rather than merely as means in accomplishing work, we must encourage worker participation and development at all levels through the creation of roles that allow enough room for self-directedness and the challenge for workers to use and develop their talents.<sup>116</sup>

Since human beings ought to cooperate with God in their work in anticipation of the new creation, as we saw in the previous section, the Spirit imparts them with various gifts to accomplish their tasks. Such gifts also form part of their personality, which they are responsible to respect and develop, both because their personalities have intrinsic value as integral parts of the new creation, and because they can better anticipate the new creation through their work the more they are developed.<sup>117</sup> By impeding self-directedness and opportunity for development, alienating work also hinders the workers' capacity to develop their gifts and personalities. Christian leaders ought to recognize the God-given gifts of those they lead and help them develop such gifts so they can become all that God meant them to be.<sup>118</sup>

Another potential cause of alienation in work that Volf presents is technology. While it certainly has the potential to be a catalyst for human beings' increased participation and development, it also has the potential to enslave them.<sup>119</sup> In order to avoid the pitfalls of

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116. *Ibid.*, 177.

117. *Ibid.*, 173.

118. *Ibid.*, 178.

119. *Ibid.*, 183.

technology usage in work, workers must expand their technological know-how. Alienation in work can be the result of the technological ignorance of workers who use mechanical technology that is superior to their physical strength and dexterity. Alienation can be even worse for workers who use information technology that is superior to their mental capacities.<sup>120</sup> Without constant technological education, the dichotomy between the few who understand how highly complex technology functions and those who merely push the buttons will continue to grow, alienating those who move through the motions, without fully—or perhaps even partially—understanding their tasks.<sup>121</sup> Thus, the increase of technological know-how is vital in helping prevent this type of alienation in work. However, technological education alone cannot guarantee free and creative work—an important additional condition for overcoming alienation caused by technology is, when in the position to do so, to design technology that can safeguard freedom and stimulate creativity.<sup>122</sup>

While Volf points out that some limitation of individual freedom is inherent to most forms of work, striving to facilitate participation, to design technology that fosters freedom and creativity, and to increase the worker's know-how is necessary in order to facilitate self-directedness in work and liberate workers to the greatest extent possible.<sup>123</sup>

Volf also emphasizes the importance of the concern for the common good as another pillar of humane work. While work cannot be humane if it excludes freedom and stifles personal development, free work that does foster the worker's development is not necessarily humane work. Freedom can become empty and personal development can become narcissistic if one

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120. Ibid., 184.

121 Ibid.

122. Ibid.

123. Ibid., 185.

strives for the two alone.<sup>124</sup> In Pauline terminology, if a person is not willing to serve others in love, then he or she will be using freedom “as an opportunity for the flesh” (Gal. 5:13). Freedom and development—two essential characteristics of humane work—can devolve into forms of alienation if they are not framed by the concern for the common good. They can alienate human beings from their true nature as beings-in-communion.<sup>125</sup>

One of the most essential aspects of a Christian theology of work is that one should care for the well-being of other individuals and the community, and should consciously and directly work for others.<sup>126</sup> The New Testament stresses that people should take up “honest work” not only to provide for their own sustenance, but also so that they “may be able to give to those in need” (Eph. 4:28). Volf presents a quote from Calvin that portrays the concept at hand: “It is not enough when a man can say, ‘Oh, I labor, I have my craft,’ or ‘I have such a trade.’ That is not enough. But we must see whether it is good and profitable for the common good, and whether his neighbors may fare better for it.”<sup>127</sup> In order for work to be humane, one may not work just for oneself and forget about the good of others. The good of others must be a goal toward which we are constantly striving.<sup>128</sup>

A pneumatological understanding of work puts the synchronic and diachronic plurality of employments or jobs of the modern world (holding different jobs at different times, or holding more than one job at any given time) in the framework of concern for the common good. The Spirit calls and equips people precisely in order to serve their fellow human beings, and the

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124. *Ibid.*, 186.

125. *Ibid.*

126. *Ibid.*, 189.

127. *Ibid.*

128. *Ibid.*, 191.

reception of such charisms obligates them to do so (1 Pet. 4:10), since service constitutes an important criterion for the genuineness of charisms (1 Cor. 14:12ff.). Charisms link individuals to a larger community—a whole in which the charisms of each person are a contribution to the good of all (see 1 Cor. 12:14-26).<sup>129</sup>

Lastly, Volf indicates that, in order for work to be humane, humans must experience it, to an extent, as an end in itself, rather than just as a necessary means. Just as the whole of a human being's life is an end in itself—without ceasing to be a means to glorify God and benefit creation—as a fundamental dimension of human life, work must also be an end in itself.<sup>130</sup> The more one experiences work as an end in itself, the more humane it will be. Volf argues that, for work to have full human dignity, humans must enjoy it and, rather than it being merely a necessary means for earning or socializing, it must be significant for them *as work*.<sup>131</sup> It is important to recognize, of course, that achieving full human dignity in work requires idyllic conditions and, as such, most of us will never experience fully humane work in Volf's definition. Nonetheless, as stated previously, Christians ought to strive to generate work conditions that foster humanized work to the extent that it is possible.

Striving for self-directedness in work, overcoming the pitfalls of technology usage, and making it possible for people to see their work as a contribution to the good of all will foster working for work's sake. Of course, however, experiencing work as an end in itself is no guarantee against doing alienating work—there are people who learn to find unhealthy pleasure in demeaning types of work in which either themselves or others are being reduced to mere

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129. Ibid., 190.

130. Ibid., 197.

131. Ibid.



means. Such kinds of work are objectively alienating in spite of being enjoyable.<sup>132</sup> To be enjoyable *and* humane, work must correspond to both human nature and to an individual's gifts and inclinations—and hence be both objectively and subjectively non-alienating.<sup>133</sup>

As we can see above, Volf does not cover all the possible problematic aspects of work, and the various forms of alienation in work that he explores are not equally problematic. Likewise, not all of the forms of alienation in work that he presents apply to all types of work, since his efforts focus on industrial and information types of work.<sup>134</sup> Nonetheless, Volf provides us with a strong foundation of principles and reasoning, which we can then apply to other types of work—such as artistic work—moving forward.

#### So, Why Volf's Pneumatological Theology of Work?

As we saw in the second half of this chapter, the main thesis of Volf's book is that Christians ought to understand their work as “work in the Spirit.” Every member of the Body of Christ is called and gifted by the Spirit to work in active anticipation of the eschatological transformation of the world. The Spirit provides Christians with callings, talents, and “enablings” (charisms) so that they can do God's will in the world in anticipation of God's new creation. Since all Christians have several gifts of the Spirit, and since most of these gifts can be exercised only through work, then work becomes a central aspect of Christian living.<sup>135</sup> As such, a theological awareness and understanding of the purpose and meaning of work is a key element in any Christian's pursuit to glorify God through their work.

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132. Ibid., 199.

133. Ibid.

134. Ibid., 169.

135. Ibid., 124.

For the purpose of this project—which is to explore some of the ways in which Christian musicians can glorify God through their craft—I chose to explore Volf’s pneumatological theology of work because, as expressed at the beginning of this chapter, a pneumatological understanding of work is not weighed down by some of the deficiencies of a more traditional vocational understanding of work. For example, Luther’s vocational understanding of work is based on an undefined, ambiguous relation between spiritual calling through the gospel and external calling through one’s “station” (state/stage/profession/condition in life).<sup>136</sup> For Luther, humans have a spiritual vocation, which is the general calling to the Christian life, and an external vocation, which is the call to serve God and one’s fellow human beings in the world in specific ways. Luther argues that the external vocation comes to a person through his or her station in life or profession—when a person decides to follow their spiritual calling and lead a Christian life, God transforms their station or profession into a vocation.<sup>137</sup> Luther’s view thus narrows down people’s vocation to the work they were doing when they received the gift of the Spirit. A pneumatological understanding of work, however, avoids such ambiguity by differentiating charisms from their mediations, which are the conditions or context in which people find themselves when they receive the gift of the Spirit (what Luther would call a person’s “station”). While people receive their charisms in a specific context—the calling and equipping by the Spirit, naturally, does not happen in a vacuum, whether natural or social—the charisms themselves are not tied to the specific context in which people found themselves when

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136. Martin Luther, *Martin Luther’s Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar, H. Böhlau, 1883), 34, II, 306.

137. *Ibid.*

they received them. This understanding of charisms or vocation gives Christians the freedom to explore their gifts and express them in different contexts and types of work.

Second, a pneumatological understanding of work is not as open to ideological misuse as the vocational understanding of work.<sup>138</sup> As we have explored in this chapter, the pneumatological understanding of work that Volf proposes does not proclaim work meaningful without simultaneously attempting to humanize it. Understanding work fundamentally as *cooperatio Dei* implies an obligation to overcome alienation, since each individual's gifts must be taken seriously. The point is not to glorify work ideologically by interpreting it religiously as cooperation with God, but to “transform work into a charismatic cooperation with God on the ‘project’ of the new creation.”<sup>139</sup>

Third, a pneumatological understanding of work is easily applicable to the increasing *diachronic plurality* of employments or jobs that characterize today's world of work, especially in industrial and information societies.<sup>140</sup> While Christians cannot simply pick and choose their *charisma*—for the Spirit imparts charisms “as he wills” (1 Cor. 12:11)—nothing keeps them from “earnestly desiring” spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1,12) and receiving various gifts at different times.<sup>141</sup> Paul presupposes a diachronic plurality of charisms, which fits the diachronic plurality of employments or jobs in today's world.

The notion in the vocational understanding of work that occupational choice is a single event and that there is a single right job for everyone—either because God calls individuals to one specific job or because they have a somewhat stable pattern of occupational traits—is not

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138. Volf, 116.

139. *Ibid.*

140. *Ibid.*

141. *Ibid.*

necessary in a pneumatological understanding of work. In the rapidly changing working environments of modern societies, people often have several consecutive careers. In a pneumatological understanding of work, they can make career choices repeatedly and in a continuous dialogue between their preferences and talents on the one hand, and on the existing job opportunities on the other—their occupational decisions need not be irrevocable commitments.<sup>142</sup> In this understanding of work, Christians changing jobs need not worry about unfaithfulness. In fact, if such changes in jobs or careers are in harmony with their given *charisma*, then they can actually be an expression of faithfulness to God, whose Spirit provided them with the *charisma* and the eagerness to serve their neighbors in a new way. This freedom from the rigidity of a single, permanent vocation “might season with creativity and interrupt with rest the monotonous lives of modern workaholics.”<sup>143</sup>

Lastly, not only is a pneumatological understanding of work easily applicable to the *diachronic plurality*, but also to the *synchronic plurality* of employments or jobs<sup>144</sup>—which, as stated previously, is how people can hold different jobs at different times throughout their lives, as well hold more than one job at a time. At any given time, in Paul’s view, Christians can have more than one *charisma*. As long as they exercise them in interdependence within the community and out of concern for the common good, Christians should seek to “excel in gifts” (1 Cor. 14:12). Given a plurality of jobs or employments—in accordance with the plurality of charisms—none of them need be regarded theologically as inferior, a mere “job on the side.”<sup>145</sup> According to Volf, a pneumatological understanding of work is free from the limitation of only

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142. Ibid.

143. Ibid., 117.

144. Ibid.

145. Ibid.

being able to theologically interpret one of a Christian's jobs and disregarding any jobs that are not primary, and is thus also open to a redefinition of work—which today's industrial and information societies sorely need.<sup>146</sup>

The pneumatological theology of work proposed by Volf provides us with a strong foundation on the subject at hand, and sets the stage for us to explore, in the next two chapters, the vocation of the musician, as well as examples of how real-life Christians in the music industry have taken up their work in the world and glorified the Lord through their craft.

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146. Ibid.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Calling of the Musician

At some point during our upbringing, most of us have been asked what we wanted to be when we grew up. For many, the answer to this question was “I want to be a musician.” Perhaps unknowingly, or unintentionally, whoever asked us those questions touched on one of the most important matters in the Christian faith, and certainly in Christian work, which deals with the concept of *calling*. Flowing from our human vocation of being the image bearers of God in the world, Christians have a *commission*. If we understand the world as God’s creation, then, when we truly listen, we should hear a *calling* rumbling in the world itself.<sup>147</sup> As Frederick Buechner puts it, “the place God *calls* you is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”<sup>148</sup> Such calling, invitation, or commission, as theologian James K. A. Smith explains, at the core, involves imaging God in the world, unfolding creation’s potential, and occupying creation.<sup>149</sup> But, in light of the theology of work that we explored in the previous chapter, what does this mean for Christian musicians? How should Christians understand the work and calling of the musician? Moreover, what does this mean for Christian musicians who do not feel called to make overtly Christian music or work in the context of formal ministry?

In this chapter, we will begin by very briefly exploring the different types of calling Christians have, as explained by Gordon T. Smith—the general calling (our invitation to follow Jesus, to be Christians), the specific calling (a vocation that is unique to every person, everyone’s

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147. James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 172.

148. Amy L. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), Kindle edition, ch. 6.

149. Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 172.

individual mission in the world), and the immediate calling (one's immediate responsibilities, those tasks or duties that God calls one to today).<sup>150</sup> Then, following the pneumatological theology of work that we developed in the previous chapter, we will delve into Steven R. Guthrie's work to consider how one's specific calling is intrinsically linked to the Spirit of God, and, specifically, what the work of the Spirit is in the musical calling and craft. Finally we will explore the calling of the musician as explained by Amy L. Sherman and Gordon T. Smith, emphasizing the importance of vocational integrity and stewardship.

At this point, it is important to note that, while the pneumatological theology of work proposed by Volf that we explored in the previous chapter uses the term "charism" instead of "vocation" to denote the multiple callings—given by the Spirit—of every Christian to particular tasks (which was helpful in setting the pneumatological understanding of work apart from Luther's vocational understanding of work), since the more modern understandings of vocation that the authors surveyed in this chapter hold are compatible with Volf's pneumatological theology of work and thus make the use of the terms "charism" and "vocation" essentially interchangeable, we shall use the term "vocation" moving forward.

### Types of Calling

While the concept of calling and vocation, at first glance, seems to be very broad—as we saw in the previous chapter—in his book, *Courage Calling: Embracing Your God-Given Potential*, theologian Gordon T. Smith provides some helpful information and distinctions between the different types of calling.

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150. Gordon T. Smith, *Courage & Calling: Embracing Your God-Given Potential* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), Kindle edition, 10–11.

God calls people, and His calling is always a demonstration of His love and initiative. Through vocation, however, we also come to an appreciation that God takes us seriously.<sup>151</sup> Gordon Smith proposes that it is helpful to understand God’s call in three distinct ways. First, there is the call to be a Christian, which we can call the *general call*. This is God’s invitation to all human beings to respond to His love. The general call comes through Jesus, who invites everyone to be His disciples and know the Father through Him. The calling to be a Christian is to know and love God, and to love and serve others. Therefore, this call becomes the fundamental fact of our lives—in light of which everything should be understood. The calling to be a Christian is God’s merciful invitation to become His people and walk in faith and obedience to His Word. Thus, it is essentially a call to God’s salvation.<sup>152</sup>

Second, every Christian has a *specific call*—a “defining purpose or mission, a reason for being.”<sup>153</sup> We ought to respond to this call through our service in the world. In this second sense, each individual has a unique calling, which, of course, must be understood in light of the general calling—fulfilling our specific vocation means living out the full implication of what it means to follow Jesus. Therefore, the specific calling derives from the general calling—as Christians love the Lord and their fellow human beings, they each follow God differently, for once they accept the first call, they are gifted and honored with a *unique* call that becomes an integral part of what it means to follow Him.<sup>154</sup>

Third, Christians have an *immediate call*—the call they face each day in response to the multiple demands in their lives. Such duties and responsibilities—such as being present to one’s

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151. *Ibid.*, 9.

152. *Ibid.*

153. *Ibid.*

154. *Ibid.*



children, serving at church, or responding to specific and important needs, for example—are *each individual's* tasks. Such tasks, as simple or as demanding as they might be, should not be taken as burdens, since they are placed before each Christian by God on any given day.<sup>155</sup>

As we can gather from the above types of calling, in talking about the calling of the Christian musician in this chapter and throughout this project in general, we are focusing on the second of the three—the *specific calling*. Thus, when using the term *calling* or *vocation*, a meaning of *specific calling* will be implied, and we will be talking specifically about Christians who are called to take up their work in the world in the context of music. We must also keep in mind, however, that vocation—in the specific calling sense—is, of course, only *part* of what it means to be a Christian. Therefore, we must think of our specific and unique vocations within the context of all that it means to be Christian, including the *general* and *immediate* calls.<sup>156</sup>

### Music in the Spirit

As discussed in the previous chapter, human beings are called and equipped by the Spirit. The Spirit of God gifts them with charisms or vocations, which they ought to exercise and develop through humane work so they can serve their fellow human beings, glorify God, and cooperate with Him in anticipation of the new creation. One's specific calling, therefore, is intrinsically linked to the work of the Spirit. But, what specifically is the work of the Spirit in the musical calling, and what does that mean for the work of a Christian musician? We will now turn to the work of Steven Guthrie in order to shed some light on these questions.

Steven Guthrie is a professor of theology at Belmont University in Nashville, where he is also the director of the Religion and Arts program and the Worship Leadership program. Before

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155. *Ibid.*, 10.

156. *Ibid.*, 11.

going to Belmont, Guthrie was a research fellow, and then lecturer at the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts at the University of St. Andrews, in Scotland. Guthrie got his bachelor's degree in music theory from the University of Michigan, and worked for several years as a musician until he stumbled upon the world of academic theology. Besides teaching, he leads worship at his church, and he plays music professionally in the Nashville area.<sup>157</sup> Guthrie, as we can see, is a Christian living out his musical calling who has taken up his work in the world in several different contexts, which serve as a great example of the synchronic and diachronic plurality of employments that characterize the modern world, as we saw in the previous chapter. As a theologian, among other topics, he has delved into the study of the relationship between theology and the arts.

In Guthrie's book, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human*, he examines the areas of overlap between spirituality, human creativity, and the arts; he aims to help Christians better understand the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and offers a clear and engaging theology of the arts. He says that the work of the Spirit is to restore our humanity, to restore our bodies, to restore our community, to restore our voices, to restore our freedom, and to restore our vocation.<sup>158</sup> Many of the insights that Guthrie offers in the book, which we will now explore, are very helpful and valuable in our quest to understand the connection between the gift-giving Spirit and music-making—and what this means for the work of a musician and its value for the common good.

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157. "Faculty & Staff," Belmont University, [http://www.belmont.edu/theology/who\\_we\\_are/faculty.html](http://www.belmont.edu/theology/who_we_are/faculty.html).

158. Steven R. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), ProQuest edition, 13.

### *Mystery and Ineffability*

The first way that Guthrie argues that we can find a rich resemblance and connection between the Spirit and the arts—which, of course, include music—is in their “ineffability.” “Ineffability,” however, portrays only part of what Scripture has to say about the activity of the Spirit, and this is also true for the arts.<sup>159</sup> While the term certainly captures part of the artistic experience—a verbal, conceptual, or auditory description of a piece of music will fall short of the experience one has when listening to it, for example—what we value in art is not merely its “unsayable-ness.”<sup>160</sup> Rather, artistic ineffability stands out due to its “allusivity.”<sup>161</sup> Art often refers or points to something indirectly, without explicit mention, covertly, or in a passing way. This “indirectness” is an artistic value because it is one of the ways in which artists invite us not merely to passively exist in the vicinity of their work, but to *participate* in it. This is certainly true for music. In order to be experienced, art must be received, and, in a sense, reconstructed in the perception of the listener or the viewer. In a paradoxical way, “the expressive character of art is directly related to what it does not say (explicitly).”<sup>162</sup> Art has the capacity to draw us in—the artist invites us to *come and see*.

Guthrie describes the interaction between artists, art, and those who experience such art—that is, the process of artistic ineffability—as “a communicative act that aims at the collaborative activity of mutual love.”<sup>163</sup> Artists *give* their art, in hope that someone will *receive* it, *experience* it, and *respond* to it. Guthrie argues that, in light of the above idea of artistic

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159. *Ibid.*, 25.

160. *Ibid.*, 26.

161. Hilary Brand and Adrienne Chaplin, *Art and Soul: Signposts for Christians in the Arts*, 2nd ed. (Carlisle, UK/Downers Grove, IL: Piquant/InterVarsity, 2001), 123.

162. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 26.

163. *Ibid.*, 28.

ineffability, there is a structural similarity between the aesthetic and the spiritual experience.<sup>164</sup> In both cases, the experience *communicates and reveals*, yet it *cannot be reduced to words*. In both cases, the experience *originates in love and culminates in participation*. In both art and the life of the Spirit, the role of mystery and ineffability, rather than keeping the recipients in a constant state of not knowing, is to “give a taste—but only a taste—so that we might accept to come to the fountain.”<sup>165</sup> The Spirit’s work, as we saw in the previous chapter, is to call forth a response. Like beauty, the Spirit draws us toward participation. The ineffability of the Spirit is an invitation and an enabling by which we speak and respond.<sup>166</sup>

### *Expression and Emotion*

The second way in which Guthrie draws a connection between the Spirit and the arts is through expression and emotion. Music, for example, can reflect and shape human experience. In worship, it helps us express our most profound thoughts and emotions in ways that words perhaps cannot. From grief to joy and from petition to praise, music is a powerful venue for human expression during worship. It has played an important role in almost every Christian service ever conducted, no matter the period of history, the worship tradition, or the culture.<sup>167</sup> For this reason, for some Christians, words like *worship* and *spirituality* essentially function as synonyms for *emotion*, *deep feeling*, or *passion*. Art and music speak to the heart—passions, emotions, the deepest and truest self—of worshippers, and, at the same time, they allow them to express their hearts to God.<sup>168</sup>

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164. Ibid.

165. Ibid.

166. Ibid.

167. Robert E. Webber, *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship*, Vol. 4 of *The Complete Library of Christian Worship* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 93.

168. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 32.

Guthrie presents one of Leo Tolstoy’s metaphors to portray the emotional and expressive character of art: one might think of the artistic experience as something like the spread of a virus. First, the artist “has the infection”— he or she feels something deeply. Then, the artist may pour that feeling into the medium of word, paint, dance, or song. The resulting work of art then carries the artist’s emotion into the world. When someone encounters the piece of work, that person meets much more than just a great piece of art—more importantly, that person “receive[s] another man’s expression of feeling, and experience[s] those feelings himself.”<sup>169</sup> When we listen to a sad piece of music, for example, Tolstoy believes that the artist’s sadness becomes *ours*; carried from the artist’s heart to ours through the music.<sup>170</sup>

The capacity that art has to communicate feelings does not in and of itself make it worthwhile, however. Tolstoy believes that the highest, best, and most (spiritually) significant art corresponds to the highest and best passions, and, for most cultures, the noblest passions are those connected with religion.<sup>171</sup> That is where Tolstoy draws a connection between spirituality and the arts. Art is a vehicle for emotional communication. The greater and more significant the emotion, the greater and more significant the art—and generally speaking, these “highest and best emotions” arise from “religious perception.”<sup>172</sup> But, what allows art, specifically *music*, to succeed as an expression of deep passion and spirituality? What musical or aesthetic conditions must be met for us to hear it as a credible act of devotion? In order to provide some examples of qualities that might help make a piece of music a better suited vehicle for spiritual expression,

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169. Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?*, trans. Aylmer Maude (New York: Crowell, 1899), 43.

170. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 32.

171. *Ibid.*, 33.

172. *Ibid.*, 34.

Guthrie turns to John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*—a great work of twentieth century art that sets out to be an expression of both deep feeling and spiritual devotion.

John Coltrane is one of a handful of musicians who defined the genre of jazz, and, in many ways, *A Love Supreme* is his definitive statement.<sup>173</sup> The work is John Coltrane's offering to God—it is an intensely personal statement and prayer. One might also say that *A Love Supreme* is an answered prayer, since Coltrane tells us that he had asked God that he might “be given the means and privilege to make others happy through music.”<sup>174</sup>

The first distinctive musical feature of Coltrane's suite that contributes to its character as prayer and expression of emotion that Guthrie identifies is its *structural openness*. The first movement features a repetitive rhythmic pattern and a four-note riff that hovers around a single sonority for seven minutes, creating a mantra-like sound. Whatever structure and direction the piece has is provided entirely by the interaction between the soloist and the band. For this reason, the piece has “an extraordinarily intimate, personal, and even autobiographical quality.”<sup>175</sup>

The second quality that Guthrie points out is the suite's *harmonic and rhythmic openness*. In terms of harmonic openness, the movements tend to feature quartal voicings, which provide a more ambiguous space, both literally and figuratively, for the improviser. This makes the character of the music more deeply shaped by the decisions Coltrane makes as a soloist. In regards to rhythmic openness, Coltrane's solos constantly push and pull the tempo, contributing to the sense of spontaneity, immediacy, and urgency.<sup>176</sup>

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173. Ibid.

174. This is part of the quotation that appears on p. 26 of the original liner notes in the booklet accompanying the recording. John Coltrane, *A Love Supreme*, deluxe ed. sound recording, 2002, The Verve Music Group, LC 00383.

175. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 37.

176. Ibid.

Third, Guthrie identifies the “*vulnerable*” tone of the suite. Coltrane’s playing on the recording of *A Love Supreme* has a vulnerable and unaffected quality, which “adds considerably to the impression of expressiveness and spiritual depth.”<sup>177</sup> Guthrie argues that Coltrane’s sound suggests that we are listening to someone desperate to say something—however he can say it. This makes it raw, immediate, unadorned, and heartfelt.<sup>178</sup>

The fourth and last musical feature that Guthrie argues makes Coltrane’s piece a successful expression of emotion and spirituality is its *voice-like quality*. When listening to *A Love Supreme*, it feels like one is hearing Coltrane’s voice. Coltrane’s solos, especially the one in the fourth movement of the suite, titled “Psalm,” feature a speechlike, preacherly quality. This certainly adds to the sense that “we are listening to the performer’s prayer, his personal confession of faith.”<sup>179</sup>

While we covered some of the features that make *A Love Supreme* a great example of how music can be an expression of deep passion and spirituality very briefly—since we will explore these qualities and many other aspects of Coltrane’s work in greater detail in the entire section dedicated to him in the next chapter—they help us arrive at the interesting conclusion that the elements that contribute to the suite’s “spiritual” character (spontaneity, immediacy, vulnerability, expressiveness, speechlike and autobiographical character) are also what make it seem more human.<sup>180</sup> This element of humanity, intimacy, and encounter is one of the things that human beings value in art generally, and the enduring value of live musical performances is a testament to this. Guthrie argues that we value these dimensions of music-making because they

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177. Ibid.

178. Ibid., 38.

179. Ibid.

180. Ibid.

add to our sense of encounter, of meeting a person. Through experiencing music, we feel that there has been some sort of communication or shared experience between ourselves and the performer. When we hear musicians interacting with each other, thinking, sensing, feeling, and reacting to the material they are creating, what we hear is “a human being, being human.”<sup>181</sup> This aspect of art resembles what Tolstoy had in mind—that the great value and virtue of art lies in its capacity to communicate the artist’s deepest concerns and experiences. He believed in the spiritual importance of art because, through it, we encounter the depths of our neighbor’s humanity.<sup>182</sup>

Perhaps that *humanity* is what many have heard in *A Love Supreme*. An outstanding musician whose voice cracks as it tries to sing of God’s love; a group of “creatures living and working through time, pushing and pulling at the corners of musical meter to say something about the One who is eternal.”<sup>183</sup> In performances like these, where we hear the fragile and the miraculous side by side, for a moment, “we hear dust inhabited by glory—whether in fact or as a kind of parable in sound.”<sup>184</sup> When we are moved through experiences like these, it may be due to an intuition that the Holy Spirit is present and working when the dust is filled with glory. We may sense that there is something properly spiritual about becoming truly human. And that intuition, Guthrie argues, is correct.<sup>185</sup>

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181. *Ibid.*, 39.

182. *Ibid.*

183. *Ibid.*, 46.

184. *Ibid.*, 47.

185. *Ibid.*



### *Community-Making*

The third connection that Guthrie draws between the Spirit and the arts is their capacity to build community. Guthrie argues that the association between art and spirituality is embedded in social practices.<sup>186</sup> In that regard, the connection between religion and music is particularly strong—music is often “intertwined with religious elements.”<sup>187</sup> There is a tendency to express religious belief musically “in the religious ceremonies of Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Jews, Sikhs, Taoists, Buddhists, and Native Americans, as well as hundreds of ceremonies of preliterate and preindustrialized societies. . . . The story of ritual is intimately bound up with music—which almost always accompanies it.”<sup>188</sup>

In Christianity, the importance of music for the community-building of the Body of Christ is no surprise, given that we repeatedly find the command to sing in Scripture. Guthrie turns specifically to the command to sing in Ephesians:

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ (Eph. 5:18–21 NASB)

The context of this passage finds Paul in the midst of a serious discussion regarding godliness, holiness, and *being filled with the Spirit*, so the mention of singing, at first, might seem to drop in at random. For this reason, many Christians downplay the importance of Paul’s instruction to sing by considering it merely a “stray remark,” and suggest that singing is simply

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186. *Ibid.*, 66.

187. Paul Honigsheim, “On Form of Music and Form of Society,” Carl Dalhuas and Ruth Katz, eds., *Contemplating Music: Source Readings in the Aesthetics of Music*, vol. 4, *Community of Discourse* (New York: Pendragon, 1993), 70.

188. Daniel J. Levitin, *The World in Six Songs: How the Musical Brain Created Human Nature* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 195.

an example of the sort of good things that Spirit-filled Christians might do.<sup>189</sup> However, in this passage, in urging the church to “be filled with the Spirit,” Paul charges them to be “joined together” (Eph. 2:21) as the people of God, and so, to be the temple. What Paul says, in effect, is to “be the gathered people of God, in whose midst God dwells; be the new temple of God, the place where his presence is made manifest on earth; be the tabernacle of God, the place in the center of the community filled with the radiant glory of God’s Spirit.”<sup>190</sup> Thus, Paul’s imperative command in verse 18 “is not just another in a long string; rather, it is the key to all the others.”<sup>191</sup> That Paul urges the church to sing, then, must not be taken as a “stray remark.”

In Ephesians 5:18, three of the five participles that elaborate the command to be filled with the Holy Spirit have to do with music—speaking to one another in songs, hymns and spiritual songs; singing; and making music. There is a remarkable connection between song and the filling of the Spirit. This is not surprising, however, when we recall that the work of the Spirit is to create a new human, and that this involves the restoration of peace and right relationship among human beings.<sup>192</sup> Since human beings are *made* for community, when God creates “new humanity” (Eph. 2:15), this also means remaking community. As the church sings together, not only does it announce the new community that the Spirit has created in Christ, but it also *enacts* it.<sup>193</sup>

For Paul, music is both a way of *being* the body of the church and, literally, a way to give this new community a voice. In other words, “song, hymns, and spiritual songs” are both a way

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189. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 70.

190. *Ibid.*, 71.

191. Gordon Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 721.

192. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 72.

193. *Ibid.*

in which people can be incorporated into a community, and an embodiment of such community.<sup>194</sup> This is certainly not only true in the context of church. If we think about other types of communities that we are a part of—such as sports teams, clubs, societies, affinity groups, support groups, and cohorts of all kinds—when we hear the fight songs, protest chants, anthems, or other songs that are important and representative of such communities, we might feel a sense of pride, loyalty, camaraderie, and empathy. Many songs serve as a kind of embodiment of the community that they represent or to which they are important. Music invites people to “meet” a community and to join in its character and identity. Music has the power to unite a community and to carry with it some flavor of the place, the people, and one’s experience among them. Songs are one way in which a community has its identity, and one way in which individuals find their identity within a community.<sup>195</sup>

Another feature of the community-building capacity that music has that Guthrie presents is the submission involved in singing together. Much like the fifth and last participle in the passage we explored above—“submitting to one another in the fear of Christ” (Eph. 5:21)—singing with others necessarily involves something that might be described as a “mutual submission,” as singers yield to a tempo, a rhythm, a melody, and many other constraints.<sup>196</sup> In singing together, we surrender the freedom to sing whatever we might choose, at whatever speed, in whatever order, and so on. Guthrie argues that these limits, however, are not oppressive. Instead of frustrating the participants’ intention to sing, they facilitate it. This mutual submission enables the freedom to join a community in song—the freedom to be part of a

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194. *Ibid.*, 73.

195. *Ibid.*

196. *Ibid.*, 78.

chorus. This type of submission is vital for music-making, and does not mean silencing individual voices. All members must contribute their own voice, and each member must “make room” for other voices. The mutual submission manifested in singing in community is “winsome and appealing rather than dull, oppressive, and burdensome.”<sup>197</sup>

Guthrie emphasizes that it is also important to recognize that, while music has the capacity to bring people together, it can also be incredibly divisive. While music itself might not inherently be divisive, it is never heard in a social vacuum, and the communities, ideas, and identities it represents can indeed cause debates, disagreements, and division. In church, for example, debates about music are rarely debates about *music*, properly speaking. They are “disagreements over the shape and identity of a community,”<sup>198</sup> and they are impassioned because they deal with deep relationships. If one has strong feelings—positive or negative—toward a community, group, or culture, one will probably have correspondingly strong feelings about the music that represents them.<sup>199</sup> Naturally, music itself is not the only factor in bringing community or generating division—how members of a given community *react* to the music depends on them to a certain degree. However, Christian musicians must be careful and recognize that their music has the potential to bring about division in certain contexts.

The fact that music often brings division serves as a vital reminder that *music* does not create the new human. *God* does—in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. As we can see in 1 Cor. 12:13 and Eph. 4:1–4, it is the *Spirit* who brings about oneness.<sup>200</sup> God alone—not music—has the power to “break down the dividing walls” and “abolish the hostility between us”

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197. Ibid.

198. Ibid., 79.

199. Ibid., 80.

200. Ibid.

(see Eph. 2:14). Nevertheless, as with the waters of baptism, or as with bread and wine, “music is one means by which God may teach us community and make it a lived reality among us.”<sup>201</sup>

Guthrie emphasizes that, “even where the church fails to act as the church—even in fact well outside the boundaries of the church—music may be the means by which God begins to draw us toward community with others, while speaking to us of the fullness of community he intends.”<sup>202</sup>

This statement is especially significant for Christians musicians who seek to glorify God through their craft outside of the formal ministry or Contemporary Christian Music contexts.

As we have seen in this section, music is a way of gathering the community—whether that be Christian or non-Christian communities—and, more importantly, it is a way of manifesting the community. Christians can recognize experiences where music helps manifest and unite communities as theologically significant, rather than only sociologically and psychologically significant. The Spirit works to restore our humanity, and this includes the remaking of human community. Therefore, it is natural that human beings would sense that there is something profoundly spiritual about singing together. As Guthrie states, “song is a shared and participatory experience that in turn gives rise to a sounding emblem of the community. And those who worship the God who is Father, Son, and Spirit confess that community is at the heart of all things.”<sup>203</sup>

### *The Art of Giving*

Another way in which the work of the Spirit relates to the arts is in their character as *gift*. The Holy Spirit is the gift-giving Spirit. As we have repeatedly encountered, the Spirit bestows

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201. Ibid.

202. Ibid.

203. Ibid., 81.

charisms, vocations, or *gifts* on the members of the Body of Christ so that they may take up their work in the world, be a blessing to others, and cooperate with God in anticipation of the new creation. God is fundamentally a giver—a God who pours himself out. Through the Spirit, God gives us the *gift of being givers*.<sup>204</sup>

The work of the Spirit is to complete and perfect our humanity. Since humanity was created in God’s image and to reflect God’s character and glory, then the work of the Spirit is to restore our true humanity in making us once again his image bearers. The Spirit does this by “refashioning us in the image of the True Human, Jesus Christ.”<sup>205</sup> In doing so, the Spirit remakes us in the image of the one who emptied and humbled himself (Phil. 2:7–8), the one who said: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Therefore, to be made fully human means to be made like Jesus—and this means to be made a giver.<sup>206</sup>

With the above in mind, Paul says that the Spirit gives gifts not simply for our individual enjoyment, but “for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7). The gifts of the Spirit are thus gifts *from*, and gifts *for*.<sup>207</sup> When Christians are given the gift of artistry, therefore, the art they make ought to be a gift for the common good.

The *giving* involved in the craft of the artist also implies a *self-giving*, a *creative submission*. Guthrie states that writers, actors, visual artists, dancers, and musicians will testify that artistry does not begin with self-expression, but with active submission.<sup>208</sup> This creative

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204. Ibid., 100.

205. Ibid.

206. Ibid.

207. Ibid., 102.

208. Ibid., 105.

submission occurs in two senses. First, creative artistry involves receptivity to one's materials. For music composers, for example, the starting point is to get to know and understand the *sound* of sound—if they are to take up their work through sound, then they must learn the possibilities and limits of their material. The works of art emerge from a “dialogue between artist and material.”<sup>209</sup> Creativity, therefore, involves humility and self-abnegation.

Second, creative artistry involves a submission to one's craft, and, most likely, to those who teach us. Artists begin by “learning what others have said, repeating their words and movements.”<sup>210</sup> However, this submission is ultimately *creative*—artistry involves a giving over of oneself that, paradoxically, opens up the possibility of self-expression.

To provide an example of this creative submission, Guthrie turns again to John Coltrane. Coltrane's devotion to his instrument, the saxophone, has become proverbial among jazz musicians, and his dedication to learning and internalizing the styles of older and established jazz musicians when he started his musical journey is admirable. He “developed his own voice by surrendering it to another.”<sup>211</sup> Coltrane's music lends plausibility to the Christian claim that self-surrender might be ultimately creative. Submission need not be construed in terms of power and oppression. In the domain of artistry, at least, “self-denial is the ground and the necessary condition for self-realization and self-expression.”<sup>212</sup> Similarly, in surrender to the gift-giving Spirit, one receives life in return—healed and whole.<sup>213</sup>

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209. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 94–95.

210. Guthrie, 106.

211. *Ibid.*

212. *Ibid.*, 107.

213. *Ibid.*

### *Inspiration*

Guthrie presents a fifth way in which the work of the Spirit relates to creative expression by exploring the concept of inspiration. When speaking of “inspiration,” artists borrow a theological category in an attempt to explain something about how the creative act *feels*.<sup>214</sup> Ang Lee, Mark Doty, Eddie Van Halen, and artists of several other mediums insist that “the song, poem, or creative idea seems to come to them—or even through them—rather than from them.”<sup>215</sup> The work of art is often reported to be felt as *discovered*, rather than planned and crafted. In testimonies like these, artists cannot really account for how their art came to be.<sup>216</sup>

How might a Christian pneumatology make sense of these kinds of comments? Guthrie argues that artists *do* encounter, in the act of creating, a voice outside of themselves. In fact, artists hear many voices—in particular, the voice of creation and the voice of culture. In hearing and responding to these voices, one might say that Christian artists are “inspired”—they are breathed into by God’s Spirit.<sup>217</sup> When this happens, while there are other forces at work in their art, artists are not passive in the activity—their individuality is not lost, and the art arises equally from their own labor. This process reflects “a creation brought into being and governed by the God of gift and the Spirit of freedom.”<sup>218</sup>

The artistic inspiration that Guthrie talks about is closely tied to the giving character of the Spirit that we explored in the previous section. The world is “gifted”—it receives its being out of the kindness of God—and it is also “given” (see Gen. 1:29 NASB).<sup>219</sup> With this in mind,

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214. *Ibid.*, 114.

215. *Ibid.*

216. *Ibid.*

217. *Ibid.*, 115.

218. *Ibid.*

219. *Ibid.*, 118.



the *inspired* creation becomes the *inspiring* creation—it is filled with the breath of God and it offers to others something of the life it has received. The artist, therefore, can be thought of as someone who, first of all, receives the gifts of a gifted world—gifts of color, light, scent, shape, and, of course, *sound*.<sup>220</sup> The world was given by a Giver, and the world offers itself. Because of this, artists are right to associate creativity with *receptivity*, with “encountering something outside of [themselves].”<sup>221</sup> Similarly, it is right to say that art is given by God, by the world, and by the artist’s own labor and creativity. Guthrie compares this cycle of giving and receiving to a cascade: “God’s Spirit stands at the head of the cascade of giving that flows through the material world and nourishes the creativity of the artist. And because God gives to make us givers, each participant in the cascade of giving contributes its own voice, its own gifts, to the onward movement.”<sup>222</sup>

Again, God made humanity not only to receive, but to give. Because of this, the emergence of culture that does not merely reproduce nature but creatively extends and develops it should not be surprising, but *expected*. The products of culture—and culture itself—are made into a gift that is offered to humanity in general, but also to the artist. Artistic creation, then, includes both cultural influences and personal expression—it involves both receptivity and personal effort.<sup>223</sup>

Christian artists are indeed “inspired.” They live in a *world* that is inspired—animated by the breath of God. It is a world in which all good gifts—gifts of the material world and of culture—come down from above (James 1:17). Artistic inspiration is also spiritual for Christian

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220. Ibid.

221. Ibid., 119.

222. Ibid.

223. Ibid., 121.

artists in the sense that it echoes the Spirit's work of making us fully human. Christian artists fulfill an important dimension of their human vocation as they give of themselves, shaping and adding both to the material world and to the world of culture. As they attend carefully and respond to the gifts of the natural world and the social world, returning their own gifts to others, they become important "participant[s] in the grace-filled cosmos described in Psalm 104; [they join] in the great chain of giving set in motion by God."<sup>224</sup>

### *Discernment*

Next, Guthrie presents *discernment* as another way in which there is a correspondence between spirituality and the arts. One might describe the artist and the spiritually discerning person very similarly: someone who is intuitive, sensitive, and creatively perceptive—someone who sees things differently.<sup>225</sup> Guthrie argues that one of the reasons the arts are "spiritual" is, perhaps, because both the artist and the mystic are open to a larger reality. Both are keenly aware that we may not recognize all the truth of the world at first glance, that there is more to be seen. Perhaps both the spiritual person and the artist, Guthrie says, "are allied in testifying to a world filled with signs, filled with *sign-ificance*."<sup>226</sup>

The British art critic Clive Bell (1881–1964) is one of many people who suggested the correspondence between the arts and spirituality in the context of discernment, and Guthrie presents some of his thoughts in order to further explore the topic. Bell argues that the artist—at least in moments of inspiration—unlike most people, is able to see, to *discern*, his or her surroundings as "pure form," as ends in themselves rather than as means to an end. While one

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224. *Ibid.*, 122.

225. *Ibid.*, 128.

226. *Ibid.*

might look at a tree and think “tree,” the artist, Bell says, looks at it and really *sees it*, sees its “essential reality.”<sup>227</sup> He argues that the artist has the ability to “recognize the *significance* of ordinary things, to perceive the universal in the particular, the God-in-all-things. The artist is able to perceive ultimate reality shining through the veil of material form and gives this perception expression in his art.”<sup>228</sup>

It is fair to say, then, that for Bell, the gift of *discernment* is the great gift of the Christian artist. Therefore, since the reality that the Christian artist discerns is the *ultimate* reality, the true artist is a virtuoso of *spiritual* discernment. Bell writes that the spiritually discerning, like the artist, “seeks within all things that ultimate reality which provokes emotional exaltation.”<sup>229</sup> The artist gives artistic form to “God in all things” in a similar way in which the truly spiritual person is able to perceive “some unnameable reality sustaining all things and attempts to give form to this experience of spiritual ecstasy in some system of religious belief.”<sup>230</sup> According to Bell, art is ultimately a manifestation of the religious sense, and, for that reason, “rightly . . . do we regard art and religion as *twin manifestations* of the spirit.”<sup>231</sup>

As we have seen above, discernment involves responsiveness—that is, seeing where the Spirit of God is at work, and so seeing the world *truly*. Discernment is also a *creative act*, in which we do not just passively hear and obey. Humanity, Guthrie says, must not only “discern the Spirit in all things,” but has also been entrusted with the creative task of *discerning all things in the Spirit*.<sup>232</sup> The Spirit of God empowers and commissions human beings to *resee* and

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227. Clive Bell, *Art* (n.p.: BiblioBazaar, 2007), 39.

228. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 129.

229. Bell, *Art*, 56.

230. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 129.

231. Bell, *Art*, 56. Emphasis added.

232. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 134.

*rename*, to perceive the same reality differently—this means to discern things with eyes given by the Spirit, rather than “after the flesh.”<sup>233</sup> For artists, this means *reseeing* and *renaming* the world through their craft. Through their art, they do not simply vent raw emotion, but deal in the stuff of the external world; they do not simply offer copies of reality, but they commend a particular way of seeing, hearing, and experiencing the world. In presenting his or her craft to the world, the artist issues an invitation to join him or her in naming part of the creation, and, as Guthrie puts it, “whether the artist speaks truly of creation, whether the artist’s vision is consonant with God’s redemptive vision for creation, in endorsing a way of experiencing the world, the artist exercises the human vocation of naming.”<sup>234</sup>

### *Spirit, Art, and Eschatology*

In the previous sections, we have seen that the work of the Spirit is to restore, complete, and perfect our humanity, which involves remaking us in our innermost being, in our bodies, in our relationships, in society, and in the rest of the created world. We have also seen that part of our human vocation of being the image bearers of God is to participate in the Spirit’s work of remaking all things. All of this draws us to the last way in which Guthrie argues that art may be considered “spiritual.” The words that describe the work of the Spirit—*completing*, *perfecting*, and *making things what they are meant to be*—all have an *eschatological* character. They speak of movement toward a final goal or *telos*.<sup>235</sup> They are also words that one might use to describe the work of an artist. With that in mind, Guthrie suggests, “perhaps the artist and the Spirit are about the same work—or at least the same sort of work.”<sup>236</sup> On this account, each perfects and

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233. Ibid.

234. Ibid., 135.

235. Ibid., 142.

236. Ibid.

brings to completion, each refines and purifies, and each seeks to bring about a fitting conclusion or a satisfying whole. Each strives toward *beauty*.<sup>237</sup>

When speaking and singing about a new creation, Christians turn to the language of beauty. Spanish poet and philosopher, George Santayana, writes that “the glory of heaven could not be otherwise symbolized than by light and music.”<sup>238</sup> Conversely, when speaking of beauty, artists and critics “reach for the language of transcendent completion.”<sup>239</sup> After hearing the opening of Mozart’s *A Major Piano Concerto*, for example, music critic Sir Neville Cardiff exclaimed, “If any of us were to die and then wake hearing it, we should know at once that (after all) we had got to the right place.”<sup>240</sup> Similarly, Dutch Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper suggests that earthly beauty points toward a glorified world, and writes:

Art has the mystical task of reminding us in its productions of the beautiful that was lost and of anticipating its perfect coming luster. . . . Art points out to the Calvinist both the still visible lines of the original plan, and what is even more, the splendid restoration by which the Supreme Artist and master-Builder will one day renew and enhance the beauty of His original creation.<sup>241</sup>

The sort of language above undoubtedly resonates with many of us—when singing with others, when appreciating a painting, when standing in the midst of an extraordinary architectural structure, or when listening to a sublime piece of music, we might feel as though “we have caught a glimpse of a better world, or perhaps, that we have seen a small piece of this world perfected.”<sup>242</sup> We might feel as though we have experienced a foretaste of God’s kingdom. In

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237. Ibid.

238. George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty: Being the Outline of Aesthetic Theory* (New York: Dover, 1955), 29.

239. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 143.

240. Jeremy Nicholas, “Composer of the Week: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart,” at *Gramophone Archive*. Available at <http://www.gramophone.net/ComposerOfTheWeek/View/124>.

241. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), 155.

242. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 143.

bringing about perfection, completion, or beauty, then, we might say that the artist is doing something spiritual, because this is what the Spirit is about as well.<sup>243</sup>

Beauty and eschatology belong together—to hope for the kingdom of God in its fullness is to hope for beauty.<sup>244</sup> To explore the relationship between beauty and eschatology, Guthrie turns to a well-known description of beauty from St. Thomas Aquinas as a guide: “Species or beauty has a likeness to the property of the Son. For beauty includes three conditions, ‘integrity’ or ‘perfection,’ since those things which are impaired are by the very fact ugly; due ‘proportion’ or ‘harmony’; and lastly, ‘brightness’ or ‘clarity,’ whence things are called beautiful which have a bright color.”<sup>245</sup>

One of the virtues of Aquinas’ definition is that it explicitly associates beauty with Jesus Christ. Since Jesus *is* the *eschatos*—He is the new creation, the pioneer of the resurrection from the dead that God intends for all creation—then the beauty of the new creation is the beauty of Jesus Christ. We can characterize the eschatological work of the Spirit as “beautifying” because the work of the Spirit is to remake us in the likeness of the altogether beautiful humanity of Jesus Christ.<sup>246</sup>

Guthrie considers three facets of beauty included in Aquinas’ definition, which give us an outline of some of the most distinctive features of beauty. The first one is *perfection* or *integrity*. If we are to use the word “perfection” to characterize the beauty of Christ and the beauty of the new creation, then it must be a perfection that can accommodate scars. As Guthrie puts it, “the

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243. Ibid.

244. Ibid., 156

245. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2nd and rev. ed., 1920, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Online Edition, copyright © 2008 by Kevin Knight.

246. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 157.

perfection of the kingdom of God is not the airbrushed sheen of the fashion magazine.”<sup>247</sup>

Pentecost cautions us against thinking of eschatological perfection as a sterile uniformity—shallow conceptions of perfection like these are inadequate both to a theological and to an artistic account of beauty.<sup>248</sup> Artists, similarly, must avoid shallow conceptions of perfection as they strive to perfect their craft, since artwork that masks difficulty—that covers over scars and struggles—is not beautiful, but fake.<sup>249</sup>

In order to move away from a superficial perfection, Aquinas elaborates *perfection* as *integrity* or *honesty*. The perfection of integrity is *wholeness* and *completeness*—integrity is “the presence in an organic whole of all the parts which concur in defining it as that which it is.”<sup>250</sup> It is right, then, to speak of the new creation and the Spirit’s eschatological work as “beautifying,” if by this beauty we mean the perfection of *integritas*. The Spirit of God works to perfect creation by bringing it to completion and making humanity and all creation what it most truly and fully is.<sup>251</sup>

This type of perfection is indeed something we value in art. Wholeness or completion often characterize great works of art in two different ways. First, Guthrie points out that many great works of art give the impression of “wholeness,” in the sense that they do not lack anything, nor do they have any extra or gratuitous elements. They have “integrity” because every part is fully integrated.<sup>252</sup> Second, many great works of art give the impression that the artist has managed to bring the material elements of his or her art to completion—that, in the piece of art,

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247. Ibid.

248. Ibid.

249. Ibid.

250. Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. Hugh Bredin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 78.

251. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 158.

252. Ibid.

the artist has been able to unfold the qualities and character of the material to greatest effect. Whether the craft of the artist involves sound, color, shape, or word, the artwork makes manifest what these elements are most truly.<sup>253</sup>

The second condition of beauty in Aquinas' definition is "due proportion or harmony." This has been the aesthetic ideal for much of Western history, and it has been particularly associated with music. We can trace this aesthetic ideal back to Pythagoras and his study of musical intervals. For Pythagoras, the key to understanding not only music, but all of reality, was a kind of harmonious and proportionate arrangement of elements. According to him, "the same universal ratio that orders musical tones and relates them to one another . . . extends outward to the heavenly bodies and inward to our own souls."<sup>254</sup> That is indeed why music moves human beings as deeply as it does—in music, they meet the sort of organizing and beautifying principle that informs the very heavens.<sup>255</sup>

Similarly, Augustine argues that proportion is essential in music.<sup>256</sup> The particular notes and rhythms in a piece of music become what they are based on how they relate all the other musical elements around them. When we hear a melody *as* a melody, for example, what our ears ask of each sound is not "Are you an A or a C sharp?" but "Where do you stand in relation to the other tones in this melody?"<sup>257</sup> Melodies and rhythms do not arise from anything other than from different relationships between notes and beats. That is what particular melodies and rhythms *are*—a particular relationship between musical events.<sup>258</sup>

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253. Ibid.

254. Ibid., 159.

255. Ibid.

256. Ibid.

257. Victor Zuckerkandl, *Man the Musician* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 91.

258. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 160.



For Augustine, the harmony and proportion of music is a powerful image of a universal truth, and he believes that this is some of what we can learn from music. First, music teaches us that *relationship* is the means through which things take on their distinctive character. The difference between a “right note” and a “wrong note,” for example, is the difference in the relationship between that note and the other notes around it.<sup>259</sup> Augustine believes that human beings, similarly, are “in tune” or “out of tune” based on their proportions with other things—that is, how they are related to God and the whole harmony of relationships in God’s world.<sup>260</sup>

Second, music teaches us that we live in a cosmos in which relationship is *possible*. As Guthrie puts it, “acoustic vibrations, cultural practices (like singing songs), our physical senses, and our mental processes can all be enlisted and drawn together in a single experience.”<sup>261</sup>

Moreover, we live in a cosmos in which relationship is not only possible, but also *beautiful*. Augustine believes that the unified but multi voiced complexity of the musical experience moves human beings because it speaks to them of a world of relation.<sup>262</sup>

Third, music teaches us that the differences and diversity of the world are an essential component of beauty, rather than a problem to overcome. The only way in which harmony can occur is if the elements of that harmony both come together *and* remain distinct. It is natural, then, that when Augustine describes the new creation in *The City of God*, he describes it as a place of harmony, proportion, and right relation. Because of this, he believes that we can characterize the new creation as *beautiful*. The Spirit of God is the giver of many diverse gifts (1 Cor. 12:4–11) and, in this sense, is the author of the diversity of the body. Therefore, in this

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259. Ibid.

260. Ibid.

261. Ibid.

262. Ibid.

sense, too, the eschatological work of the Holy Spirit can meaningfully be described as “beautifying.”<sup>263</sup>

The third and last condition of beauty in Aquinas’ definition is “brightness or clarity, whence things are called beautiful which have a bright color.” Here, the emphasis is on the immediate impression that beautiful things make upon our senses. We can paraphrase the third condition, then, as “pleasure,” which is an important term in another of the definitions of beauty by Aquinas: “beautiful things are those which please when seen. Hence beauty consists in due proportion; for the senses delight in things duly proportioned.”<sup>264</sup> In this definition, besides emphasizing the importance of proportion, he draws attention to the fact that, rather than being just a quality in things, “beauty” also identifies a type of response in *us*. When we see beauty, we are *pleased*—we are *delighted*.<sup>265</sup> We can meaningfully describe the work of the Spirit as “beautifying,” then, because it has to do with pleasure. The Spirit is bringing about a new creation that is pleasant, delightful, and abundant. Moreover, the new creation that the Spirit is bringing about will be marked by a free pleasure—not “taking pleasure from,” but “taking pleasure in.”<sup>266</sup> In God’s eternal presence, his people will find “pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16:11).

As we have seen above, the Spirit of God perfects creation, brings wholeness, and brings completion. The Spirit gives proportion, nurturing harmony and right relation. Thus, it is right to associate the Spirit with pleasure—particularly the kind of delight that is marked by freedom and

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263. *Ibid.*, 161.

264. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, q. 5, art. 4, ad. 1.

265. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 162.

266. *Ibid.*, 164.

takes pleasure in others.<sup>267</sup> In a similar way, the artist is right in honoring as “spiritual” the experience of beauty. This does not mean, of course, that art becomes a kind of surrogate Spirit. Our capacity to identify perfection, proportion, or pleasure, after all, is as fallible as our capacity to recognize truth and goodness. Nonetheless, when we truly experience beauty that is characterized by perfection, proportion, and clarity, we might feel as though we have encountered something “spiritual”—perhaps even a foretaste of the new creation—and, as Guthrie says, we are right to feel this way.<sup>268</sup>

### Musicians at Work

In the previous section, we explored the different ways in which music relates to the work for the Spirit and what this means for the musical calling and craft. All the points presented by Guthrie are great examples of the theological value of music, and serve as great principles for Christians who are musicians to keep in mind as they partake in the creative activity of composing, performing, arranging, producing, and generally *working*, with music. As we end this chapter, we will once again turn to the work of Gordon T. Smith, along with Amy L. Sherman, to briefly discuss why many Christian musicians might feel as though the only way to glorify the Lord through their craft is by working in the sphere of contemporary Christian music—or any genre of overtly Christian music—or by working in the context of formal ministry, and why this idea is not necessarily true, as musicians can, in fact, glorify God in their work in countless ways outside those contexts. Then, we will discuss some practical, general ways in which Christian musicians can glorify God through their work by exercising vocational

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267. Ibid.

268. Ibid.

integrity and stewardship, before looking at specific, real life examples of musicians taking up their work in the world in the next chapter.

*“Religious” vs. “Secular” Work*

There is an assumption, deep within the religious psyche of many Christians, that religious work is inherently more sacred than all other activities—that the very best work we do is either directly related to participation in church mission, or is focused on the life and ministry of the local church.<sup>269</sup> For centuries, Protestant Christians have tended to use the language of “calling” and “vocation” only if a person was called to the life of ministry in the church, to the gospel ministry as a pastor or missionary. Even today, as Amy Sherman points out, thousands of Christian professionals sit in the pews, wondering if they can participate in Jesus' mission and do so using the gifts and skills God has given them. She argues that the answer is, of course, a resounding yes—but such a word is tragically uncommon in many Christian congregations.<sup>270</sup>

The notion that religious work is inherently more valuable than any other type of work is not consistent with biblical witness, and, at different points in the history of the church, Christians have been called back to a more inclusive notion of both work and vocation,<sup>271</sup> as we saw in Volf's pneumatological theology of work. Smith argues that Christian work has had the most consistent impact for the glory of God and for the reign of Christ when it has affirmed that women and men are called into each sphere and sector of society. While church-related activities and other types of religious work are extremely important, they do not inherently have more

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269. Smith, *Courage & Calling*, 35.

270. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, location 935.

271. Smith, *Courage & Calling*, 44.

weight or significance than the work of the architect, the gardener, the public school teacher, the pharmacist, or the businessperson.<sup>272</sup>

Christian work, as we have seen throughout this project, is done in response to God’s calling. Since we are called to do the work we do, our work becomes an offering to God, and thus everyone is invited to do good work that they are not craving to avoid, whether that is in the context of formal ministry or not.<sup>273</sup> For this reason, when we ask ourselves what work we are called to, what our vocation is, and what our life purpose is, we must keep in mind the fundamental biblical principle that all vocations are inherently potentially sacred. Whether we are called into service in the church or in the world—whether we are called to religious work, to work with our hands, to work in the arts, or to work in education and the sciences—each call has the potential for sacredness, for no more powerful reason than that it comes from God. Therefore, speaking of a “secular vocation” is a contradiction in terms—a vocation is sacred *in* that it comes from God.<sup>274</sup> As Calvin puts it, “In following your proper calling, no work will be so mean and sordid as not to have splendor and value in the eye of God.”<sup>275</sup> Rather than being distinct from the secular, then, the sacred is that which sanctifies the ordinary and thus makes it good and noble. God’s kingdom is not merely spiritual, and, as God is establishing his kingdom on earth, he calls and enables us to be his kingdom agents within every sphere of life and society. As Smith puts it, “Each vocation reflects but one means by which God, through word and deed, is accomplishing this.”<sup>276</sup>

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272. *Ibid.*, 36.

273. *Ibid.*, 43.

274. *Ibid.*

275. *Ibid.*, 45.

276. *Ibid.*, 46.

Smith argues that, when we fail to affirm the sacredness of all vocations, we create burdens for people. They carry the burden of assuming a role or responsibility that is not truly their own, and the burden of not embracing the work that God has truly called them to do. Moreover, in both cases, not only do people carry a false burden, but also become a burden to others.<sup>277</sup>

All of the above is, of course, also true about the work of the Christian musician. Assuming that a Christian artist must produce religious art as though this is more consistent with a Christian's vocation, and thus assuming a worship ministry role or embarking in a Christian music career just because we feel as though we *should*, as though we *ought to* as Christians, might in turn keep us from actually doing what God has truly called us to do, which is perhaps to be a blessing to others through our craft in the world in different contexts. While there certainly are wonderful and edifying ways for musicians to take up their work in the world directly in the context of worship ministry or the sphere of Christian music, there are also countless ways in which they can serve God and show the love of Jesus to their neighbors through their craft outside of overtly religious contexts—ways which are also wonderful and edifying.

#### *Vocational Integrity and Stewardship*

An integral aspect of what it means for Christians to glorify God through their work, whatever that work may be, is to exercise vocational integrity and stewardship. If our work is guided by vocational integrity and stewardship, it will naturally glorify God and be a blessing to others. This is certainly true for the work of Christian musicians. By vocational stewardship, Sherman means “the intentional and strategic deployment of our vocational power-knowledge,

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277. *Ibid.*, 133.

platform, networks, position, influence, skills and reputation to advance foretastes of God's kingdom."<sup>278</sup> The witness of the Scriptures and of Christian heritage suggest that the stewardship of our capacities and opportunities is a key element of responsible human life.<sup>279</sup>

For those who are called into the arts, exercising vocational integrity and stewardship will mean responding to God's call and stewarding the gifts they have been given. Looking at the work of Bezalel in Exodus 31:2–5, Smith describes three specific gifts of the artist. The first one is talent and ability—a capacity for working with the materials from which he or she will do this craft. The second gift is that of intelligence—specifically, the intelligence or understanding that is particular to his or her calling, which in this case surely means an aesthetic sense. Third, the artist is given knowledge of the craft.<sup>280</sup> But, to what end is the artist given these gifts? What is the essence of the gift of God through the artist? What is the “necessity” from which the artist does his or her work and without which they are not true to themselves and thus to the call of God? The answer that Smith proposes is that God gifts the artist, at the very least, “to enrich our lives from the inside out, to foster a depth of appreciation of the beauty of God and of God's creation.”<sup>281</sup> He argues that the arts “assure that we are not one-dimensional people, but alert and attentive to the beauty of God because we are attentive to the response of our own hearts to beauty<sup>282</sup>—and this happens both in worship and in our lives in the world. This is, of course, true for the work of the Christian musician.

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278. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, location 149–150.

279. Smith, *Courage & Calling*, 43.

280. *Ibid.*, 157.

281. *Ibid.*

282. *Ibid.*

Since the focus of this project is the work of the Christian musician outside of the formal ministry context, we will not elaborate on the value of the artist for Christian worship. It will suffice to say that Christian worship depends heavily on the work of the artist—artists of all kinds. Artists foster our capacity to appreciate the beauty of God in creation, and thus heighten our response to God. Whether it is the String Quartets of Mozart or the sculpture of Michelangelo, art is potentially offered as a prayer to the Creator.<sup>283</sup>

As far as human beings' daily lives are concerned, Smith argues that, in the comings and goings of our lives, we need the work of the Christian artist to remind us of the transcendent—of the beauty and glory of our God.<sup>284</sup> Whether it is through the art in our walls, the design of our buildings, the layout of our parks and gardens, and certainly the music we listen to, art can bring us foretastes of God's kingdom. Both in worship and in daily life, the arts have the capacity to “lift our spirits and expand our hearts and souls so that we can know more of the breadth and depth of the glory of God.”<sup>285</sup> It is through the arts that our joy is made full. Thus, as Hans Rookmaaker puts it, “Art needs no justification.”<sup>286</sup> Christian art cultivates within us a Godward orientation, fostering our capacity for worship and increasing within us a capacity for an attentiveness to the presence of God in daily life—at work, at home, in our neighborhoods, in the school, the hospital, the park, or the airport.<sup>287</sup> Through the arts, we find our deepest and fullest sense of identity, purpose and meaning.

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283. Ibid., 158.

284. Ibid.

285. Ibid.

286. Hans R. Rookmaaker, *Art Needs No Justification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978).

287. Smith, *Courage & Calling*, 159.



Smith emphasizes that, naturally, not just any art will do. By this, he does not mean that Christian artists must necessarily produce religious art, as though this is more consistent with a Christian's vocation. Rather, what makes art (and certainly music) *authentic*—what makes the craft evidence that the artist is faithful to God's call—is, at the very least, a *commitment to excellence, a commitment to intellectual honesty, a commitment to the calling of God rather than to acclaim or the commercial potential of such calling, and leaving no place for self-indulgence.*<sup>288</sup>

With the above in mind, in order to glorify God in their work, Christian musicians must, first, strive for excellence in their craft. Musicians are given gifts and capacities, and to be true to themselves, they must exercise them to the best of their ability. In order to faithfully steward their expertise, they must apply it to achieve the highest degree of excellence in their work.<sup>289</sup> Excellence is found in fulfilling our vocation in the service of truth to the very best of *our* ability, with a continued commitment to serve God as well as *we* are able.<sup>290</sup> Christian musicians should seek to create the best music they can, and should not be satisfied with anything less than their best. Through excellent art, artists can call others to excellence in their work—they can inspire all of us to do our work well. Of course, excellence does not come in a “swish of inspiration.”<sup>291</sup> It is the fruit of countless hours of hard work and practice. A commitment to excellence, then, involves a commitment to diligence. Our work is marked by quality, integrity, and beauty when we are faithful behind the scenes, when no one is overseeing or affirming or praising us, as much as when we are in the spotlight. Musicians must be diligent in both the public and private aspects

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288. Ibid.

289. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, location 1289.

290. Smith, *Courage & Calling*, 111.

291. Ibid., 159.

of their work because they are committed first and foremost to good work.<sup>292</sup> Musicians, Smith argues, can only become accomplished at their task if they practice with thoroughness and persistence, which provides little reward or affirmation. As he puts it, a commitment to excellence and diligence “must be a personal commitment or it is not a commitment at all.”<sup>293</sup>

However, Smith warns musicians against confusing the love and pursuit of excellence with perfectionism. Perfectionism is a misguided pursuit of excellence. Rather than delighting in work well done for the sake of others, perfectionists are consumed with themselves and their own performance.<sup>294</sup> As we saw in a previous section, as Guthrie points out, seeking a shallow perfection, a sterile uniformity, is artistically and theologically inadequate, and will result in art that is fake, rather than authentic.<sup>295</sup> Similarly, Smith warns musicians against confusing diligence and hard work with hectic activity or overwork, as it will result in them being consumed by work and by all the things they think need to be done, and they will never be satisfied. Frantic and anxious work is not work done well, with care, diligence, and grace.<sup>296</sup>

Second, Christian musicians must show a commitment to intellectual honesty. In order to be faithful to the call of God, artists must be honest about the pain of this world, its fragmentation, and “the violence of a creation gone askew.”<sup>297</sup> The genius of the artist, rather than denying the pain, is to “witness to the glory of God and the possibilities of grace in the very midst of the fragmentation.”<sup>298</sup> As we saw with Guthrie, artwork that masks pain—that covers

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292. *Ibid.*, 40.

293. *Ibid.*, 116.

294. *Ibid.*, 114.

295. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 157.

296. Smith, *Courage & Calling*, 117.

297. *Ibid.*, 160.

298. *Ibid.*

over scars and struggles—is not honest and beautiful art.<sup>299</sup> Art sustains our hope not by sentimentality, but with a rigorous honesty.

Smith also points out that a commitment to intellectual honesty suggests that artists take their materials seriously—that they value honest materials.<sup>300</sup> Once again, as we saw with Guthrie, through their artwork, in creative submission, the artist makes manifest what his or her materials are most truly.<sup>301</sup>

Third, Christian musicians must show a commitment to the calling of God, rather than to acclaim or the commercial potential of their calling. While Smith recognizes that, of course, artists need to make a living, he emphasizes that the integrity of their work is in grave danger if they are driven more by their financial potential than by their calling. Musicians compromise their art when they create something merely because it will sell, pandering to the tastes of their public rather than seeking to cultivate their capacity for good, honest art—art that may trouble them as much as it comforts them, that stretches their imagination and infuses them with hope.<sup>302</sup> With this in mind, since our work is ultimately a service *for another*, Smith argues that musicians must distinguish between *generous* service and *calculated* service. While calculated service “counts” the cost and considers the return, generous service is given freely. Again, by no means does this mean that artists should not get paid for their art, but, while they may be paid for their work—in payment that is certainly necessary for them to meet their financial needs—their service does not need to be calculated.<sup>303</sup>

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299. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 157.

300. Smith, *Courage & Calling*, 160.

301. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 158.

302. Smith, *Courage & Calling*, 161.

303. *Ibid.*, 118.

Fourth, Christian musicians must leave no place for self-indulgence. Smith argues that, when artists become celebrities whose egos fill the room, their vocation is compromised.<sup>304</sup> While this is true with all vocations, it is perhaps most obvious for the artist: they must give priority to their craft and avoid viewing their work as a means for their own glorification. The true artist, Smith says, “defers to the art itself and to the God the art witnesses to.”<sup>305</sup> As an example of this, Smith thinks of the humility of Johann Sebastian Bach, who “was never taken with himself but only with the God and the Christ to whom he witnessed in the grandeur of his music.”<sup>306</sup> The world needs artists who know the power of self-effacement, artists who just want to be faithful to their craft and to the One who has called and gifted them.<sup>307</sup>

Going back to Amy Sherman’s definition of vocational stewardship—the intentional and strategic deployment of our vocational power-knowledge, platform, networks, position, influence, skills, and reputation to advance foretastes of God’s kingdom—we can add a few more elements to the four features above that characterize the work of Christian musicians who practice vocational integrity and stewardship and glorify through their craft.

In order to be faithful stewards of their vocation, Christian musicians must mindfully utilize their *platform, networks, position, influence, and reputation*. The profession of musicians often provides them with a platform—a valuable opportunity to share a message with others or to shine the spotlight on an issue, cause, place, person, or organization. Possession of a platform, Sherman argues, is a heady responsibility, and stewarding it wisely involves a relentless

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304. Ibid., 161.

305. Ibid., 162.

306. Ibid.

307. Ibid.

commitment to truth and accuracy, and requires a great sensitivity to human dignity.<sup>308</sup> Similarly, musicians must thoughtfully and carefully steward their networks for the purposes of shalom. Sherman argues that Christian artists with strong networks should seek to use them to create interest groups, coalitions, or issue task forces in order to promote institutional transformation—to promote positive change at the institutional level—within their field.<sup>309</sup> Likewise, Christian musicians must consider what degree of influence they possess in their work settings—whether it is through the credibility that their position grants them or through relationships they have formed—and how that influence could be used creatively for good.<sup>310</sup> Finally, Christian musicians who achieve high levels of reputation and fame within—and sometimes beyond—their vocational field, should seek to generate strategic opportunities to direct wide-scale attention to particular issues or causes that advance foretastes of God's kingdom.<sup>311</sup>

All the features of vocational integrity and stewardship that we explored above are critical principles for Christian musicians to keep in mind as they take up their work in the world. Whether they are solo artists, band members, singers, instrumentalists, teachers, composers, arrangers, conductors, producers, studio musicians, music industry specialists, or any combination of the above (at the same time or at different times in their career), musicians must exercise vocational integrity and stewardship in order to faithfully respond to the Spirit's calling and thus glorify God through their craft.

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308. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, location 1304.

309. *Ibid.*, location 1318.

310. *Ibid.*, location 1323.

311. *Ibid.*, location 1353.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Examples**

Having developed a theology of work in chapter 2, and having explored the interplay between music and the work of the Spirit, as well as the calling of the musician with an emphasis on vocational integrity and stewardship in chapter 3, chapter 4 will present three examples of how Christians who have taken up their work in the world in several different spheres of the music industry have sought to glorify God through their craft. It is important to note that, naturally, the examples below are by no means the only ways in which musicians who are Christians can glorify God in their work outside of the context of worship music and formal ministry. These examples are meant to show merely a few of the ways in which Christian musicians can apply the principles we explored throughout this project in order to use their craft for the common good. While all three examples below are musicians whose careers gave them a large platform which they were able to use for the Lord, having a big platform or achieving a considerable amount of fame are certainly not necessary for Christian musicians to glorify God through their craft. It is also important to note that the portrayals below are in no way representative of the whole lives and careers of the artists in question; an in-depth analysis of that kind would warrant a separate, lengthy work about each character. However, the excerpts of the lives and careers of the musicians that we will explore below will serve as great examples of the many different ways in which Christians who have a musical calling can steward their gifts to bring about foretastes of the kingdom and be a blessing to others.

## John Coltrane

While John Coltrane passed away over fifty years ago, his sound continues to grab the ears of an ever-widening circle of fans. His legacy has planted him firmly in our culture as one of the 20th century's musical giants. His saxophone playing is still one of the most recognizable sounds in modern jazz, and his influence stretches over styles and genres, and transcends cultural boundaries. The modern ideal of music serving a deeply spiritual, connective purpose is one of Coltrane's defining facets.<sup>312</sup>

### *Struggle and Redemption*

John Coltrane was born in 1926 in Hamlet, North Carolina, to a family in which both of Coltrane's grandfathers were pastors in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. At age 13, in less than five months, Coltrane lost three of the most important figures in his life—two of his grandparents, and most notably, his father. It was at this point in his life that he began to learn music.<sup>313</sup> Grammy-nominated jazz pianist, composer, and author Lewis Porter speculates: “Perhaps, in a sense, music became his father substitute. And through music, he could both express and relieve the pain he felt about his father's death, a pain he never seems to have allowed himself fully to explore.”<sup>314</sup> Following a brief stint in the navy, Coltrane began to pursue music as his full-time profession. In Philadelphia, he was able to study music under Dennis Sandole and also found work in both jazz and rhythm-and-blues. In 1949, Coltrane joined the

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312. “Biography,” John Coltrane, <https://www.johncoltrane.com/biography>.

313. Jamie Howison. *God's Mind in That Music: Theological Exploration through the Music of John Coltrane* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 64.

314. Lewis Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 17.

great Dizzy Gillespie's band, and it was at that point that his use of both heroin and alcohol began to cause serious problems.<sup>315</sup>

Struggling with addiction, Coltrane ended his tenure with Gillespie's band in 1951 and returned to Philadelphia, where he remained for the next few years, working in relative obscurity with several jazz and rhythm-and-blues bands and finishing his music studies. By 1955, he was able to keep his addictions in check enough that he was able to play at a demanding level again.<sup>316</sup> It was that year that Coltrane received an invitation to join the legendary Miles Davis' band. By the first month with the band, they were in the studio recording the tracks for *Round About Midnight*, and many other recordings followed. On top of their recording responsibilities, the band had a steady and grueling touring schedule through the remainder of 1955. Having gotten married that year as well, however, Coltrane struggled to balance the demands of his music with the realities of domestic life, and he was increasingly losing himself to his addictions once more. Although Davis warned Coltrane to "straighten out," his addictions were anything but in check by early 1957, when Davis finally fired him.<sup>317</sup>

It was at this point in Coltrane's life that, with the encouragement of his friends and family, he finally decided to free himself from his addictions. While there are many different accounts for the events that followed, the basic narrative is that Coltrane "locked himself up" in his bedroom, with not much more than water for sustenance, and, after a period of time—different versions ranging from four days to two weeks—he emerged "straight, sober, and spiritually transformed, ready to live the rest of his life in a whole new light."<sup>318</sup> In one of

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315. Howison, *God's Mind in That Music*, 65.

316. *Ibid.*

317. *Ibid.*, 67.

318. *Ibid.*, 68.



Coltrane's biographies, *Chasin' the Trane*, J.C. Thomas writes: "With God's grace, [Coltrane] believed, and his own determination, all things were possible. His readings in religion and philosophy had convinced him that he should now cleanse himself of physical and psychological impurities and dedicate his music to God, in whom he believed with increasing involvement each passing day."<sup>319</sup> In a different account, John Fraim writes: "During the days he spent most of his time praying and asking for God's help to see him through this ordeal. . . . Clearly, some incredible event was taking place in that room. One morning, about four days later, he walked out of his room and announced to the family that he was no longer addicted to heroin or alcohol."<sup>320</sup> And, in yet a different account of Coltrane's period of isolation, Eric Nisenson writes: "Early on during this period, he said, he was somehow touched by God, with whom he made a deal of sorts: get him through this torment and he would devote his talent to God, he would make music that would bring people to experience the same kind of revelations he was witnessing."<sup>321</sup>

Jamie Howison, whose book, *God's Mind in That Music: Theological Explorations through the Music of John Coltrane*, I used as my primary source for this section, adds that, based on several different accounts like the ones above about this period of Coltrane's life, we can conclude that Coltrane's struggle with his addictions was lived out in a more work-a-day world, and one in which he needed to keep putting one foot in front of the other as he learned to cope with his own cravings.<sup>322</sup> What we can be certain of, however, is that after this period of

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319. J. C. Thomas, *Chasin' the Trane* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 83.

320. John Fraim, *Spirit Catcher: The Life and Art of John Coltrane* (West Liberty, OH: Greathouse, 1996), 34–35.

321. Eric Nisenson, *Ascension: John Coltrane and his Quest* (New York: Da Capo, 1995), 40.

322. Howison, *God's Mind in That Music*, 71.

time, Coltrane decided to glorify God through his craft. Although he knew there was still work to be done regarding his struggle with addiction, he was grateful to God for helping him get through that dark period,<sup>323</sup> and, rejuvenated, he began to work harder than ever on his music.<sup>324</sup>

In 1958, Coltrane was invited to return to play with Miles Davis' band, and during his two-year stint with them, he collaborated with several other artists, played on a number of sessions, participated in several recordings, and released his landmark record, *Giant Steps*. His success led to his signing with Impulse Records, a label that gave Coltrane considerable artistic control, right down to the album packaging.<sup>325</sup> Impulse Records is the label in which he would later release *A Love Supreme*, which stands as one of the most engaging and influential jazz albums of all time.<sup>326</sup>

### *A Love Supreme*

Outside of sacred and choral music, *A Love Supreme* is one of the most unapologetically theological jazz recordings ever made. It marked a new beginning in terms of Coltrane's spiritual/theological work. As we will see below, the music itself was theologically charged, and the liner notes include Coltrane's testimony and sincere gratefulness and submission to God—he shares his deep, unapologetic devotion to the Lord that saved him. In the liner notes to *A Love Supreme*, Coltrane writes that: “During the year 1957 , I experienced, by the grace of God, a spiritual awakening which was to lead me to a richer, fuller, more productive life. . . . I humbly

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323. Ibid.

324. Porter, *John Coltrane*, 106.

325. Howison, *God's Mind in That Music*, 73.

326. Ibid., 76.

asked to be given the means and privilege to make others happy through music. I feel this has been granted through His grace. ALL PRAISE TO GOD.”<sup>327</sup>

With the above in mind, Coltrane’s response to God’s act of grace in helping him break free from his addictions was to ask to be enabled to pass something on to others, and one of such things was indeed *A Love Supreme*.

Coltrane’s suite consists of four movements, all of which portray different theological themes. “Part 1—Acknowledgement,” as we saw previously in Guthrie’s section, is characterized by a mantra-like theme. Alice Coltrane once described this first movement of the suite as a statement that “the doors are opening and the service is beginning.”<sup>328</sup> As the movement gets to the final minute-and-a-half, the mantra-like sound of the music is joined by Coltrane’s voice in unison with the bass, chanting the words “a love supreme.” Lewis Porter writes:

He brilliantly executed a reverse development, saving the exposition— or perhaps ‘revelation’ would be a better word in this case— for the end. He’s telling us that God is everywhere— in every register, in every key— and he’s showing us that you have to discover religious belief. You can’t just hit someone on the head by chanting right at the outset— the listener has to experience the process and then the listener is ready to hear the chant.<sup>329</sup>

“Part 2—Resolution” shifts quickly into full gear, and Coltrane plays with a fiery intensity. Howison argues that the movement is sort of a pilgrim’s traveling song, in which the “resolution” is to keep moving along the path, because it is really going somewhere.<sup>330</sup> Then, in “Part 3—Pursuance,” the music settles in a more evenly swinging groove, with solos screeching

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327. Quoted in Howison, *God's Mind in That Music*, 138.

328. Quoted in Howison, *God's Mind in That Music*, 143.

329. Porter, *John Coltrane*, 242.

330. Howison, *God's Mind in That Music*, 144.

into the highest registers, as if crying out in agony, portraying the pilgrim—Coltrane—in search for the divine, in search for the path which would move him closer to God.<sup>331</sup>

In “Part 4—Psalm,” as we discussed briefly in Guthrie’s section, Coltrane actually plays, note for syllable, the text of a poem. Coltrane writes in the liner notes that “the fourth and last part is a musical narration of the theme, ‘A Love Supreme’ which is written in the context; it is entitled ‘PSALM.’”<sup>332</sup> The text of the prayer is an expression of thanks—for peace, for deliverance from fear and weakness, for grace and mercy—punctuated by the repetition of the phrase “Thank you God.” The prayer is also a gentle cry for continued help, in which Coltrane affirms that “No road is any easy one, but they all go back to God,” and then expands this by writing, “God breathes through us so completely . . . so gently we hardly feel it . . . yet, it is our everything.”<sup>333</sup> As Porter points out, not only is Coltrane playing a musical recitation of the text, but his playing also “beautifully expresses the meaning of the words—serene on the word ‘beautiful,’ shouting out ‘He always will be.’”<sup>334</sup>

Howison concludes about the structure of *A Love Supreme* that:

In summary, I hear—and read—A Love Supreme in terms of a spiritual path that moves from an opening acknowledgement of the abiding presence of God, through a picture of the steadfast pilgrim seeker striving to walk the road faithfully, to a strong statement of the reality of the seeker’s failing. With that admission of failure comes an equally strong statement that the failed seeker has been pursued all along by the very God from whom he has drifted. This experience of being pursued is one of considerable turmoil, fear, and perhaps even suffering, yet once caught by God the realization is made: there is nothing to fear, and there never was. The peace and joy that come through having been caught up in the grace of God are affirmed in the closing movement, with its almost tearful repetition of “thank you God.”<sup>335</sup>

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331. Ibid.

332. Ibid., 145.

333. Ibid., 146.

334. Porter, *John Coltrane*, 246.

335. Howison, *God's Mind in That Music*, 146.

In an interview shortly after the release of *A Love Supreme*, Coltrane commented about his renewed vision for his life and music: “My goal is to live the truly religious life and express it in my music. If you live it, when you play there’s no problem because the music is just part of the whole thing. To be a musician is really something. It goes very, very deep. My music is the spiritual expression of what I am— my faith, my knowledge, my being . . .”<sup>336</sup>

Over the years that followed the creation of *A Love Supreme*, Coltrane’s sound became increasingly free and searching. Coltrane himself spoke of his need to “just get it out,” and of, “going all the way, as deep as you can . . . right down to the crux.”<sup>337</sup> His search to glorify the Lord through his work continued throughout his career, and it took him into some very rich theological and musical territory, but also down at least a couple of blind alleys.<sup>338</sup> His pursuit to bless others with his music continued until the end.

### *A Lasting Legacy*

John Coltrane’s importance today rests in his enduring role as a paragon of artistic sacrifice and spiritual vision. Coltrane viewed the musician as a messenger—he believed that making music is an endeavor tied to a larger, greater good. As we saw previously in Guthrie’s section, Coltrane wrote in a letter to his listeners that he “humbly asked to be given the means and privilege to make others happy through music,” telling of a prayer to God. Less than a year before his death, he stated: “I know that there are bad forces, forces that bring suffering to others and misery to the world. I want to be the opposite force. I want to be the force which is truly for good.”<sup>339</sup>

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336. Quoted in Porter, *John Coltrane*, 232.

337. Quoted in Howison, *God's Mind in That Music*, 150.

338. *Ibid.*, 151.

339. “Biography,” John Coltrane, <https://www.johncoltrane.com/biography>.

As a diligent, hard-working jazz player coming out of a proud, rooted musical tradition, paying his dues as a sideman, learning the ropes as a leader, and working with primarily wordless music to convey his message, Coltrane was able to achieve his goal. He released twenty-five albums as a leader during his lifetime, many of which became classics of the jazz genre, and one of which is his Grammy-nominated, “humble offering” to God, *A Love Supreme*. Coltrane’s music “defined a comet-like path of rapid growth and dizzying rate of change,” resulting in an extraordinary musical career and legacy.<sup>340</sup>

Coltrane sought to glorify God through his music, and he worked diligently to coat his sounds with theological meaning, and, as we saw above, *A Love Supreme* is perhaps the greatest example of this. All the different theological interpretations that *A Love Supreme* prompted are a testament to how successful he was at making his craft his vehicle for praise. Perhaps some interpretations are closer to what he really meant to portray than others, but in aiming to make his art his personal prayer, he was able to reach many people in many different ways. Merely by pouring his soul into his craft, by making it his sincere prayer to God, and by including part of his testimony in the liner notes, Coltrane was able to get others talking about their faith, theological themes, and perhaps get closer to God. The music itself had the potential to bring foretastes of God’s kingdom to the listeners, and the liner notes served the purpose of further emphasizing the theological content of his music to anyone that would care to read them. Naturally, one could argue that Coltrane could not have planned for his music to generate the conversations and theological insights that it has, but, by truly aiming to glorify God through his

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340. Ibid.

craft, his music became a means for blessing others in ways that he himself could not have possibly foreseen.

### Tupac Shakur

Rapper, songwriter, poet, actor, and activist, Tupac Amaru Shakur—more commonly known as 2Pac—is one of the most popular hip-hop/rap artists in history, with over seventy-five million records sold worldwide.<sup>341</sup> Although his life was tragically cut short at age twenty-five, his musical catalog continued to grow thanks to a significant cache of unreleased songs, and he left a legacy of life, love, rage, pain—and theology. Tupac’s work continues to ring true almost twenty-five years after his death because his meaningful lyrics are coated with “a type of ghetto spiritual essence and urban contextualized spiritual authority entrenched in the murky waters of the profane and the sacred.”<sup>342</sup> In several of his writings, author Daniel White Hodge explores Tupac’s career, establishing his hermeneutical, ecclesiological, and numinous pursuits throughout his music, poetry, and life.<sup>343</sup> We will briefly explore some of his insights below.

#### *Theology Through Song*

White Hodge echoes Quincy Jones in stating that “Tupac was touched by God; God had a special message and mission for Tupac.”<sup>344</sup> Tupac became a sort of popular critical pundit for the hip-hop community in his critique of US social structures—particularly religion and economics. He aimed to give a voice to the marginalized, oppressed, and downtrodden. He wanted to help connect God with people who would never imagine gracing the pristine hallways of a church.<sup>345</sup>

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341. “Official Biography,” 2Pac, <https://2pac.com/us/biography>.

342. Beaudoin, Tom, ed., *Secular Music and Sacred Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 127.

343. Daniel White Hodge, *Baptized in Dirty Water: Reimagining the Gospel According to Tupac Amaru Shakur* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 114.

344. Beaudoin, *Secular Music and Sacred Theology*, 127.

345. *Ibid.*, 128.

Tupac sought to relate culture, hip-hop, life, and pain, with Jesus—he forced his listeners to deal with difficult issues while providing an accessible pathway and access to a God that was not “marred with a blonde-haired, blue-eyed embodiment of perfection.”<sup>346</sup> In his lyrics, Tupac expressed his deep hurt and alienation, but he also expressed profound religious sensibilities.

White Hodge argues that Tupac sought to portray a post-soul gospel message through his music. The post-soul context is the era which began in the late 1960s and early 1970s that rejected dominant narratives, systems, and structures which tended to exclude ethnic minorities and particularly “the ‘hood.” The post-soul theology that Tupac expressed in his lyrics, then, prioritized a connection with a God of the oppressed and disenfranchised—it made God accessible to people in a multi-ethnic, inclusive way, while recognizing at the same time the atrocities committed in the name of religion.<sup>347</sup> Tupac aimed to portray a new type of theological discourse through his music in light of the severe economic, social, and political disparities at the time.<sup>348</sup> His lyrics present a “voice to engage culture, deal with conflict, create connective narrative, generate community, dispel the traditional powers and call people to a different level of engagement with God.”<sup>349</sup>

White Hodge points out that, in his critique of cultural, economic, and religious systems, Tupac never questioned, blasphemed, or cursed the name of God or Jesus. His intention was to call out religious officials, churches practicing hyper-traditionalism, irrelevant theologies, conventional forms of religion, and current methods of evangelism.<sup>350</sup> White Hodge also notes

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346. Ibid.

347. Ibid., 131.

348. Ibid.

349. Ibid., 133.

350. Ibid., 134.



that Tupac was not a trained theologian, pastor, or evangelist. However, he was “still able to connect God to the streets and give those who had never heard of God a vision for what their life could be like.”<sup>351</sup> Tupac’s lack of formal training did not disqualify him from doing “God’s work.”

Tupac’s listeners were able to connect and identify with him because he created a sense of transparency and authenticity by owning a lot of his own sins and shortcomings. White Hodge argues that it is within that brokenness and profanity in his music that an attempt to create honest communication between God and humankind is at work.<sup>352</sup> Through the authenticity and message in his music and lyrics, Tupac aims to share three main ideas with his listeners: hold on, keep your head up, and “heaven has a ghetto.”<sup>353</sup>

First, Tupac aims to encourage those who have given up or are about to give on life or other people—he wants to encourage his listeners to see that there is hope for a better tomorrow.<sup>354</sup> For example, in his poem titled “God,” Tupac calls out to God and asks for a conduit. He looks for revelation and looks for no one else but God.<sup>355</sup> Another example is his song “So Many Tears,” in which Tupac begs God not to forget him. The lyrics read “Lord I suffered through the years and shed so many tears. . . . Dear God please let me in.” Tupac encourages his listeners to hold on—to seek a better way and a higher level of understanding.<sup>356</sup>

Second, Tupac encourages his listeners to keep their head up. He aims to make sense of immediate pain and suffering. Tupac wants others to know that, in the face of adversity, extreme

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351. Ibid.

352. Ibid., 139.

353. Ibid.

354. Ibid., 140.

355. Ibid.

356. Ibid.

opposition, and hurt, there is still a way to move forward.<sup>357</sup> For example, his song “Ghetto Gospel” reads:

If I upset you, don't stress, never forget  
 That God isn't finished with me yet  
 I feel His hand on my brain  
 When I write rhymes I go blind and let the Lord do his thang  
 But am I less holy?  
 'Cause I chose to puff a blunt and drink a beer with my homies  
 Before we find world peace  
 We gotta find peace and end the war in the streets, my ghetto gospel<sup>358</sup>

Tupac aimed to bring his listeners a pragmatic type of hope through his music instead of traditional hymns.<sup>359</sup> Another example of this is his song “Hold Ya Head,” in which Tupac seeks to encourage those who are in prison, lost, and in pain to hold on and keep their head up in adverse times.<sup>360</sup>

Third, Tupac shares the idea that “heaven has a ghetto.” He attempts to contextualize heaven and make it accessible for people who do not subscribe to Euro-Western theology.<sup>361</sup> His goal is to “bring a gospel to those who have been left out and have not been invited to the anticipated heavenly party with its unspoiled clean streets.”<sup>362</sup> Tupac affirmed that heaven has a ghetto not in the sense that there is poverty, gentrification, crime, and homelessness in the kingdom of God, but as a symbolical way to ask, “Is the gospel big enough to fit everyone who wants to fit in, and can God handle me if he really created me?”<sup>363</sup>—to which his answer was a

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357. Ibid., 141.

358. Tupac, “Ghetto Gospel,” *Loyal to the Game*, 2004.

359. Beaudoin, *Secular Music and Sacred Theology*, 141.

360. Ibid., 142.

361. Ibid., 143.

362. Ibid., 144.

363. Ibid., 145.

resounding “yes.” Tupac hoped to encourage his listeners to see that there was room in heaven for those who did not fit in a traditional evangelical (at times white) theology.<sup>364</sup>

### *Tupac’s Legacy*

While Tupac did his best to own his own sins and shortcomings, he was still human, and was at times contradictory to his own belief system. However, despite his personal demons and contradictions, Tupac’s message was, at its core, a Judeo-Christian one. It is because he was so transparent with his faults that he became one of Hip-Hop’s most respected artists and voices.<sup>365</sup> As we have seen above, Tupac used his craft to glorify God. Consistent with what we explored with Smith and Sherman regarding vocational integrity and stewardship, Tupac’s songs served as a platform for bringing attention to important issues in a post-soul context. He attempted to create a gospel message for the poor, the disenfranchised, and the dispossessed—those who often lived in the urban enclaves called the ghetto. Tupac aimed to create a transcendental space for them to find God.<sup>366</sup>

### Christopher Parkening

*On my music stand at home I have taped a note that reads, “Chris, what are you here for?” Just as my touring guitar bears the scars of having been used to create music, so I pray that my imperfect life will be an instrument in God’s hands for His purposes and to His glory.<sup>367</sup>*

Christopher Parkening is celebrated as one of the world’s preeminent virtuosos of the classical guitar. His concerts and recordings have received the highest worldwide acclaim for over 40 years. Parkening is recognized as heir to the legacy of the great Spanish guitarist Andrés

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364. Ibid.

365. White Hodge, *Baptized in Dirty Water*, 115.

366. Beaudoin, *Secular Music and Sacred Theology*, 144.

367. Christopher Parkening and Kathy Tyers, *Grace Like a River* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2006),

Segovia, who proclaimed that “Christopher Parkening is a great artist – he is one of the most brilliant guitarists in the world.” *The Los Angeles Times* has noted: “Parkening is considered America’s reigning classical guitarist, carrying the torch of his mentor, the late Andrés Segovia.” Parkening’s rare combination of dramatic virtuosity, eloquent musicianship and uniquely beautiful sound has captivated audiences around the world.<sup>368</sup>

### *Early Career*

Parkening grew up in Los Angeles and started playing the guitar at age 11. Growing up in a home that taught him the value of hard work and discipline, he strived for excellence and worked diligently to perfect his craft, getting up at 5:00 a.m. every morning to practice for an hour and a half before school, and again in the afternoon. He kept up with his rigorous practice schedule despite the conflict it created for a young man with a keen interest in sports, and who would have often preferred to go outside and play with friends than stay inside practicing his guitar. Parkening’s hard work certainly paid off, as he received a scholarship to perform for the greatest classical guitarist of all time, Andrés Segovia, at age 15, which led to him continuing private study with Segovia later on, when he attended the University of Southern California. At age 19, he signed a recording contract with Capitol Records for a series of albums, and was asked to start a guitar department at the University of Southern California. The following year, Parkening signed with Columbia Artist Management and added a grueling concert schedule to his teaching and recording obligations, touring the United States, Canada, Europe, and Asia—eventually performing over 90 concerts a year.<sup>369</sup> Needless to say, he had an extraordinary career by his early twenties.

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368. “Career,” Parkening, <https://www.parkening.com/page/career>.

369. “Personal,” Parkening, <https://www.parkening.com/page/personal>.

As Parkening grew up, he became convinced that his aim should be to make a lot of money in order to retire early and enjoy the “good life.” His aim was to retire by the age of thirty, and, as a lover of fly-fishing, to own a ranch with his own private stream. Given the great success that he achieved through his hard work, he was able to accomplish his goal. Parkening stopped playing the guitar and moved from Southern California to a ranch with a beautiful trout stream in Montana by the time he was thirty years old. He called Capitol Records, USC, and Columbia Artists Management to thank them, and to let them know that he would not be playing the guitar anymore. He had achieved his life’s dream.<sup>370</sup> Of course, if the story had ended there, there would not be a reason to include Christopher Parkening in this section. What happened after his retirement, however, is a great example of many of the principles we have covered throughout this project.

### *Retirement*

During the following four years in retirement, Parkening was able to do what he wanted to do. He was able to fish to his heart’s content and enjoy the outdoors, and he returned to Southern California in the winter to escape the snow and cold weather. He was living the good life—or so he thought.<sup>371</sup>

Parkening eventually became bored with his life and felt empty inside—but he did not know why. His “ideal” life was turning out to be not so ideal after all. He felt like he needed something more—something to provide the fulfillment his success had not given him.<sup>372</sup> Deep down, he knew he ought to be doing something worthwhile. He would think to himself, “Is this

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370. Ibid.

371. Ibid.

372. Ibid.

all there is?”<sup>373</sup> Even before his retirement, he had begun to understand that there was something missing in his life—that whenever he finished a tour or put the last touches on a recording, the happiness and satisfaction lasted only a short time.<sup>374</sup>

At that point, Parkening was an occasional churchgoer, with a Methodist and Presbyterian background.<sup>375</sup> During one of his visits to Southern California, however, he had the chance to go to Grace Community Church, where he heard John McArthur preach a sermon entitled “Examine Yourself Whether You Be in the Faith.” During the sermon, McArthur read Matthew 7:21–23. Of this event, Parkening recalls:

When he spoke those words from the Bible my whole life flashed in front of me and I realized I would stand before Christ and He would say to me, “Depart from Me, I never knew you! You never cared about the things of Christ, you never cared about being obedient to My commandments, you never cared about glorifying Me with your life or with your music—all you cared about were your ranches and your trout streams. Depart from Me!”<sup>376</sup>

Parkening realized that, while he believed all the right facts about Christ and wanted a savior to save him from hell, what he did not want was a Lord of his life—a Lord he should follow, trust, and be obedient to. He realized that Jesus is both Savior and Lord. Lying awake that night, Parkening decided to give his life to Christ, and asked Him to forgive him of his sins and to be his Lord and Savior. “And by His grace alone He did save me,” he adds.<sup>377</sup>

### *Performing for God’s Glory*

Parkening’s new commitment to Christ made responding to God’s call on his life become his priority. While reading 1 Corinthians, he came across verse 10:31—“Whatever ye do, do all

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373. Parkening and Tyers, *Grace Like a River*, 143.

374. *Ibid.*, 127.

375. *Ibid.*, 128.

376. “Personal,” Parkening, <https://www.parkening.com/page/personal>.

377. *Ibid.*

to the glory of God.” Parkening truly wanted to live for God, and was convinced that he needed to use his gifts for God’s glory. He admired J.S. Bach’s commitment to the Lord. Bach said, “The aim and final reason of all music is none else but the glory of God,” and signed many of his compositions with the initials S.D.G., which stands for *Soli Deo Gloria* (to God alone the glory).<sup>378</sup> Parkening writes: “I thought, *If Bach could use his great ability for that purpose, that would be the least I could do with whatever ability or talent the Lord had given me.* It became evident that the Lord wanted me to return to playing the guitar again, but this time for a different purpose—to honor and glorify my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!”<sup>379</sup>

Thus, Christopher Parkening made the decision to return to playing guitar. That decision, however, was not an easy one to make—he was not even sure that he could get back on the career, since he had not performed or recorded since his retirement. Nonetheless, as disturbing as it was to him to consider playing the guitar professionally again, he was “willing to obey if the Lord led [him] to that.”<sup>380</sup> After selling his ranch in Montana and returning to California, Parkening’s former manager told him, plainly, that he had thrown away a very valuable career, and that it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to return to the concert stage after a four year absence. However, Parkening was willing and ready to hear God’s call, whatever it took, and knew that it would be only by His grace that he would be able to return to a professional concert career.<sup>381</sup> After making some calls, Capitol Records offered Parkening another contract, and Columbia Artists Management began booking him concerts.<sup>382</sup>

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378. Ibid.

379. Ibid.

380. Parkening and Tyers, *Grace Like a River*, 154.

381. “Personal,” Parkening, <https://www.parkening.com/page/personal>.

382. Parkening and Tyers, *Grace Like a River*, 154.

Naturally, Parkening's return to the stage did not come without sacrifice. Returning to playing the classical guitar professionally involved massive amounts of practice and diligence to take up and perfect his craft once again—and once again, he strived for *excellence*. He had a supportive group of fellow guitarists and musicians who guided him musically and professionally—several of whom were also committed to Christ and supported him so that he felt responsible and accountable for continuing to grow in Christ.<sup>383</sup> Despite all the challenges involved in his return from retirement, Parkening persisted in his search for excellence in order to glorify the Lord through his work, and ended up playing with every major orchestra in the nation, traveling the world on countless concert tours, and even playing for the President of the United States at the White House.<sup>384</sup>

As Parkening started asking God how to best use his career to glorify Him, almost immediately, he says, opportunities began to open up. He decided to give his Christian testimony at the end of one of his masterclasses for whoever chose to stay, since he did not want to have a forced audience. Coincidentally, the National Public Radio happened to be recording that entire four-day masterclass, and the sound engineer kept the recording running while he gave his Christian testimony, “simply speaking from [his] heart to the students who chose to stay and listen.”<sup>385</sup> That recording became one of Parkening's valuable tools for telling others about Christ, as he started giving out copies of it at the end of performances and masterclasses to anyone interested in hearing his testimony.<sup>386</sup> He continues to do so today.

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383. *Ibid.*, 158.

384. “Personal,” Parkening, <https://www.parkening.com/page/personal>.

385. Parkening and Tyers, *Grace Like a River*, 167.

386. *Ibid.*



Focusing his life and career on honoring God, Parkening knew he had at last found a purpose worth living for. He writes: “God had given me some talent and the discipline to pursue excellence and, therefore, the opportunity to honor Him.”<sup>387</sup> His career became a wonderful means for sharing his faith and blessing others. His craft, however, was not only a means for sharing his testimony—he strived to make his music itself a vehicle for praise and transformation as well. Parkening prayed before every performance, dedicating it to God, and asking Him to “have the audience hear exactly what He wants them to hear.”

### *Teaching for God’s Glory*

Another opportunity that opened up for Parkening to glorify the Lord through his work was by becoming faculty at Pepperdine University. Since every musician starts the journey as a student, Parkening thought it seemed “appropriate to finish as a teacher and share what one has learned.”<sup>388</sup> He was eager to pass along what he had gleaned from a concert career of more than thirty-five years to the younger generation. Although Parkening was approached by both UCLA and Pepperdine University, he ultimately decided to join the latter. Pepperdine’s mission statement and the faculty’s and staff’s integrity and commitment to Christ, to the school, and to academic excellence convinced him that he had made the right decision. Parkening writes, “To have the opportunity to openly speak of the gospel and what motivates me whenever I play the guitar was the deciding factor.”<sup>389</sup>

As Distinguished Professor of Music and Chair of the Guitar Department at Pepperdine University, Christopher Parkening’s goal is to guide his students toward a goal of concert

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387. Ibid.

388. Ibid., 221.

389. Ibid., 222.

performance while equipping them with a broad-based knowledge of academics and the music industry, to mentor them with an emphasis on their commitment to personal excellence in their lives and with the music they play, and to pass on the legacy taught to him by the great guitarist Andrés Segovia, who moved millions with his poetic, lyrical phrasing, beautiful sound, and romantic, beautiful spirit.<sup>390</sup> Most importantly, however, Parkening seeks to inspire his students to lead lives and careers that glorify God. During his studio classes, Parkening often shares with his students what he calls “stories of God’s grace,” which are stories of how he became aware of God’s work at different points throughout his life and career. He also prays with his students before each performance, like he does for his own, praying that each of them will dedicate the performance to God, and asking God to have the audience hear exactly what He wants them to hear.<sup>391</sup>

#### *A Christ-Centered Career*

The life and career of Christopher Parkening are a great example of a Christian musician who has committed every aspect of his life to the Lord. He diligently stewarded his gifts and always strived for excellence in his craft. He sought to glorify the Lord with his work by blessing others through his music and by making use of his platform to share his testimony and bring others closer to God. His position and successful concert career allowed him later to also glorify God by teaching his craft at Pepperdine University and encouraging others to lead lives and careers that glorify the Lord.

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390. “Christopher Parkening,” Pepperdine Seaver College, [https://seaver.pepperdine.edu/academics/faculty/christopher-parkening/?faculty=christopher\\_parkening](https://seaver.pepperdine.edu/academics/faculty/christopher-parkening/?faculty=christopher_parkening).

391. Gathered from personal experience in the Classical Guitar Department at Pepperdine University from August 2013 to April 2017.

While Parkening previously worked very hard for worldly success, he now works hard for excellence in order to bring glory to the Lord—to Parkening, *God* is the audience.<sup>392</sup> He believes that it is vital to pursue personal excellence based on one’s own God-given potential, rather than success. We ought to strive for excellence and seek satisfaction in having done our best in relation to our potential, and that we ought to pursue quality in our work and effort without regard to worldly recognition—all of which is certainly consistent with the features that characterize vocational integrity and stewardship that we explored in the previous section. He writes: “Whenever I finish a concert or complete a recording, I feel a deep sense of satisfaction and gratitude that the guitar has become my platform to glorify God and Share the gospel.”<sup>393</sup> As Parkening looks back on his life and career, he adds that he is grateful that, through God’s love, he was able to overcome his personal and professional shortcomings, and that he was blessed to build a career that, more than anything else, he looks upon as the foundation of his ministry.<sup>394</sup>

*I chose to close this chapter by briefly exploring Christopher Parkening’s career because, as one of his former students myself, I was able to witness his commitment to glorifying God through his work first hand—and I was deeply blessed by it. Professor Parkening’s influence and guidance throughout my time as his student—and even after graduation—was instrumental in my formation as a Christian musician, as well as in my decision to pursue a master’s degree in religion and choosing the subject at hand as the topic of my thesis.*

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392. Parkening and Tyers, *Grace Like a River*, 239.

393. *Ibid.*

394. *Ibid.*, 240.

## CHAPTER 5

**Conclusion**

Whether or not they consider themselves “artists,” human beings are irrepressibly artistic. As Steven Guthrie puts it, we need not only clothing, but adornment; we need not only four walls and a roof, but paint, pictures, and décor; we need not only food, but flavor, spices, and cuisine.<sup>395</sup> Even in our communication, in its most ordinary form, we think not only in definitions and logical relation, but in cadence, prosody, and metaphor. Art and beauty are truly a significant part of our lives.<sup>396</sup> Music is indeed one of the forms of art with which God has blessed the world, and, as we have seen throughout this project, Christians who have found their calling in music can certainly glorify God through their craft in countless creative, kingdom-oriented ways.

In order to find ways to bring foretastes of the kingdom through their work, Christian musicians must first have an understanding of a theology of work. As we saw in chapter 2, they ought to understand their mundane work as “work in the Spirit”—they must see their talents and calling as gifts bestowed upon them by the Spirit so that they may do God’s will in the world in anticipation of God’s new creation. Moreover, Christian musicians must see their work as *cooperation with God* in active anticipation of the eschatological transformation of the world.

The pneumatological understanding of work provided by Volf that we explored in chapter 2 considers each musician’s social interrelations and psychosomatic constitution as important factors in the gifting of the Spirit while, at the same time, affirming that charisms *remain different from their mediations* and should not be reduced or confused with them. A

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395. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit*, 166.

396. *Ibid.*

pneumatological understanding of work also emphasizes the obligation to overcome alienation in work, since each individual's gifts must be taken seriously, and it accounts for both the *diachronic* and the *synchronic plurality* of employments or jobs that characterize today's world of work—which is certainly common amongst musicians.

Alongside a strong foundation for a theology of work, Christian musicians must also have a deep understanding of their calling. In order to develop such understanding, in chapter 3, we explored the calling of the musician with an emphasis on the work of the Spirit in the musical vocation and craft, and discovered that the interplay between music and the work of the Spirit lies in their similarities in regards to mystery and ineffability, their connection with human expression and emotion, their ability to create and foster community, their quality as gift, their relationship with inspiration and discernment, and their eschatological character.

Then, we discussed Gordon Smith's and Amy L. Sherman's understanding of vocational integrity and stewardship, and determined that in order to engage in kingdom-oriented work that will glorify God and be a blessing to others, Christian musicians must strategically deploy their vocational power and knowledge to advance foretastes of God's kingdom. They must intentionally make use of their platform, networks, position, influence, skills, and reputation to show the love of Jesus to others, to bring attention to important issues, and to generate positive change for the common good. Christian musicians must also have a strong commitment to excellence and intellectual honesty in their craft and work, they must have a deep commitment to the calling of God rather than to acclaim or the commercial potential of their calling, and they must be mindful about leaving no place for self-indulgence. Striving for all of the above

characteristics will allow Christian musicians to faithfully respond to the Spirit's calling and thus to glorify God through their craft.

Finally, in chapter 4, we explored the lives and careers of three Christian musicians who took up their work in the world in several different spheres of the music industry and sought to glorify God through their craft outside of the context of formal ministry or worship music. John Coltrane sought to glorify God through his music by working diligently and coating his sounds with theological meaning to the best of his ability. His intentionality in portraying a message of hope and redemption through his sounds, and his conviction to share his deep, unapologetic devotion to God in his liner notes allowed him to make of his music a means for blessing others in ways that he could not have possibly foreseen.

In contrast with Coltrane's theologically charged sounds, Tupac Shakur sought to glorify God in his work by infusing his lyrics with a post-soul theology that prioritized a connection with a God of the oppressed and disenfranchised, which was popularized in the late 60s and early 70s. He aimed to make God accessible to his listeners in a multi-ethnic and inclusive way, and made strategic use of his platform to bring attention to severe economic, social, and political disparities at the time, in hope of bringing about positive change. Tupac's music was his means for creating a gospel message for the poor, the disenfranchised, and the dispossessed.

While Coltrane and Tupac expressed theological ideas by composing and creating intricate jazz ensembles and provocative hip-hop lyrics, respectively, Christopher Parkening let the sound of his classical guitar become a vehicle for praise. He strived for excellence in his craft and diligently stewarded his gifts in order to glorify God in his work. Parkening lived out the *cooperatio Dei* aspect of his work as, before each concert or presentation—whether his own or

his students’—he prayed that the performance would be dedicated to God, and that He would have the audience hear exactly what He wanted them to hear. He also used, and continues to use, his platform to share his testimony and bring others closer to God. Even after retiring from touring, Parkening continues to seek to glorify the Lord in his work by teaching his craft to students at Pepperdine University, and encouraging others to lead lives and careers that glorify God.

As seen above, there are countless ways in which Christian musicians can glorify God through their work. Living out the implications of their beliefs on the canvas of their daily work will look very different for each of them, and it will require their will, their emotions, their souls, and their minds. From using their platform to bring attention to important issues to bringing those in their network closer to God through their interactions, and from striving to cultivate their gifts in order to do skillful, excellent work to aiming to bring about foretastes of the kingdom through the beauty of their art, Christians who have found their calling in music certainly have a wide array of options when it comes to using their craft to glorify the Lord.

It is my hope that this project has proved, at least to some extent, that there is much more to the musical calling of Christians that seek to make their work an offering to God than leading worship at church or taking on a CCM career. While many Christian musicians use their gifts to take up their work in the world in the context of formal ministry or overtly Christian music—which are undoubtedly necessary, honorable, and kingdom-oriented endeavors—there are also many others who feel called to express their musical calling and to glorify the Lord through their work in different contexts and spheres of the music industry. We have shown that it is certainly possible for Christian musicians in this group to find ways to live out their faith in their work and

careers outside of the ministry and worship music contexts. There are countless examples alongside that of John Coltrane's, Tupac Shakur's, and Christopher Parkening's. When Christian musicians strive to use their gifts in the ways that characterize kingdom-oriented work that we explored throughout this project, they will be able to glorify God through their craft—whatever path in which their musical journey might take them.

...

I would like to close by offering some encouragement to those musicians who are in the journey of discovering their career path and integrating their work with their faith. As Timothy Keller puts it in his book, *Every Good Endeavor*, profound spiritual hope is necessary if we are going to face the challenge of pursuing our vocation in this world, acknowledging how deeply frustrating and difficult that work may be.<sup>397</sup> To portray this kind of hope, he turns to J.R.R. Tolkien's short story, "Leaf by Niggle."

Tolkien wrote this short story at a time in his life that was filled with uncertainty and dread—World War II had begun, and while he was not called into the military, the horror of war was a looming presence. With Britain in a precarious position, it was uncertain if he would survive the war even as a civilian. Thus, Tolkien began to despair of ever completing the work of his life—he was working on the manuscript of *The Lord of the Rings* at the time, and by that point, he had spent *decades* working on the languages, histories, stories, and characters behind the story. The thought of not finishing was "dreadful and numbing."<sup>398</sup> One day, Tolkien saw that a tree near his house had been "lopped and mutilated" by a neighbor. That image—the

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397. Timothy Keller and Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*, First Riverhead Trade Paperback ed. (New York: Riverhead Books, 2014), 24.

398. *Ibid.*, 25.



mangled tree—made him think of his work, and all the mythology he had developed for it, as his “internal tree,” fearing that it might suffer the same fate as the neighbor’s tree. He wrote the short story soon after.

“Leaf by Niggle” is a story about a painter who was a perfectionist, prone to worry and procrastination, and always unhappy with what he produced. His name, quite fittingly, was Niggle, which means “to work . . . in a fiddling or ineffective way . . . to spend time unnecessarily on petty details.”<sup>399</sup> As Keller points out, Tolkien knew that those were some of his own flaws, and that “Niggle was of course Tolkien himself.”<sup>400</sup>

Niggle had a long journey to make and, although he tried his best to put it off, he knew the journey was inevitable (Keller explains that the journey to which Tolkien was alluding was death).<sup>401</sup> As he continued to put off the journey, Niggle was working on one particular painting—he had a vision of a tree, and behind it, a whole country, complete with forests and snowy mountains. To accommodate his vision, he laid out a canvas so large that he had to use a ladder. Although Niggle knew he had to take the long journey, he hoped that he would be able to finish his painting before embarking on it. However, because of the way he worked—focusing on specific details, spending a long time expressing his artistry on a single leaf—he never got much done. No matter how hard he worked, very little actually appeared on the canvas. Another reason why he could not get much done was because his neighbors constantly asked him to do things for them, and the kind-hearted Niggle was often distracted by these requests.<sup>402</sup>

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399. *Ibid.*, 26.

400. *Ibid.*

401. *Ibid.*

402. *Ibid.*, 27.

While doing one of such favors for one of his neighbors, Niggle gets sick, and, although he works desperately to finish his painting, the Driver comes to take him on the journey he has put off. Realizing he must go, Niggle bursts into tears, having to leave his work unfinished. Some time after his death, his painting—or, rather, what was left of his crumbling canvas—was put in the Town Museum. It was “one beautiful leaf” that had remained intact, which they titled “Leaf by Niggle,” and which was noticed by a few eyes as it hung there in a recess.<sup>403</sup>

However, as Keller emphasizes, the story does not end there. After his death, Niggle embarks on the journey toward “the mountains of the heavenly afterlife.”<sup>404</sup> Although he had seemingly accomplished so little in life, he had chosen to sacrifice for others, and, as such, is rewarded with a wonderful sight when he gets to the outskirts of the heavenly country: “Before him stood the Tree, his Tree, finished; its leaves opening, its branches growing and bending in the wind that Niggle had so often felt or guessed, and yet had so often failed to catch. He gazed at the Tree, and slowly he lifted his arms and opened them wide. ‘It’s a gift!’ he said.”<sup>405</sup>

While Niggle’s old country had almost completely forgotten him, and his unfinished work had helped only a few, he finds that in his new country—what Keller calls “the permanently *real* world”—his tree was not just an idea that had died with him, but rather stood there in full detail and *finished*. His Tree was indeed part of the True Reality that would live and be enjoyed forever.<sup>406</sup>

Keller writes that he has recounted this story many times, and to people of various professions, who are often deeply moved—particularly artists and creatives. Tolkien had a very

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403. Ibid.

404. Ibid.

405. Ibid., 28.

406. Ibid.

Christian understanding of art and work—he believed that we do for one another what God wants to do for us, through the gifts He gives us.<sup>407</sup> As a writer, for example, Tolkien was able to tell stories that conveyed the nature of reality, and thus could fill people’s lives with meaning. Christian musicians can similarly convey the nature of reality through their art. When Niggle arrived at the heavenly country, he was assured that his Tree was truly real, and that the small glimpse of it that he had unveiled to the people on earth through his beautiful leaf had been a foretaste of the kingdom. Tolkien was very comforted by his own story, and it helped him to get over some of his fears and to get to work again.<sup>408</sup>

Musicians can certainly identify with Niggle. As Keller puts it, artists “work from visions, often very big ones, of a world they can uniquely imagine.”<sup>409</sup> Very few realize even a portion of their vision. Working with a product whose impact for the common good is rarely evident or quantifiable, it is natural for musicians to wonder if our work has any impact at all. Not only musicians, but *everyone* hopes to accomplish things, to be successful, to make an impact, and to make a difference in life. However, that is beyond the control of any of us. It is vital, then, that we remember that, like Niggle’s painting, our kingdom oriented efforts will indeed matter—in one way or another, they will be blessing to others, whether it is in the way we intended or in ways that we could not have foreseen. Every good endeavor, as small and simple as it might be, if it is pursued in response to God’s calling, can matter forever.<sup>410</sup> As Keller writes:

“Whatever your work, you need to know this: there really is a Tree. Whatever you are seeking in your work—the city of justice and peace, the world of brilliance and beauty,

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407. Ibid.

408. Ibid.

409. Ibid., 29.

410. Ibid.

the story, the order, the healing—it is *there*. There is a God, there is a future healed world that he will bring about, and your work is showing it (in part) to others. Your work will be only partially successful, on your *best* days, in bringing that world about. But inevitably the whole tree that you seek—the beauty, harmony, justice, comfort, joy, and community—will come to fruition. If you know all this, you won't be despondent because you can get only a leaf or two out in this life. You will work with satisfaction and joy. You will not be puffed up by success or devastated by setbacks.”<sup>411</sup>

So, go out and make some music—if your heart longs to glorify God through your work, you can be certain that you will start painting leaves.

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411. *Ibid.*, 30.

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