

Geneva Lecture
A Christian Spirituality for Hopeful Earthkeeping
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Introduction

[Slide 2: Locating Christian spirituality]

We live in a time where knowledge has exploded.
We live in a time where the word “spirituality” is commonplace.
We live in a time of serious economic and ecological challenges.
We live in a time where working and keeping the earth may look increasingly meaningless.

In this lecture I will contend that such events and developments can only be met with the true and sound wisdom of knowing God and of knowing ourselves in the light of God.¹ Knowing God is to have knowledge of God’s relation to us as a person, to stand in relation to him, not just to have knowledge “about him”. In such a context of “double knowledge” Christian spirituality is not a vague mystical experience or a self-help project, but “integrates relationships to God and creation with those to self and others”.²

[Slide 3: Purpose of lecture]

It will be argued in this lecture that believers *are* workers and keepers of the earth by virtue of who we are as believers in Christ. This new status of participating in Christ transforms us towards a practice that expresses God’s concerns towards others and all of creation.

Anthropology matters in keeping the earth, but not just any human anthropology. I will, first, join a chorus of voices pointing out that the human person is rejected in modern culture’s logical resolution. Second, I will argue for a theological anthropology where believers are adopted as children of God who are participating in communion with Christ, and thirdly, trace some of the implications of such an understanding of who we are for the ethics of working and keeping the earth.

[Slide 4: Structure]

The lecture is structured around the following questions

- Is there a problem in our common household?
 - What are the main proposed solutions and why are these inadequate?
- Digging deeper, what is then the real problem?

¹ James Houston, “The “Double Knowledge” as the Way of Wisdom” in *The Way of Wisdom. Essays in Honor of Bruce C. Waltke* edited by JI Packer & Sven K. Soderlund (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 310.

² Bradley Holt, *Thirsty for God. A Brief History of Christian Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 4.

- What are adequate responses to the real problem?
 - Who are we really?
 - What are the implications?
- How do you and I respond?
 - What does this mean for our work and vocations?
- How would such a response affect the common household – the economy, society and culture in which we live?

Is there a problem in our common household?

In one sense, this question can be answered just by glancing out of the window or by following the news. Yes, we do not live on a perfect earth. Although modern capitalism has mostly led to a steep decline in poverty, the capitalist moral vision to elevate the freedom for individuals above all other moral goals, has fostered the decline of virtue and has given rise to social inequality, consumerism and environmental degradation.³

[Slide 5: Is there a problem?]

Earth scientists point out that several planetary boundaries have already been overstepped, notably those core processes affecting climate change and the integrity of the biosphere, but also bio-chemical flows and land-system changes and point towards a safe operating space for humanity.⁴ Economists point out that wealth inequality in the US is at its highest levels in many decades⁵ and that real income growth has mostly benefitted the super-rich and some Asian economies in the twenty years leading up to the recession in 2008.⁶ Social scientists further point out that only 13% workers report to feel engaged in their jobs worldwide.⁷

Ecological damage, a largely disengaged global workforce, rising inequality and changing distribution of wealth across the globe and are only a few indicators that our socio-economic systems are not delivering wellbeing to all of creation.

[Slide 6: Comic – sometimes a pictures speaks a thousand words]

Such results is leading many to the conclusion that a more radical approach is needed to achieve some measure of justice, looking towards more effective governments to protect own national interests or to enforce broader social justice and ecological limits. Such a solution, however, is not only blind to the realism of the corruption of power,⁸ but also does not grant developing countries space to grow out of poverty and may place whole social-economic systems at

³ Paul Williams, Free markets do foster the decline of virtue. *ChristianWeek* 21(2), April 13 2007

⁴ W. Steffen, K. Richardson, J. Rockström, et al. “Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet,” *Science* 347 (2015): 6223-6235.

⁵ Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman, “Wealth Inequality in the United States since 1913: Evidence from Capitalized Income Tax Data”, *CEPR Discussion Paper 10227*, October, 2014.

⁶ Christoph Lakner and Branko Milanovic, “Global Income Distribution: From the Fall of the Berlin Wall to the Great Recession”, *World Bank Economic Review*, 2015. doi: 10.1093/wber/lhv039.

⁷ Gallup, *State of the Global Workplace. Employee Engagement Insights for Business Leaders Worldwide*. (Washington DC: Gallup, 2013).

⁸ Williams, *Free markets*.

risk. Rising instabilities in the global system increase the risks, not only of direct impacts, but also of misguided political and socio-economic responses.

Responding wisely is an urgent conversation to have and Christians need to join in to preserve the good and the humane for everyone. Despite its obvious weaknesses, the global marketplace remains an important place to be of service to God and our neighbours.

[Slide 7: The governing question]

But, how can the entrepreneurial impulse, the investment of capital and employment of labour, factors that drive the growth of economies, be reconciled with earthkeeping, social justice and dignity of human work in a biblically responsible way?

A question that has kept me busy for at least twenty years by now.

The sciences are one component in formulating a response. The field of economics, literally the science on how to rule the household, and the field of ecology, literally the study of the house, are both responses to God's command to keep and till the earth, to work it and take care of it (Gen 2:15). Increasing knowledge of the natural world, such as living organisms, physical matter and energy, the earth, space as well as the humanity and society, often aided by formal sciences such as logic and mathematics, have greatly deepened our collective understanding of creation and much more is still to be learned. However, studying and managing our common household are not the only components of a wise response though, as now illustrated by a brief discussion on modernity's inadequate options.

What are the main proposed solutions and why are these inadequate?

The views that govern *how* humanity generally respond to problems in the common household may serve us better in understanding *how* decisions are made and will reveal what the shape is of modern culture's spirituality. It also provides a reality check on those Christian positions that have strayed to far into assimilating with modern cultural categories of response.

[Slide 8: Modernity's responses]

Modernity's main responses are as follows:

- The first main response is that humans are sole agents to address these problems. Problems can be overcome through an investment in better human agency, such as in education, technology or morality. This practical and optimistic view is rooted in the idea of progress perpetuated since the Enlightenment,⁹ and although tempered by the harsh realities of the 20th and 21st centuries so far, still a widely held and dominant view evident in the pretensions of mastery and control in economics, science, technology, industry, industrialized agriculture, engineering, modern government and politics. In this view religion is reduced to morality and ethics and people become mere objects or things for manipulation,

⁹ D.W. Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian View* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 19.

leaving little room for an “affective spirituality”¹⁰, and then mostly in inward and private experiences.¹¹

- A second response, and one that is still alive in much of the oppressed world and in segments of the disillusioned developed world is one of Marxism. History is explained in terms of the economic development of human society, as characterized by a division in classes and the struggles of these classes. For Marxists, problem solving still resides in human rational agency, but now concentrates power in the state and focused on removing the forces and structures that are hindering the struggle between the classes such as religion. Such a response leaves no room for public spirituality as it threatens the godly attributes of the state. The world’s history has shown that the practical realization of this thought proved to be a utopian dream shattered on the dark realities of totalitarianism, although it continues to rear its head in response to the injustices and oppressive forces of modern capitalism.

Both these first two responses finds less and less appeal in a world that has not found meaning among an abundance of material goods or have lost a sense of meaning amidst suffering, oppression and unattainable utopian ideals. The “Teacher” from Ecclesiastes concluded that meaninglessness awaits those just toiling under the sun and not fearing God, and as Job had to learn painfully, blaming and cursing seems to be default human reaction when our human desires are not fulfilled. The Marxist with her utopian dreams has no answer for continued pain and suffering, while the progressive child of the Enlightenment has no answer to the experience of meaninglessness amidst plenty.

- A third response is to reject modern society and find responses that match pre-modern categories. Much of the oriental and ancient world, and nowadays what Old Testament scholar Iain Provan refers to as “dark green religion”, believe that history is a pattern of natural or cosmological cycles characterized by emergence and decay. Problem solving in this view means to pessimistically reject civilization and to find a more authentic way of being and living, a search for “timeless truths of authentic spirituality”¹² – a spirituality not only, if at all, in relation to the God of Christian believers, but rather with many pagan gods.
- A fourth response, and one increasingly characterizing developed societies, is a loss off confidence in all meta-narratives, whether held by progressive children of the Enlightenment or by those rejecting civilization.¹³ In this post-modern (or hyper-modern) view, problems are solved through the deconstruction of seemingly accepted interpretations, an appreciation of the limits of human knowledge and an appeal to the sovereignty of individual opinion, choice and values. Spirituality is

¹⁰ Holt, 117.

¹¹ Leslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1986), 40.

¹² Iain Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion. What The Old Testament Says and Why It Matters* (Waco, Baylor University Press, 2014), 10.

¹³ John Stackhouse, “Postmodernity and Postmodernism(s)”, in *Humble Apologetics*, 27.

eclectic and perceived as a matter of own choice and not to be bound by organized religion or institutionalized churches. The lack of confidence is evident in the wholesale return to pre-modern ideologies, such in the resurgence of Islam, nationalism and fundamentalism.¹⁴ Others are using a mix of modernist methods with the deconstructive critique of established interpretations to push for so-called “politically correct” causes (e.g. feminine, black, gay, animal rights).¹⁵

In his analysis of modern culture Craig Gay concludes that the main responses of the modern world are guided by a mastery of creation through rational-technical means (such as better knowledge, organization, technology and science), stimulating “the desire to conquer and to dominate”¹⁶ and second, a reaction of doubt and retreat into “particular convictions of particular individuals or groups” (such as an escape into pre-modern ideologies of fundamentalism, asceticism or apocalypse).

Some Christians have also taken over some of these ideas, by pushing for rational control of the world, or using rational-technical means to grow and manage churches, or retreat into individualized or communal positions closely related to pre-modern ideologies.¹⁷ Given the modernistic polarized choices, it should come as no surprise when Christians form opinions and when other Christians reject them, often on conflicting theological and biblical grounds.

I have grown up in apartheid South Africa and have experienced what can be done to theology to justify preconceived ideas. Modernity’s stark choices are playing out in political, economic, technological and environmental discourse also among Christians. Without further discussing the content of such discourses here, the danger is to be caught up in the default responses of modernity. This exposes the need for everyone to dig deeper in locating the real problem.

Digging deeper, what is then the real problem?

[Slide 9: What is the real problem?]

The real problem with all these general responses is a misguided theology; specifically what Craig Gay refers to as “the assumption that even if God exists he is largely irrelevant to the real business of life”.¹⁸

Reality, however, is not solely to be defined in material, energetic, biological or earthly terms, nor in social or human terms. A new reality is already contained in Jesus Christ. Given the truthful words contained in Colossians:

“So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.” (Col 3:1 NRSV)

¹⁴ Ibid., 29.

¹⁵ Ibid., 34.

¹⁶ Craig M. Gay, *The Way of the (Modern) World. Or, Why It’s Tempting to Live as If God Doesn’t Exist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 271.

¹⁷ Ibid., 13.

¹⁸ Ibid., 2.

what does it mean for earthkeeping that a person is raised along with Christ and sets out to seek things above?

Does one reality offset the other? No, reality in Christ places the earthly reality in perspective and transforms it. But for this radical reality to hit home and to place earthkeeping in proper perspective, we need to understand who we are in relation to God and where we fit into his creation.

Leaving such weighty question in the hands of autonomous human beings is a heavy burden. Modern and post-modern responses of control and doubt are bound together in their emphasis on human potential and human agency, and not surprisingly cause much anxiety.¹⁹ One indicator that measures anxiety is stress.

Slide 10: Stress in Canada

To cite one example: 6.9 million or around 25% of Canadians older than 15 years old reported in 2014 that most days were “quite a bit” or “extremely stressful”.²⁰ It is significant that daily stress rates are highest in the core working ages (35-54). This situation has not really improved in the last decade. Anxiety in itself is a given in many lives, and many Christians also experience it, but the real tragedy is when we “lose sight of God, we also lose sight of ourselves” and become a society that is “...not simply “godless,” but impersonal and inhumane as well”.²¹

[Slide 11: Real problem]

Thus, the real problem characterizing the main views governing the narratives of modern culture are that they all have a tendency towards the rejection of what it means to be a human person.

This stands in sharp contrast to what Leslie Newbigin observes as the biblical narrative dominated “by the figure of a living God who acts, speaks, calls, and expects an answer”.²² Personal existence is not something autonomous, but is “...the creative act of the personal God who graciously calls us into relationship with himself”.²³

Breaking the grip of modern culture’s lifeless choices of control and doubt means to submit to God, and to accept our unique particular humanity in and through Christ. The process of repentance, of dying in Christ can be very stressful, but the real solution lies in submitting ourselves to the yoke of Christ. In his grace he will grant us the gift to partake in the divine work in his creation.

What are adequate responses to the real problem?

Who are we really?

[Slide 12: Adequate response? Who are we?]

¹⁹ Ibid., 11.

²⁰ Statistics Canada, “Perceived Life Stress, 2014,” accessed March, 21 2016. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-625-x/2015001/article/14188-eng.htm>.

²¹ Gay., 3.

²² Newbigin, 41.

²³ Gay, 280.

The starting point of a theological reflection on the human person is what Wheaton College theologian Marc Cortez refers to as the “true knowledge of the human person begin[ning] with the relationship between God and humans...[that is] with the person and work of Jesus Christ”.²⁴

Reality needs to be redefined as ultimately deeply personal, not what is rational, material, practical, empirical, instrumental or magical. But, how does the shape of the relationship between God and humans look like? This is a question that has kept many people very busy over entire lifetimes and I will not attempt to even come close to their momentous reflections. I want to very cautiously start with a few main proposals on what a biblically responsible interpretation is of how humans stand in relationship with Jesus Christ. The views of three Christian theologians, namely German Reformed theologian Jurgen Moltmann, Augustine and John Calvin, on theological anthropology are now further discussed.

[Slide 13: Moltmann, Augustine, Calvin]

I have chosen Moltmann as he wrote his book *God in Creation* in response to the modern ecological crises. In this book he reacts amongst others against Augustine, explaining my second choice. Calvin further reformed the weaknesses of Augustine’s anthropology, and has come to a biblically responsible position that challenges both Moltmann’s and Augustine’s conclusions. Apart from original sources, I have relied heavily on a recent interpretation by Julie Canlis on Calvin’s spiritual theology of ascent.

[Slide 14: Views on who we are]

Moltmann’s central idea is that the idea of a transcendent God has led to human lordship over creation, resulting in scientific disenchantment and technological exploitation. He argues that God has to found *in* all the beings he has created by virtue of the life-giving Spirit.²⁵ The exploitation of creation for Moltmann is an assault on the indwelling God himself. He argues for a new theology that does not concentrate on the salvation of the individual soul at the expense of the “earthly, bodily and cosmic dimensions of the salvation of the whole world”.²⁶ Moltmann achieves this amongst others by formulating a *relational anthropology* focused on the “indwelling of human beings in the natural system”.²⁷ For Moltmann, the anthropological task is to naturalize human beings by claiming them as one of nature’s products.²⁸ Knowledge on creation for Moltmann must not be focused on domination, but on recognizing value and to participate in life.

Moltmann developed his relational anthropology in reaction to a theology of a transcendental God focused on the salvation of souls only. He traces this idea back to Augustine who reduced the *imago Dei* to the rational human soul, arguing that God’s image is engraved in the human soul that mediates between

²⁴ Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology. A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 4-5.

²⁵ Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* 1st Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), xi.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, xiv-xv.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 49-52.

heaven and earth and is superior to the body.²⁹ From his *Confessions* it is indeed clear that Augustine thought of the *imago Dei* as meaning to be “put in authority over all irrational animals by your image and likeness, that is by the power of reason and intelligence”.³⁰ For Moltmann, such an interpretation of the *imago Dei* became a token for humanity’s feudal superiority over the earth and the divinely endorsed engine that drove exploitation of the earth.

Moltmann is correct in pointing out the disastrous consequences when human beings have misunderstood or disobeyed what it means to be created in God’s image. Moltmann’s *relational anthropology* does expose the limits of Augustine’s *rational anthropology*, but I agree with Julie Canlis, one interpreter of Calvin, that this does not convincingly account for the biblical language to partake in divine nature (2 Pet 1:4), which is not an external relationship of lord, liege, friend or servant, but a relationship of sharing and mutual indwelling.³¹

I will try to explain this position in more depth.

Canlis astutely observes that an innate longing after God is located strongly within *human* anthropology.³² In contrast, John Calvin argued that there is still a longing after God, but it is located within *Christ’s* response and longing for God.

This is a very important distinction to make.

John Calvin further reformed Augustine’s thought with insights on a theology of *koinonia* (or communion), highlighting another category in understanding divine-human relations. *Koinonia* means to *share with someone in something* as opposed both to a Neo-Platonist *participation*, meaning to have an innate longing or desire to return to an original divine home, or Moltmann’s *methexis*, meaning to have a share in something.

Calvin’s theology of ascent is *Christological* in orientation and takes away the anxiety associated with measuring *human love for God* and replaces it with the restful “knowledge of *divine love toward us* instilled into our hearts by the Spirit of God” [italics added].³³ Augustine would have agreed when he famously commented that he was restless until he has found rest in God.

What about the biblical language to set our hearts on things above and not on earthly things? In his commentary on Colossians 3:1 Calvin remarks: “Ascension follows resurrection: hence, if we are the members of Christ we must ascend into heaven, because he, on being raised up from the dead, was received up into heaven (Mark 16:19), that he might draw us up with him.” For Calvin, both the

²⁹ Ibid., 236.

³⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, transl. with introduction and notes by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 302.

³¹ Julie Canlis, *Calvin’s Ladder. A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 4.

³² Ibid., 36.

³³ Ibid., 36.

goal and the *means* of Christian life is one of “participatory communion” with Christ.³⁴

Calvin does not start with the problem how a transcendent God and his creation are related, as both Moltmann and to some extent Augustine did with very different outcomes, but with the truth of the Mediator Jesus Christ in whom the Creator and creation are joined.³⁵ Transcendence for Calvin does not imply a lack of contact as for Moltmann, but rather emphasizes the “absolute freedom with which God stands in relationship to his creatures”.³⁶ Theological anthropology for Calvin means to be rooted in Christ himself, a shift that “locates anthropology in the realm of communion with God”.³⁷ In this anthropology there is no sense of a remaining human capacity or endowment that reflects the divine being such as found in Augustine,³⁸ or an anthropological “deposit of relationality” as found in Moltmann.³⁹

Calvin’s anthropological proposal is to accept a Trinitarian participation expressed as a “theology of adoption”.⁴⁰ Calvin defines theological anthropology as being relational (like Moltmann) but in the very specific ontological sense of being adopted in Christ and as confirmed to us by the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ Adoption means to *be* sons and daughters, with Christian living flowing from this participation in God.⁴²

In summary,

[Slide 15: To be human...]

To be human is not derived from anything humans are endowed with or possess, but means to be in relation to another person, Jesus Christ, who is in free communion to us by the Holy Spirit.

What are the implications?

[Slide 16: What are the implications?]

Calvin’s mystical “participatory communion” with Christ is not a mere theological novelty, but has radical implications for an ethic of working and keeping the earth. An ethics of working and keeping the earth would start with the believer’s new status of adoption: a new creation made righteous in communion with Christ to which the Spirit continually testifies. Such an ethic starts in a restful conscience and in true gratitude, in contrast to anthropologies that starts with anxious and tiresome longing and straining towards union with God or towards an elusive harmonization of our relations with the rest of creation. As Calvin commented on Phillipians 3:13, with “outstretched arms” we

³⁴ Ibid., 4.

³⁵ Ibid., 61.

³⁶ Ibid., 68.

³⁷ Ibid., 73.

³⁸ Cortez, 18.

³⁹ Canlis, 72.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 145.

⁴¹ Ibid., 148.

⁴² Ibid., 149.

may be “following Christ’s calling” - an action not to be “ascribed to human industry”, but only caused by Christ Jesus.⁴³

The good news does not stop with humans only though; communion with Christ is the goal to which all of creation strains.⁴⁴ Bringing peace and rest is the knowledge that Christ the Mediator is the “sustainer of creation” from beginning to end.⁴⁵

[Slide 17: The spiritual engine...]

The “spiritual engine” of a hopeful working and keeping of the earth therefore lies in the truth of a believing Christian’s renewed communion with God in Christ and in a truly grateful response for such a great gift.

This does not mean that the kingdom of God is consummated already. Until the sons of God are wholly restored, the whole of creation groans (Rom 8:22). Yet, the difference of those accepting God’s kind gift is a hope rooted in the truth of being adopted, shown in creation, but not yet fully consummated. Calvin comments on Romans 8:23:

*It would have been then wholly inconsistent that the earnest of the Spirit should be less efficacious in the children of God than hidden instinct in the lifeless parts of creation.*⁴⁶

How do we respond?

[Slide 18: How do we respond?]

What is the ethical shape of thankful humans setting their “hearts on things above” in relation to the rest of creation? What happens when we listen to God who calls us personally to Him in and through Christ?

The rest of Colossians 3 gives good clues. We die in Christ, meaning to let go of our earthly nature (and not in error to encourage an otherworldly orientation),⁴⁷ and be clothed in compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, love and peace (Col 3:12-15), to the benefit of one another (Col 3:16). Not in our own names, but in the name of the Lord Jesus we give thanks to the Father through him (Col 3:17).

[Slide 19: Ethics of working and keeping the earth]

An ethics of Christian working and keeping of the earth starts with Christian virtues that “flow from our status as those raised and ascended to the right hand of the Father in Christ”.⁴⁸ The Holy Spirit cultivates such virtues, becoming fruitful blessings in the right hand of God that fills the whole world. Such virtuous fruits will testify of our unwavering hope for a common household in

⁴³ John Calvin, “Commentaries Philippians,” accessed November, 4 2015. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/philippians/3.htm>.

⁴⁴ Canlis, 54.

⁴⁵ Canlis, 56-57.

⁴⁶ John Calvin, “Commentaries, Romans,” accessed November, 4 2015. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/romans/8.htm>.

⁴⁷ D.M. Hay, *Colossians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 116.

⁴⁸ Graham Tomlin, ed., *Reformed Commentary on Scripture. New Testament XI. Philippians, Colossians* (Downes Grove: IVP Press, 2013), 207.

peril. Only in such a divine context is it possible that persons in *koinonia* with Christ can use wisdom in scientific knowledge and technological ability within different societies, cultures and economies to meaningfully restore relations with each other and with the rest of creation.

Not our own straining, working and studying is the engine of working and keeping the earth, but Christ is, for in him all things were created and in him all things hold together (Col 1:15-16). True meaning lies in participating with Christ in God's work, starting already here on earth, as our labour in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58). As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, we are "created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph 2:10).

In summary, a "spiritual engine" of hopeful working and keeping of the earth cannot be separated from believers' anthropological status as persons participating in communion with Christ. There will be many places where we falter and fail, but we may rest assured that meaning is not derived from who we are or what we do in working and keeping the earth, but found in God's relationship to us in Christ, as testified by the Spirit.

What does that mean for our work and vocations?

Keeping the earth is not something reserved for the specialists, a separate issue that deserves attention from those interested in science, economics or ecology while the rest of us continue our daily grind elsewhere. Believers in Jesus Christ *are* workers and keepers of the earth by virtue of being adopted as God's children.

What does this mean for our work and vocations where we are?
[Slide 20: Meaning for work and vocations?]

In one sense the shorthand answer is to read Ecclesiastes. I will try to emphasize a few points on what it means to be a truly wise worker and keeper of the earth:

- First, this does not mean that our work, even if we are deeply rooted in Christ, will save the earth. The "Teacher" has some important wisdom to share: work performed "under the sun" is often toilsome as "...we were not made for work in the first place, but rather for God". Work, however, can be an "inspired frustration", an opportunity to turn to and find God where our work cannot deliver.⁴⁹ Working in the creation care movement can be deeply frustrating and may involve feelings of powerlessness and despair, especially when caught up in the cynical reaction to the environmental idealism of the 1960's and 1970's. However, this is an opportunity to meet God and walk with Him and share those experiences to the edification of others.
- Second, our response is not governed by the question how we can affect daunting global problems, but rather by the question how we can most effectively partake in the work God has prepared for us and by which He will fulfill his purposes. To participate in open communion with Christ

⁴⁹ Paul R. Stevens, *Work Matters. Lessons from Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 105.

implies a response that we will do whatever it takes to roll away the obstacles that obstruct our relationship with the Father. This is not limited to a disciplined spiritual rhythm in life between work engagement and withdrawal, but a situation where “everyday business becomes an arena for growth”.⁵⁰ Every work, whether washing pots and pans, running a business or doing ecological fieldwork, to name a few examples, is an arena for growing in relation to God, to walk with Him.

- Third, our deepest vulnerabilities show up not in prayer meetings and church services, but through the temptations in the workplace. We are one way or another prone to the “need to be needed, seeking status or the need to be in control”.⁵¹ Keeping spiritual disciplines in solitude and in community are life-giving interventions to deal with such temptations and to grow in our answer to God’s relationship with us. Our roles as workers and keepers of the earth need to be continuously refocused on Christ as our only root and only hope, a relationship that needs to be nurtured to grow in a healthy way.
- Fourth, in a world where people suffer and creation groans, the “Teacher” reminds us to “let our live speak”. He observes that:
 - *for everything there is time* (Eccl 3:1-11). A correct attitude to time is to see it as a gift from God. There is no need to work ourselves in a frenzy to develop or save the earth. Our identity is not in work, but in Christ.
 - *life is there to be enjoyed*: “Eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart” (Eccl 9:7) and “enjoy life with your wife, whom you love” (Eccl 9:9). Money in itself does not satisfy and is not the goal of business.
 - *our live needs to be holy, that is set apart for God*: “Be clothed in white, anoint your head with oil” (Eccl 9:8), and “fear God and keep his commandments” (Eccl 12:13). To slow down, know God and to hold him awe, brings proper perspective: “Work itself then turns out to be an evangelist to take us to God”.⁵²
 - *an attitude of openness to life, living generously and a willingness to take risks*. This does not mean to always crave for spectacular things: “Whatever your hands find to do, do it with all your might” (Eccl 9:10). It also does not mean to be too anxious to spend money on business ventures: “Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight (Eccl 11:2), and “sow your seed in the morning and at evening let your hands not be idle” (Eccl 11:6). The marketplace is the place where God is present, a mission-field teeming with people who all have eternity set in their hearts yet not finding meaning in life (Eccl 3:11), but also a place full of resistance from the world, our own flesh and the devil. It is a place never to be conformed to, yet a place to be deeply engaged with. It is a dangerous place to enter without dying in our earthly nature (Col

⁵⁰ Richard J. Goossen and R. Paul Stevens, *Entrepreneurial Leadership. Finding Your Calling, Making a Difference* (Downer’s Grove: IVP Books, 2013), 72.

⁵¹ R. Paul Stevens, “Ministry and Spirituality”, Unpublished Regent College Lecture, Westminster Abbey, Mission, 19-21 February 2016.

⁵² Stevens, *Work Matters*, 105.

- 3:5), walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:24-25) and defying the devil through Word and prayer.⁵³
- *wisdom, knowledge and happiness is a gift from God to the person he pleases.* To the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God (Eccl 2:26). To gain “wisdom is better than strength” (Eccl 9:16), and “quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools” (Eccl 9:17).

Truly wise working and keeping of the earth starts with God’s loving and just relationship with us. Standing in awe before the Creator and responsibly keeping his commandments to love Him and our neighbours, transforms how we work and keep the earth and how we affect the common household we are placed in.

How would such a response affect the common household – the broader economy, society and culture?

[Slide 21: Broader household?]

The focus so far was on individuals, inviting the question what a broader meaningful society or economy would look like. Meaningful economies are neither linked to the fulfillment of an intrinsic goal of perfect individual human happiness,⁵⁴ nor to a goal of ecological sustainability. Rather, the starting point to a meaningful economy would be to engage with the question what divine-human relationships, as discussed so far, mean for human living and behavior.

[Slide 22: God’s universal mission]

To answer the question how our status as adopted children of God affects broader society would require a biblical responsible way to speak to all of life in all of creation. Old Testament scholar Chris Wright, for example, describes the bible as the “story of God’s mission through God’s people in their engagement with God’s world for the sake of the whole of creation”.⁵⁵ God created the world and will bring everything to a new heaven and new earth. God’s people are partakers in extending his blessings to all the nations. The whole Bible speaks of a universal God with a universal mission announced in particular to Abraham and his seed, accomplished in Christ (Gal 3: 16), and to be completed in the new creation.⁵⁶ We can only really be keepers of the earth under the priestly blessing

⁵³ R. Paul Stevens, *Doing God’s Business. Meaning and Motivation for the Marketplace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 223.

⁵⁴ It must be noted that a goal of human happiness can be helpful to define a purposeful divine and human activity in reaction to naturalism or the idea of “purposeless causes” (See Steward Goetz, *The Purpose of Life. A Theistic Perspective*. London: Continuum, 2012). The overly focus of God’s concern for the straining individual person in her pursuit to the goal of ultimate happiness and the negation of the renewal of all of creation in Christ, reveals this proposal’s weakness in relation to the theological anthropology of persons participating in communion with Christ as proposed here.

⁵⁵ Chris Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downer’s Grove, IVP Academic, 2006), 22.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 252.

that the Lord will bless and *keep* us (Num 6:24). We will not be a blessing to ourselves or to others without faith and (often costly) obedience.

[Slide 23: Engagement and confrontation]

To place ourselves within this story, Wright speaks about both “constructive engagement” in and “courageous confrontation” of the world.⁵⁷

First, it must be made known to all that God loves all of his creation. In the broad sense of God’s mission, to care for creation, to be workers in and keepers of the earth, flows from a love and obedience of God and is part of Christian mission.⁵⁸ Christian scientists, entrepreneurs and business owners, ecologists, economists, engineers, farmers, medical doctors, caregivers and housekeepers to name a few, all specifically participate in their engagement with God’s world for the good of all of creation. If you are in such a vocation, are you constructively engaged and modeling to the world a deep gratitude for the goodness as well as a concern for exploitation of God’s creation? Does your joy and hope amidst pain, suffering and a groaning creation shine as a witness to God’s steadfast love for all of his creation? Does your life unmask the stark and lifeless choices offered by modern culture by showing the love for all the people that God places on your path? Do you thankfully enjoy Sabbath rest and also allow the rest of creation to participate in this rest?

Second, courageous prophetic voices need to be heard defending God’s justice and speaking into the exploitation and greed in society and the corruption that comes with power. Lawyers, politicians, ethicists, theologians and philosophers to name a few, all specifically participate in God’s mission to achieve justice and mercy in His world and assist others in a holy, ethical living before the Lord. If you are in such a vocation, do you speak up against the misuse and perversion of justice in the world? Do you unmask the false prophets who are only in it for their own profit? Are you calling leaders to account that do not take their direction from God’s commands? Do you hold those leaders accountable who only shout peace for their own benefit and who mislead others by smooth talk that the Lord will always be with us? (Mic 3:5,11) Do you uncover unethical business practices (Mic 6:10-11) and speak up against false and violent speech by the rich at expense of the poor (Mic 6:12)?

None of these missions on engagement and confrontation in the world can and should be accomplished alone. When the true goal of a Christian’s life is to participate in communion with Christ, the meaning of participating with each other and in the broader creation is also changing through the work of the Holy Spirit. Christians worship together as members of the one body of Christ, being equipped for works of service and maturing towards the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:11-13).

[Slide 24: A call to workers and keepers]

⁵⁷ Ibid., 229.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 412.

Christian workers and keepers of the earth, we can, given our status as being adopted in Christ, be a blessing to others and all of creation. Many people, societies, economies and ecosystems are staggering under the load of injustice and exploitation. Modernity's stark and lifeless options are resolving in more and more inhumane outcomes. In desperation many are turning towards pre-modern pagan and fundamentalist ideologies to protect their own and many others have found only themselves to worship. The sure knowledge that believers are made righteous and adopted as God's children in and through Christ and that we may participate in the divine nature, may give us rest and be a source of joy to ourselves and others, despite and amongst great pain and suffering in creation. We as believers have received the gift to participate in God's work.

In faith we may accept this gift. It will involve costly obedience, but we may surely know that the Lord will bless us and that He will keep us.