

FAITH, WORK, AND ECONOMICS



SOUTHWESTERN
JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Editorial

W. Madison Grace II
Managing Editor
Southwestern Journal of Theology

Christianity as a mere religion may have nothing more to it than obligatory rituals—occasional Sunday worship, baptism, the Lord's Supper, etc.—but Christianity as a way of life calls for something greater than mere religion. However, many Christians find themselves thinking of faith as a weekend endeavor and not something applicable to the whole of life. This is understandable if one thinks of the Christian life as existing only when one is gathered for religious events. The remaining time of the week must be for something else—something other than religion. However, if one considers Christianity as a whole-life faith endeavor, more than Sunday is in mind. Christianity then becomes something that is an everyday occurrence. If this is the case then work—what most people spend their time doing—must be a part of that lived-out faith. This raises the question, does the Bible actually speak to this concept of whole-life Christianity? The answer to that question is a resounding yes and the articles that follow are engaged with the broader question of what does the Bible say about faith, work, and economics.

The completion of this issue of the Journal was a little different than many produced in that a variety of people were involved in the process leading up to the production of the essays that follow. I am thankful for all these who helped complete this issue. As always Joshua Williams has not only been a thoughtful editor for our book reviews he is also a resource for thinking through content whether it be biblical, theological, or aesthetic. Two young scholars, Cole Peck and Marc Hatcher, also have provided needed assistance in running the Journal's office as well as producing this issue. The Land Center, The Kern Family Foundation, and the Oikoinomia Network all have aided in facilitating the presentation of the original papers. Finally, Eric Mitchell and John Taylor (who introduce the volume more clearly below) have been a tremendous help in gathering these articles and seeing them through to their completion.

Southwestern Journal of Theology • Volume 59 • Number 2 • Spring 2017

Guest Editorial: Faith, Work, and Economics

John Taylor
Gateway Seminary
Eric Mitchell
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

One of the key developments in the Christian landscape in recent years, and one which has the potential to have a lasting impact on the church's mission in the world, has been the rising interest in understanding human work and economic life, from both a biblical and theological perspective. For too many believers there is a disconnect between their church activities, and the work which occupies most of their waking lives, whether paid or unpaid. The so-called "Faith and Work" movement has attempted to bridge that Sunday-Monday gap. There is a need for whole-life discipleship, in which work is important not only for economic well-being, or for the development of godly character, but, according to the creation mandate of Genesis 1 and 2, is also the avenue for human flourishing in a fallen world, the arena for the expansion of the kingdom of God, and the proclamation of the gospel. Although this movement is able to draw upon Luther's understanding of vocation it has otherwise lacked a substantive and freshly formulated theological and biblical underpinning.

In June 2013 two groups of evangelical biblical studies scholars and professors (an Old Testament Group and a New Testament group) met at the Kern Scholar's breakfast at Acton University, in Grand Rapids. Their discussions led them to identify fundamental problems faced in efforts to incorporate the theology of work and economics into the curriculum in seminaries and colleges. Despite the rise in interest of faith and work at a local church level, not enough was being done to ensure that the movement had a strong biblical alignment and foundation. Many draw on the Bible in formulating ethical and theological approaches to work, economics, and vocation, but in this area few resources are being produced by biblical specialists, especially evangelical ones. There are meager resources available to those who wish to integrate these subjects into courses.

Much of the scholarship that is related to economics, work, and vocation, although useful, does not have a strong biblical foundation, and is from a theologically liberal perspective. Overall, the scholarly consensus tends towards a statist or a socially progressive perspective. It is all too common for scholars to find the Jesus that we want to find. While some bias is unavoidable, it is important as far as possible not to impose such bias on the

Scriptures, but to follow where the Bible leads, cognizant of its historical and social context. Despite some prominent exceptions, evangelicals have generally been absent in examining the Bible in areas related to economics and work, despite the clear concerns of the biblical writers in these areas. For example, both Testaments show an interest, and in no particular order, in: money and wealth, government and authority, work, benefaction, giving, taxation, financial ethics, corporate and personal finances, and poverty. The first step was to provoke scholars to start researching and writing. After all, history belongs to those who write.

The discussion at Acton became an ongoing conversation. In September 2014 a colloquium was held on the New Testament and Economics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, under the auspices of the Richard Land Center for Cultural Engagement, with the sponsorship of the Kern Family Foundation and the assistance of the Oikonomia Network. The goal was to bring together scholars to stimulate biblical scholarship, build relationships, and produce publishable material. Evangelical scholars, including leaders in the field, gathered from across the country, representing a wide range of denominations and interests. As well as New Testament professors, there were also scholars in the field of economics, Old Testament, and archaeology.

This first colloquium was well received and in September 2015 a second colloquium was held on the Old Testament and Economics with scholars in Old Testament, economics, and archaeology. We have found the diversity of scholarship and cross-disciplinary interaction to be of great help in viewing the Scriptures through the multi-faceted lens of Faith, Work, and Economics. Several of the papers presented at these colloquia have already been published elsewhere, and selected papers are made available for the first time in this volume. A third, combined colloquium on The Old Testament and the New Testament and Economics will occur in the Summer of 2017. It is our goal to publish the majority of the papers from all three colloquia in an upcoming single monograph.

We are grateful for the contribution of each author. We are also gratified by evidence that these colloquia have stimulated other similar events, involving not only biblical scholars, but theologians and church historians, and the emergence of various related books. To God be the glory.