



“Work While it is Still Light” (John 9:4) Toward an Orthodox Christian Theology of Work

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I. Work: A Uniquely Human Activity

The way we live our lives and the way we earn our living is crucial to our sense of self and well-being. For clergy, it goes without saying that our work is central to our identity, and is an expression of our life and location in the Church. But in addition to the idea of work as a priestly activity, it is helpful to recall that work is also a uniquely *human* activity.

Some animals build nests, such as the South African Weaver Bird, whose large, elaborate nests contain dozens of chambers serving as home for up to 400 birds. Australian Cathedral Termites build mounds more than fifteen feet high, and which spread out underground for several acres. Beavers cut down trees and build dams for protection and easy access to food during winter. Many insects and animals gather food and store it away for the winter months, and have become proverbial examples of hard work, such as the “industrious ant” and the “busy bee” we read about in the book of Proverbs: “Go to the ant, thou sluggard, and see and emulate his ways, and become wise, for he prepares provisions for himself in the summer, and stores up food for harvest ... Or go to the bee, and learn how diligent she is, and how earnestly she is engaged in her work” (Prov 6:1-8).¹

Human labor, however, is of an entirely different order, and anthropological theories of human origins have identified work or labor as a uniquely human activity. *Homo sapiens* is also *Homo faber*, which means not simply “man the worker” but “man the maker,” that is, someone who through the work of his hands and the creation of tools can influence and alter his environment.

2. Theologies of Work

Though work is a uniquely human activity, the Orthodox tradition does not have a developed theology or spirituality of work. So-called “theologies of work” are relatively recent additions to the theological curriculum, which is surprising considering the extent to which our waking hours are consumed by work. The term “theology of work” first appeared in 1949, and the first formal “theologies of work” did not appear until the 1950s. It was probably not by chance that this coincided with the post-WWII economic boom, also known as the golden age of capitalism.²

But if theologies of work are relatively new, the idea behind them is much older, having first emerged as part of the Protestant reaction to Roman Catholicism. In rejecting what he saw as the Roman Catholic emphasis on “works,” Luther introduced a dualistic separation of the inner person from the outer person: whereas the inner

¹ Ἰθὶ πρὸς τὸν μύρμηκα, ὃ ὀκνηρὸν, καὶ ζήλωσον ἰδὼν τὰς ὁδοὺς αὐτοῦ καὶ γενοῦ ἐκείνου σοφώτερος· ἐκεῖνον γὰρ γεωργίου μὴ ὑπάρχοντος μηδὲ τὸν ἀναγκάζοντα ἔχων μηδὲ ὑπὸ δεσπότην ὧν ἐτοιμάζεται θέρους τὴν τροφήν πολλήν τε ἐν τῷ ἀμήτῳ ποιεῖται τὴν παράθεσιν. ἢ πορεύθητι πρὸς τὴν μέλισσαν καὶ μάθε ὡς ἐργάτις ἐστὶν τὴν τε ἐργασίαν ὡς σεμνὴν ποιεῖται, ἧς τοὺς πόνους βασιλεῖς καὶ ἰδιῶται πρὸς ὑγίειαν προσφέρονται, ποθεινὴ δὲ ἐστὶν πᾶσιν καὶ ἐπίδοξος· καίπερ οὕσα τῇ ῥώμῃ ἀσθενῆς, τὴν σοφίαν τιμήσασα προήχθη (Prov 6:1-8); cf. Basil, *Hexaemeron* 8.4 (FOTC, 124-25).

² M.D. Chenu, *The Theology of Work: An Exploration*, translated by Lilian Soiron (Chicago: Regnery, 1966), originally published in French in 1955; and D. Rembert Sorg, *Towards a Benedictine Theology of Manual Labour* (Illinois, 1951).

person is justified by faith alone and not by works, the outer person is necessarily occupied with some form of work or employment. Luther described such work as a “vocation,” and his novel definition of “vocation” is considered one of his three major achievements after his teachings on Scripture and the sacraments.³

Prior to Luther, the word “vocation” referred to a calling to the priesthood or monastic life. But Luther rejected monastic life and the priesthood, which meant that the traditional notion of “vocation” was secularized. As a result, a person’s “calling” was about his or her place in the economy, and was directly related to hard work and the accumulation of wealth. Over time, this has led to the widely accepted theory, put forward by German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920)—himself a Lutheran—that the Protestant work ethic contributed more or less directly to the rise of capitalism.⁴

The Roman Catholic Church likewise has a long tradition of theological reflection on work, from Leo III’s 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (“of the new things”), to John Paul II’s 1981 *Laborem Exercens* (“through work”). Both of these documents emphasize the dignity of work and express concern for the social conditions of workers and workers’ rights. The second of these documents appeared one year after the death of Dorothy Day (1897-1980), who was one of the founders of the Catholic Workers Movement. Established during the Great Depression, the Catholic Workers Movement advocated for the poor, for workers, unions, and child labor laws. The process of her canonization has been underway for several years now, and is unanimously supported by the Roman Catholic hierarchy of the United States.

Roman Catholic theology has established some important elements for a theology of work, but the emphasis is mostly on social justice issues, not unlike the “Liberation Theology” movements of Latin America in the 1970s and 80s, which were a synthesis of Roman Catholic Theology and Marxist socio-economic analyses.

Before turning to the question of what an *Orthodox* theology of work might look like, it will be helpful to consider the nature and meaning of work in American society today, since most of us were born and grew up in the United States, and it is here that we work.

3. American Work(aholic) Culture

From their teenage years, Americans are socialized to discover their “passion” and make that their career. They are, in other words, socialized to find their identity and the meaning of their existence in their work. Work is no longer pursued for mere survival or economic production, but is now the basis of one’s identity and purpose in life. We no longer work to live, but live to work. The American dream promises that hard work will guarantee upward mobility and heightened social status, and has made Americans obsessed with material success and the exhaustive striving required to attain it.

The dream of a shorter workweek, which was promised to American workers as far back as the 1930s, has never become a reality.⁵ Middle-class, college-educated people, especially men, work more now than they did decades ago. We work longer hours, have shorter vacations, get less in unemployment, less in disability, less in retirement benefits, and retire later than workers in comparably wealthy and developed countries. Most advanced countries give new parents paid leave, but the United States guarantees no such thing. Many advanced countries ease the burden of parenthood with national policies and programs, but in the US, public spending on child care and early

³ Kathryn Kleinhans, “The Work of a Christian: Vocation in Lutheran Perspective,” in *Word & World* 35.4 (2005): 394-95. Luther articulates these ideas primarily in his 1520 treatise, “The Freedom of a Christian.”

⁴ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribner, 1958), originally published in German in 1905; cf. Robert Bellah, “The Protestant Structure of American Culture,” *The Hedgehog Review* 4 (2002): 7-28; Jack Barbalet, *Weber, Passion, and Profits: The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

⁵ See the essay of economist John Maynard Keynes, “Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren” (1930).

education is near the bottom of international rankings. In most advanced countries, citizens are guaranteed access to health care by their government, but the majority of insured Americans get health care through—where else?—their workplace. By design and by law, Americans have transformed themselves into the world’s premier workaholics.⁶

It’s not surprising, then, that in relation to their work, Americans have a strong love-hate relationship. We speak of work as a “rat race.” We experience it as a competitive “dog-eat-dog” world, with little or no time for relaxation or enjoyment. (And note how the very language of “rats” and “dogs” expresses a situation that is essentially dehumanizing.) Work pervades our lives and makes ever-increasing demands on us. But we remain on the treadmill. Many men (and, increasingly, women) have chosen the office for the same reasons that believers attend church on Sundays: it’s where they feel most themselves. And without work, most people tend to feel miserable, and studies suggest that long-term unemployment affects us more deeply than the loss of a loved one.⁷

All of this became possible after work evolved from being simply a means of material production to a means of identity production and individual self-realization, becoming a kind of contemporary religion in which God is absent, replaced by worship of the self, of the so-called self-made man. As I stated a moment ago, we have been raised in a society that is culturally Protestant and economically capitalist, and our work ethic is essentially a secularized version of what was once understood as a religious vocation, as if the desk had replaced the altar table.

This helps to explain how work has come to dominate our lives and produces unhealthy lifestyles. Moreover, our work ethic has taught us to evaluate work not on the basis of its goodness or usefulness but on whether or not it pays well. Even worse, we tend to associate a person’s value as a human being with his or her economic worth (and the conflation of these terms is itself revealing). In a capitalist society, everyone has a price, and everyone can be bought.

Our workaholic lifestyle has been further compounded by the advent of social media, which has amplified the pressure to craft an image of success for oneself, for one’s parish, and for parish and metropolis-level programs and projects. But exactly what constitutes “success” in religion, and how exactly one visualizes such success online is by no means obvious. Blue-collar jobs produce tangible results and concrete objects, like coal, steel, and houses. (Though they stopped officially counting in 1994, MacDonalds can still tell you that it has served well over 300 billion hamburgers.) The work of a priest or a parish, on the other hand, is not so easily measured or quantified; it is often not even visible to the eye, yet every Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn profile is conspicuously marked with the metrics of accomplishment—followers, friends, viewers, likes, tweets and retweets—which inject all communication with the features of competition. All of this, needless to say, is a blueprint for spiritual and physical exhaustion.

I don’t want to say any more about this, or pursue these questions any further, because I don’t think I need to: all of you are familiar with what I’m talking about, and could tell your own stories about how the increased pace of life debases the quality of just about everything we do.

4. Toward an Orthodox Theology of Work

If nothing else, the negative aspects of work help us to see that work is a complex phenomenon that cannot be isolated from larger cultural and societal dynamics. Earlier I said that there is no Orthodox theology of work, yet the resources for such a theology are nonetheless present in our tradition, though they have yet to be systematically studied. Let’s take a closer look now at what our tradition has to offer us on this subject, beginning with Scripture.

4a. God the Worker

⁶ See Derek Thompson, “Workism is Making Americans Miserable,” *The Atlantic* (February 24, 2019).

⁷ Cited in Derek Thompson, “A World Without Work,” *The Atlantic* (July/August 2015).

On the very first page of the Bible, God is presented to us as a creator, a maker, a worker, indicating that work is inherently good and meaningful. The first chapter of Genesis describes God working with his hands, creating⁸ all that exists, and deeming all his works to be “good” and “very good.”⁹ God continues to work even after the initial act of creation, as the Lord says: “Even now my Father is working (ἐργάζεται), and I too am working” (John 5:17).¹⁰ Just like the work of Christ, the work of God in creation is a work of love, and all that he does he does for the purpose of human salvation.

Throughout Scripture, the image of God the worker takes various forms: composer and performer, metalworker and potter, garment maker, gardener, farmer, winemaker, shepherd, tentmaker, builder, and architect.¹¹ St Theodore the Studite adds to this list when he says that God is also an iconographer, and concludes that: “Because human beings are made according to the image and likeness of God, the work of iconography is a divine activity.”¹²

4b. Man the Worker

If God created human beings after his image, then this means that human beings are workers too. As I noted a moment ago, work is one of the characteristic activities that distinguishes human beings from the rest of creatures. By virtue of being God’s images, we are called to share in the activity of God through our work. Adam and Eve were called to cultivate [or ‘till’] the garden and watch over it (ἐργάζεσθαι καὶ φυλλάτειν) (Gen 2:15). They did not create things out of nothing, but rather were co-workers with God, ordering and shaping and leaving their mark on the things that God had created.

Their work was joyful and full of pleasure, since they were working in a “garden of delights” (παραδείσῳ τῆς τρυφῆς) (Gen 2:15).¹³ St John Chrysostom says that they were given the task to cultivate and watch over the garden because, without some kind of work, they would have fallen victim to sloth and self indulgence, and, not least, because it kept them mindful that they were not working for themselves but were accountable to God.¹⁴

Intimately connected with this work was Adam’s calling to exercise a specific ministry with respect to creation, since it is only in the human person that creation arrives at self-consciousness and knowledge of God. Through their calling to cultivate the garden, human beings had the specific task of returning creation back to its Creator. In the words of St Gregory the Theologian:

God bound together the body and the soul so that the soul would draw the lower, material nature to itself and raise it to heaven, in order that the soul may be to the body what God is to the soul, itself leading on the matter which ministers to it, and uniting it, as its fellow servant, to God.¹⁵

4c. Humanity’s Priestly Vocation

It is no coincidence that these comments appear in St Gregory’s treatise *On the Priesthood*, and are made with specific reference to the *priestly* vocation of the human person to transfigure the created world. Human beings

⁸ Note that the verb used here is ποιεῖν (i.e., to make, do, produce, create, bring about), but the results of this “making” are said to be “works” (ἔργα); cf. Gen 2:1-3; and Heb 1:10, citing Ps 102:25-27: καὶ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου εἰσιν οἱ οὐρανοί.

⁹ καλόν or καλά (Gen 1:4, 8, 11, 13, 18, 21, 25) and καλὰ λίαν (Gen 1:31).

¹⁰ Note that patristic commentators on Genesis affirm that God in no way exhausted himself or expended all his power in the work of creation; cf. Basil, *Hexameron* I.2, where the act of creation is described as a “trifling demonstration of his creative power,” the product of a minor “impulse” (ροπή) of the divine will; and id., *On the Holy Spirit* 5,7: “It is he (i.e., the Word of God) who sustains the whole heaven with but a small fraction of his whole power (μικρῷ μέρει τῆς ὅλης ἑαυτοῦ δυνάμεως)” (SC 17:274).

¹¹ For a study of these images, see Robert J. Banks, *God the Worker: Journeys into the Mind, Heart, and Imagination of God* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1994).

¹² Theodore the Studite, *Antirrheticus* III.2.5 (PG 99:420B).

¹³ See St John Chrysostom, *Homily on Genesis* 14.7-8 (FOTC, 184-85).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.9 (185).

¹⁵ See Gregory the Theologian, *Oration* 2:17 (PG 35:428).

are called to offer the gifts of creation back to the Creator so that all creation might be sanctified. Adam was the first human priest, and the elements of creation were given to him as the materials of his sacrament. He was given the task of cultivating nature, of transforming the face of the earth; he named with knowledge the living creatures around him, revealing his ability to discern and actualize the presence of God hidden in the depths of creation.

Note that paradise was understood to be a temple or sanctuary; the name ADAM indicates that he is a kind of ‘cosmic’ man, since his name is an acronym for the four points of the compass: 1) ἀνατολή, 2) δύση, 3) ἄρκτος = north, from Ursa Major, the constellation in the northern sky (or ἄρκτούρος, the giant red star in the northern hemisphere), and 4) μεσημβρία [south]); the name ‘Adam’ = Hebr. ‘soil’ because he was fashioned from soil taken from the four corners, as was the temple; cf. St Sophia, with marbles from all over the empire; Adam is clothed with divine grace, which are his vestments. These traditions are especially prominent in the Syriac tradition, especially in St Ephraim the Syrian’s *Hymns on Paradise*.]

But as we know, Adam failed in his vocation, rejecting communion with God for shallow and superficial appearances. Failing to cultivate the field of the world, he had nothing to offer to God. As a result of his transgression, the character of his work changed, and he was condemned to a life of hard labor. Work did not originate in the fall, but was distorted in the fall. It has been said that man was meant to be a gardener, but because of his transgression he became a farmer,¹⁶ which is to say that human work is now characterized by monotony, toil, and pain.

This ‘toil,’ which is now a feature of all human work, was also an announcement of death: “In the sweat of your face you shall eat your bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken” (Gen 3:19). Scripture says that this was part of God’s ‘curse’ on Adam, but the ‘curse’ in question was not something new introduced by God, but the consequence of a freely chosen human action, which placed human beings in a new relationship to the world and to work. What God had intended to be joyful is now marked by pain. Harmony with the world was replaced by something like forced labor.

It is quite telling that the Greek word for ‘toil’ or ‘labor’ (πόνος, πόνημα; cf. hydroponic, geponic, etc.), which means “hard labor, effort, struggle, sorrow, and pain,” is related to the word πονηρόν, which denotes something that is toilsome, grievous, painful, bad, but also tricky, cunning, sly, and evil (as in someone who spins tales, and who twists and stretches the truth). Both πόνος and πονηρός are derived from the laborious activity of weaving, twisting, and spinning (i.e., πένομαι – πονέομαι, and thus “Penelope” = Homer’s archetypical weaver). The linguistic connection of πόνος and πονηρός expresses the complex attitude toward human labor and toil to which Scripture is a witness.¹⁷

5. Beyond Genesis

Most theologies of work adhere rather closely to the creation story, but there is more, or should be more, to a theology of work than the book of Genesis—and a Christian theology of work cannot be limited to the witness of the Old Testament alone. We would want such a theology to look, not simply backward to life in the garden, but forward to the life of the age to come. We would also want it to have a strong Christological component, because if work is characteristic of human nature, then we need to understand how work was transformed by Christ, who assumed human nature and healed it.

We have already begun to do this by considering Adam’s priestly vocation, which was fulfilled in Christ, who has begun a new work within us. Adam points to Christ, and Christ points to the future, which is why St Paul calls him, not the “second Adam,” but the “final Adam,” the ἔσχατος Ἀδάμ (1 Cor 15:45), because he directs us

¹⁶ In the words of W.R. Forrester, *Christian Vocation* (New York: Scribners, 1953), 130.

¹⁷ Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2010), 1172.

to the future, to the expectation of his return, an expectation which can energize our work and give it a sense of urgency, as well as enable us to see those aspects of our work that are merely contingent and temporary.

In fact, such an idea is already present in Genesis. In his commentary on the first chapter of Genesis known as the *Hexaemeron* (= 9 homilies covering Gen 1:1-26), St Basil notes that, every time God creates something, he sees that it is ‘beautiful.’ Basil wonders what exactly God is looking at that he thinks is so ‘beautiful’? Is it the beauty of nature, visible in majestic mountains—like the ‘purple mountain majesty’ of America the Beautiful—is it colorful sunsets, and panoramic views of the ocean? No, St Basil says, it isn’t any of these things. Instead, Basil says that God looks at what he has created and says that it’s beautiful because he sees the *end* for which he created it, namely, for union with Christ. Things are beautiful, the results and outcomes of work are beautiful, only by virtue of their orientation and movement toward Christ, and Basil places creation in a strongly eschatological context, since every “beginning” (including the “In the beginning”) must necessarily have an end.¹⁸

These same ideas are expressed by Christ, who in the Gospel of John tells us something important about his work and our work: “We must work the works of the him who sent me while it is still day; the night comes when no one can work” (John 9:4).¹⁹ Here, Christ is not talking about the twenty-four hour cycle of night and day. To the contrary, he is looking at things from an eschatological perspective, and with a tremendous sense of urgency. He knows his time on earth is limited, and he also knows that God has sent him on a mission to accomplish certain things in this life, and he knows that he needs to get on with what God sent him to do. In the same manner, we all have a limited amount of time on this earth to accomplish what God has put us here for, and so we too should have a sense of urgency about putting our priorities in order and getting on with the job.

The work that Christ came to accomplish was to give his life for the salvation of the world, and thus it is in the mystery of the cross, in Christ’s obedience unto death, that we find the Gospel’s definitive teaching on the question of human work, because Christ’s obedience stands in marked contrast to the primal disobedience of Adam, which from the beginning marred all of human life and work (cf. Rom 5:12).

What do I mean by this? In our work for others, we find a small part of the cross, and we accept it in the same spirit of obedience and gratitude in which Christ accepted his cross for us. (We speak of τὸ διὰ σταυροῦ πολίτευμα, without thinking about what that means.) When we approach our work in the spirit of obedience to Christ, we will discover that our obedience will lead to prayer, since prayer comes from obedience, and not obedience from prayer. Work and prayer at first glance may seem to be unrelated, but work does not constitute an obstacle to prayer, and through God’s grace the two become harmonized. Whether we are engaged in manual labor, performing routine tasks, or celebrating the Divine Liturgy, our thoughts should always remain with God—and because “the recollection of God is itself the indwelling of God within us,”²⁰ our thoughts will sanctify the whole of our life and work.²¹

Second, our obedience to Christ will generate two things at once: humility and love. The two are united. Genuine obedience, on the one hand, requires humility, it presupposes a degree of humility, and in a sense already is humility, because it means that, in my obedience to Christ, I set aside my own interests and attend to what the other directs me to do. At the same time, if I am obedient to Christ and put his commandments into practice, as well as put into practice what the other has asked me to do, then my work constitutes active love for God and neighbor—and with this, I have fulfilled the greatest commandment, to “love God with all my heart and mind, and my neighbor as myself” (Mt 22:36-38).

¹⁸ Basil, *Hexaemeron* 3.10 (SC 238-40); and *ibid.*, 4.6 (SC 270).

¹⁹ ἡμᾶς δεῖ ἐργάζεσθαι τὰ ἔργα τοῦ πέμψαντός με ἕβς ἡμέρα ἐστίν· ἔρχεται νῦξ ὅτε οὐδεὶς δύναται ἐργάζεσθαι (Jn 4:9).

²⁰ Cf. Basil, *Letter 2*: “And the indwelling of God is this: to hold God ever in memory” (τοῦτό ἐστι Θεοῦ ἐνοίκησις, τὸ διὰ τῆς μνήμης ἐνιδρυμένον ἔχειν ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὸν Θεόν).

²¹ Elder Sophrony, *Building the Temple of God Within Us and in Our Brothers* (Essex, 2013), 317.

When obedience, humility, and love for God and neighbor come together in this way, God comes to abide in us, just as the Lord promised: “If anyone loves me, he will keep my commandments, and my Father will love him, and we will come and abide in him” (John 14:23). When and to the extent that we are obedient to Christ and for his sake to our work, we will easily and naturally come to practice the virtues of humility and love. When I forget myself in genuine obedience and accept the tasks that the other gives me, I have attained a state of humility. And when I carry out and fulfill those tasks, love is realized through my actions. If we truly love Christ, we will also love our neighbor, and if we love our neighbor, our love will be manifested in our service to others through our work.²²

[Slide] During his enthronement speech, His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros stated that we are all διάκονοι. The word διάκονος is formed from the preposition διά and the word κόνις, so that the English word “deacon” refers to those who are completely (διά) covered in dust (κόνις). It refers to the humble—to those who work without thought or care for themselves. It refers to the selfless worker, who continues and extends the selfless, self-effacing work of Christ; it refers to the priest whose life is “broken and poured out for many.”

6. St Basil on the Nature of Work

Τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἦθη κατεκόσμησας

In the writings of St Basil, the connection between work and prayer is likewise linked to obedience, and to love of God and neighbor. In his organization of community life, work occupies an important place, and his personal commitment to work is evident in his extraordinary efforts on behalf of the poor, the sick, orphans, and the elderly. In addition to the actual work that we do, Basil was also concerned about the motivations behind the work we do, and about the attitude and disposition we bring to our work.

We must, he says, toil with diligence (μετὰ ζήλου), and not think that our goal of piety (τὸ ἰδεῶδες τῆς εὐσεβείας) offers an escape from work or an excuse for idleness. Instead, we need to see our work as an opportunity for struggle, greater effort, and for patience in tribulation. Work is an opportunity to show love to our neighbor. Being idle, on the other hand, is the cause of great evil, and the Lord himself couples sloth with wickedness, referring to the: “wicked and slothful servant” (πονηρὸ δοῦλε καὶ ὀκνηρὸ) (Mt 25:26) (and note that the “sluggard” of Proverbs, who is told to consider the ant and the bee, is also addressed as ὁ ὀκνηρὸς). God has endowed us with the ability to work, and he demands that we labor according to our capacity, for he says: “To whom much is given, much is expected” (Lk 12:48).²³

Basil addresses the kind of work that is appropriate to Christian life, but declines to make definitive statements about this, since conditions differ from community to community. He does insist, though, that whatever tasks we undertake, they should not create turmoil in our lives or deprive us of our peace of mind. Neither should we compromise our principles by any kind of work that will bring us into “unsuitable or harmful associations with others.” Work must be kept simple and must not pamper or indulge foolish desires, egotistical projects, or be undertaken for things that have nothing to do with the life of the Church.²⁴ Work must always be directed toward satisfying real needs. And we must always avoid any kind of task or work that creates strife or competition, or which harms our relations with others. Instead, we should work in such a way that allows us to lead recollected lives in constant attendance on the Lord.²⁵

²² For these ideas, I am indebted to Archimandrite Ephraim of Vatopaidi, “Monastic Work as Prayer,” a paper given at the Ninth Madingley Conference, Madingley Hall, Cambridge, 1-3 March 2019.

²³ *Longer Rule* 37 (EPE 8:345).

²⁴ Palladius, *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom* 6, famously characterized Theophilus of Alexandria as λιθομανής, for his obsession with building churches while ignoring the poor living in a shanty town around his cathedral: “Theophilus was obsessed, like Pharaoh, with a craving for stone for buildings, of which the Church had no need” (λιθομανία γάρ τις αὐτὸν Φαραώσιος ἔχει εἰς οἰκοδομήματα, ὃν οὐδαμῶς χρῆζει ἡ ἐκκλησία) (ed. Coleman-Norton, p. 35, line 19).

²⁵ *Longer Rule* 38: προτιμῶντες τὰς τέχνας τὰς διατηρούσας ἡμῖν τὴν ἀπερίσπαστον ζωὴν καὶ ἐνπάρედρον τῷ Κυρίῳ (1 Cor 7:35) (EPE 8:354).

In his homily *On the Words, Attend to Thyself*, Basil gives us one example of what he means by this. He believes that, for those with spiritual eyes, even ordinary kinds of work can teach us about the life in Christ. The hunter tracking his prey, for example, should think about what he is truly searching for, and bring to Christ anything in his soul that has become wild and savage by sin. The traveler should reflect on the how the Lord travels with him and guides his footsteps; and he should pray for the wisdom to swerve neither too far to the left or the right. The architect building a house should consider laying the firm foundation of faith which is Jesus Christ. The farmer should restore health to any unfruitful tree in his soul, and administer remedies to promote growth. The athlete should consider that he must follow the rules of the Gospel if he hopes to be crowned at the end of the race. This is the world of analogies that Basil lives in.

An even more focused example of this kind of thinking is found in *Long Rules 5*, “On Avoiding Distractions,” where Basil says: “When a blacksmith forges an axe or a sword, he thinks of the person who commissioned it, and with him in mind he calculates its shape and size, suiting his work to the one who ordered him to do it. In the same way, you too should direct your every action, small and great, according to the will of God, performing the action with care and precision while keeping your thoughts fixed on the One who called you to the work that you do.”

In discussing the nature of work, Basil is concerned about the unhealthy way in which we become self-identified with our work, which is often little more than an opportunity to project our self-will and passions. He points out that work like this is not in service to others, but in service to one’s self, it is a “pleasing of the self,” which he strongly condemns (in *Longer Rules 41-42*). In the same way, to refuse to do one’s assigned work, to refuse to carry out one’s obligations, or to do something other than this, is condemned as prideful and contrary to the virtue of obedience:

He who denies himself and sets aside his own wishes does not do what *he* wills but rather what he is directed to do ... but whoever chooses a task conforming to his own personal wish (ιδίαν επιθυμίαν) brings against himself the accusation of self-gratification (αὐταρέσκεια), and reveals his desire either for worldly renown, the hope of gain, or some similar reason, demonstrating that his hope is not in the Lord, but is still held captive by the world ... and it is equally unfitting to rely on yourself as it is to refuse to submit to the decision of others.²⁶

Basil likewise teaches that we should not be committed to too many projects at the same time, and that we should complete the projects we start. It is better, he says, to finish one project well rather than undertake many and not complete them.²⁷ We are not working for ourselves but for others, and ultimately for the Lord:

Everyone, therefore, in doing his work, should place before himself the aim of service to those in need and not his own satisfaction, and thus will you escape the charge of self-love (τῆς φιλαυτίας τὸ ἔγκλημα), and receive the blessing for brotherly love from the Lord, who said, “Inasmuch as you did it to one of these, my least brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40).²⁸

To the leaders of the Church (οἱ προεστώτες), Basil says that in your work, you must be a model to the faithful, an example worthy of imitation, so that there be no excuse for those under you to disparage the power of the Gospel, to ridicule or mock the faith, or to think that the Lord’s commands are impossible and thus are to be ignored.²⁹

²⁶ *Longer Rule 41* (EPE 8:360).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Longer Rule 42* (EPE 8:366).

²⁹ *Longer Rule 43* (EPE 8:370).

In all of his teachings about work, Basil is concerned about the inner disposition of those who work in the Church, as well as with the quality of their work. “‘Work out your salvation,’ Scripture says, not carelessly or negligently, but ‘with fear and trembling’” (Phil 2:12). Like St Paul, Basil wants us to work in a manner that is εὐσχημόνως καὶ κατὰ τάξιν (1 Cor 14:40), that is, “in a way that is proper [or seemly], and according to the right order.”³⁰

Basil would agree with the Greek proverb, quoted by St John of Damascus: Οὐ καλὸν τὸ καλόν, εἰ μὴ καλῶς γένηται (Το καλό δεν εἶναι καλό εαν δεν γίνεται καλά.) In every work, τὸ πῶς γίνεται must be foremost, and not just in church but in everything. Things have to be done in the right spirit, and in the right way, otherwise the *work* might move forward, but *we* will be left behind—or worse, we will build or produce something at the cost of destroying ourselves, gaining the world and losing our souls. “Unless the Lord build they house, they that build it labor in vain” (Ps 127:1). Without Christ, even seemingly good or virtuous works can bring harm to those we serve, to ourselves, and to the Church.

This is well illustrated in the story from the *Gerontikon* about the Three Brothers ...

There are two passages in the writings of St Maximos the Confessor that make the same point in an even stronger way:

In discussing the meaning of the phrase: “Prepare the way (ὁδόν) of the Lord, make straight his paths (τριβους),” St Maximos says that: “These paths are made straight by those who pursue a life of virtue not for the sake of human glory, personal advantage, or to engage in self display. This is because Christ does not enjoy frequenting roads that are not straight, even if among some men He should find the way prepared. That is, if someone fasts and avoids the passions, and does all the other things that contribute to his deliverance from evil, he has ‘prepared’ what is called ‘the way.’ But if someone else undertakes these same practices out of self-esteem, love of flattery, the desire to please men, or for any reason other than to please God, he did not ‘make straight the paths’ of God, and even though he endured the labor of preparing the way, he did not have God walking on his paths, and all his labor was for nothing” (*QThal* 47.4).

“The demons do not hate temperance, neither do they loath fasting, or the distribution of wealth, or hospitality, or chanting, or reading, or sleeping on the ground, or keeping vigil—or any of the things that are characteristic of a life lived according to God—as long as they can twist the motivation of these activities to their own ends. For a person will perhaps quickly recognize the demons that openly tempt him to sin, and easily avoid suffering harm from them. But *these* demons—who seem to cooperate with us on the way of virtue, and who wish, as it were, to help us in our efforts—cannot be easily recognized even by the most spiritually advanced without the help of the ‘active and living Word, who penetrates through all things, even unto the division of soul and spirit’ (cf. Hebr 4:12)?” (*QThal* 56.7).

7. The Divine Liturgy: The Work of God and Man

As I said at the beginning of my first talk, man is a working creature, and work is a distinctively human activity. But if man is by definition a working creature, he is also a *worshipping* creature, and there is no greater expression of this “work” than the Divine Liturgy, which is a work both *of* the people and *for* the people.³¹

The world in its totality is called to enter the Church; it is called to become what the Church already is: the body of Christ. The Church in turn, through the work of her priests, is called to bless the elements of creation which,

³⁰ *On Renunciation of the World* (PG 31:645).

³¹ The word λαός has archaic forms such as λεώς and λειτός, and a λείτωρ was an ancient word for a priest, so λειτός + -ούργος is from ἔργον and used to form compounds, like γεωργός, δημιουργός, πλαστουργός, ταχυδακτυλουργός, and, not least, ιεουργός, λειτουργός, συλλειτουργός = λειτουργία; Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary*, 832.

by the sanctifying power of the *epiklesis*, are purified, regenerated, and elevated to their primal dignity and destiny as transparent bearers of the Spirit. This is made especially clear in the Eucharist.³²

“On the night that he gave himself up for the life of the world,” Jesus took bread and a cup of wine signifying his relationship with the earth and with the toil and longings of human beings. Having taken these gifts, “he gave thanks, blessed, and sanctified them,” thereby extending the activity of God and renewing the covenant with the created universe—a universe which can again mediate a presence. “This is my body and blood,” forever part of creation destined to die—and yet rise like the sun ascending into heaven and at the same time “invisibly present among us” (ὧδε ἡμῖν ἀοράτως συνών). The gaze, gestures, and words of Jesus are focused on those at the table, yet they encompass the whole of time. The historical meal is pregnant with the future because it is offered by the Eternal One who is “food and drink indeed” (John 6:55).

In the Eucharistic offering of bread and wine, human labor again becomes a sacrificial movement to God. In this movement, we no longer usurp and violate the world for our pleasure but we renounce the world, and ourselves, and give all things back to God. At the same time, we do not give the world back to its Creator unchanged: through our work we add something to it. We do not simply take wheat and grapes (directly from nature) and place them on the altar, but bread and wine, that is, the fruits of the earth wondrously transformed by human technology, transformed through human labor and work. Neither do we worship outdoors, in the natural world as God created it, but in temples whose very bricks, stones, wood, paint and other materials have been transfigured to reveal the depth of their inner beauty. Through their labor, the architect and the iconographer, the stone cutter and the wood carver, have discerned the mystical heart of creation (the “body within the body”), and with their craft (*techne*) have empowered it to join the magnificent chant of the cosmic liturgy—and not just to join it but to actually embody it. In the words of Fr Dimitru Staniloae:

The seal on the altar bread is the seal of man’s understanding of and intelligent work on creation, through which he humanizes the world and gives it back to God. He actualizes the world’s potentialities; he organizes the world so as to be able to make proper use of it, as much as possible. Through the organization and actualization of the <raw materials of the> world, he reveals its hidden and possible uses and its inner beauty, the Divine Logos present in its actual and virtual matter.³³

In this way, the creative activity of the Liturgy—the great poem of humanity—serves as a model for all human activity. Purified by ascetic discipline, the Eucharistic man through his work brings order to chaos; he gathers that which is scattered, and binds up that which is broken; he gives form and beauty to what is formless and misshapen, be it in agriculture, industry, science, politics, the fine arts, or economics. The daily bread he molds and kneads through his labor is the totality of human culture and civilization sealed with the sign of the Kingdom.

The fact that human beings were called to cultivate the garden means that creation is not a finished product, it is not something that was given to us so that we might keep it exactly as originally created. From God’s perspective, the world needs work, and human work has been renewed in Christ in a way made manifest in the Divine Liturgy.

What the Liturgy brings about is the restoration of the unity of life and work. The “river of the water of life,” which “flows from the throne of God and the Lamb,” is “crystal clear” (ὡς κρύσταλλον) (Rev 22:1), but a carnal man cannot see it, and spiritual men discover it only after much labor and work, as they learn to act in God and like God. For the Liturgy is action, it is work: it is the work of God and the human person reaching into all the dimensions of human nature and life. Starting with the person of the priest, the liturgy unfolds in “gifts, services, and activities” (χαρίσματα, διακονίαι, ἐνεργήματα) (1 Cor 12:4-6), by means of which everything is made subject

³² For these comments, and for what follows, see my article, “Commentary on the Patriarchal Message on the Day of the Protection of the Environment,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 35 (1990): 192-94.

³³ Dumitru Staniloae, “The World as Gift and Sacrament of God’s Love,” *Sobornost* 5 (1969): 669.

to Christ and transformed into him. “All things belong to you, but you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God” (1 Cor 3:22-23): this is the movement of the Liturgy which seeks its completion in us.

The work of the liturgy is the place where mankind and the world meet in the glory of God, in the river of life flowing from the throne of grace. This encounter fails or is frustrated to the extent that we “lack God’s glory” (Rom 3:23). If creation is to be recognized and experienced as “filled with his glory,” as Isaiah says: πλήρης ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ τῆς δόξης σου (cf. Is 6:3), we must first become once again the dwelling places of his glory, our very bodies becoming living “temples of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19). This is why everything begins with the inner liturgy of the heart and the inward transformation of the person. We delude ourselves or at best deal in abstractions when we think we can change the world without the grace of God being the source of that change. “Even if all deny you, I will never deny you,” said Peter on the eve of his denial (Mt 26:33). Yet in saying this, Peter has *already* denied Christ because he thinks that the source of fidelity to Christ is something he contains within himself. [And having lost the inner fire of grace, he is left to warm himself at the fire in the courtyard of the high priest.]

To the extent that we allow the Spirit to “come and dwell in us,” and form within us the “features of Jesus Christ crucified” (cf. Gal 3:1), we are transformed from light to light, and from strength to strength. But like the work of the Spirit, *our* work too is one of forming and imprinting. On everything that we touch we leave our personal imprint. And rather than project or impose ourselves on the world around us, our work aims to awaken all of creation and our fellow man to the life of the Spirit. [“We are trying to speak to the Christ in people.”]

Creation is “groaning,” St Paul says, “awaiting its deliverance” (Rom 8:22), waiting its freedom, and it is for man to liberate it by becoming free himself. This is why the work of the Spirit consists in transfiguring the hearts of men in and through their work. The light never comes to us from the outside; it cannot be apprehended with the eyes of the body: it flows from the heart and is shed from within on the whole person. The glory of God, which is held captive in creation by human sin, can shine only when the heart of man accepts and welcomes the light from within. *Homo faber* is a slave as long as he has not become *homo liturgicus*. If the river of life has not made its way into our hearts, how can it make its way into the field of our work?

“My Father is still working, and I am working too” (John 5:17). To celebrate the Eucharist is to experience first hand the transformation of human effort and work. We know from experience that the power of the risen Christ is at work, freeing our toil and our labor from the weight of death. This does not spare us from labor—because the cross is always the hour of decisive struggle and effort—but to the contrary opens up our labor and makes it an offering to the Spirit of life.

And it is in the heart of the priest who undertakes the work of the liturgy where work is again the place of *epiclesis*. For, whatever work we do, both the activity and the outcome are incomplete as long as they have not been penetrated and transformed by the power of the Spirit who alone carries them beyond death and turns them into a work of light. What we offer at the threshold of the *anaphora* is not “gifts” in any simple sense, but an incompleteness, an appeal—the *epiclesis* is that “groaning” St Paul spoke about (Rom 8:19)—the anxious expectation of creation that carries the marks of our work, that bears the imprint of our hands but not yet the imprint of light.

The light of the Spirit is prophetic (τὸ λαλήσαν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν): it discerns, it challenges, it spurs creativity and is translated into actions. It cries out for justice and is the servant of peace. It incites to sharing, because all the earth belongs to God, and the fruits of human labor are meant for everyone.

8. Work and Rest

To share in the Spirit is the true “jubilee year”³⁴ of work, the end of a cycle of seven years, and thus a symbol of the eighth day, Sunday—the day of abstinence from activity—the day on which all work is restored to its purity through the freely given gift of grace. Laborious work is for the sake of bread, but the bread of Sunday, the ἐπιούσιος ἄρτος, is for the sake of the transfiguration of work.

Finally, after he worked, God rested, and, in our emphasis on work, we must not overlook the critical importance of the sabbath. The seventh day—the day of rest—was the very first thing that God hallowed, sanctified, which he set apart, and deemed holy: καὶ εὐλόγησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ἑβδόμην, καὶ ἡγίασεν αὐτήν, ὅτι ἐν αὐτῇ κατέπαυσεν ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἔργων αὐτοῦ (Gen 2:3).

This, too, brings us back to the cross, and to Christ’s rest in the tomb after he had completed his work of redemption. This interpretation of Genesis is found in the *Doxastikon* of the *Ainoi* of Holy Friday, which we sing again on Holy Saturday morning, and is taken word-for-word from a paschal sermon by St. Gregory of Nyssa.

As I stated in my previous talk, one of the most pervasive pathologies in our culture today is the tendency to work to excess, without proper rest. In fact, many workers receive bonuses for this—it’s called overtime. And many of us acquired the habit of overworking not merely on the job but in school, where in many graduate and professional schools “sleep is optional.” Work and rest need to be balanced, and rest is not optional; it is mandatory. It has been said that a human being is free only when he can determine and limit his activity. Rest is not inactivity, because it is about allowing God to be more active in our lives. Christ’s rest in the tomb marks his absolute surrender to God. We need a holy day, a day set apart, not only for worship, but for rest, for true rest in God, every week, indeed every day. If we want to be free—free to be open to God and give ourselves to him—we need to know how to limit our activities, and in that rest find the true source of our work.

Concluding Recommendations

Start your day with prayer.

Be grateful at being alive and having twenty-four brand-new hours to live. Remember that every day is a chance to make a new beginning.

Commit to memory a meaningful phrase from your morning devotions (from the Epistle, Gospel, or other spiritual writing) and call it to mind throughout the day.

Eat breakfast at home, not in the car, and eat at the kitchen table and not at your desk. Take the time to enjoy it.

Turn off your cell phone while in your car.

Use red traffic lights or traffic jams to slow down, take a breath, and say the Jesus Prayer.

At the office, take regular breaks.

Don’t eat lunch at your desk. Change environments. Go for a walk.

Before going to work, or to a meeting, think about what you want to accomplish, what you want to say, and who you need to be.

³⁴ Which the Septuagint renders as the ἀφέσεως σημασία, or the “trumpet-blast of liberty.” The Latin word *Jubilaeus* is derived from the Hebrew *yobhel*, meaning ‘ram,’ since the Jubilee Year was announced by a blast on the shofar, the ram’s horn, during that year’s Yom Kippur.

Learn to see those around you as your allies and not your enemies. Recognize that working collaboratively brings more satisfaction and joy than working alone. Wherever possible, work in a team. Know that the success and happiness of everyone is your own success and happiness.

Learn to see your work as a contribution to the good of all and not merely a means to personal enrichment or advancement.

Try and relax and restore yourself before going home so you don't bring accumulated negative feelings, thoughts, or frustrations home with you.

Practice looking for the positive things in your work and your fellow priests and colleagues. Express your gratitude and appreciation to them regularly for their good work.

Conclusion

Work is a uniquely human activity, but through person and work of Christ, and by virtue of our participation in the priesthood of Christ, our work now has the possibility to be a *divine*-human activity, a true sharing in the creative and redemptive work of Christ.

Though Orthodox thinkers and theologians have not shown much interest in developing a “theology of work,” I hope to have shown that we have an important and in many ways unique contribution to make to this question, based in part on the place of work in monastic and community life (as we saw in the writings of St Basil), and even more so in the Divine Liturgy, which provides us with a model, or rather with a set of principles indicating what forms our work should take, and what the true aim of our efforts should be, namely, the ongoing transformation of all things into the likeness of Christ.

As we have seen, not all work is automatically transformative: the moment we turn away from our divine vocation, weeds with sharp thorns appear in our cultivated field, suffocating the life that is there, and giving way to the barrenness of spiritual death. When work does not have the proper end in sight, it becomes problematic: *πόνος* becomes *πονηρός*, for unless the Lord builds the house, we build on sand, and all our labor is in vain. If we work without the Lord, we build on sand, and thus make no progress, and begin a kind of descent into hell, in the way that in the ancient world, frustrated labors were the traditional punishment of the damned (Sisyphus, Tantalus).

Though we have been called to our work by Christ, we are not reducible to our jobs. The true source of our identity is not our job, but Christ. Our motto is not: “I am busy, therefore I am.” We do not create ourselves in or through our work, because God has already created us, and redeemed us, and our work should strive to be a response to his creative and redemptive love.

The excessive individualism of American culture, which pervades the way we think about work as a path to personal fulfillment and self-realization. Decades from now, future historians will probably look back on our generation with some puzzlement, or as an aberration, given our religious devotion to overwork in a time of unprecedented prosperity, with its sacrifice of family in service to job opportunity, its conflation of income with self worth. ‘Industriousness’ has served as America’s unofficial religion since its founding. The sanctity and preeminence of work lies at the heart of the country’s politics, economics, and social interactions, and the ideal worker is someone driven by purely careerist ambitions, who is focused not only on income but also on the status that comes with promotions and increased recognition among their peers. All of this is a formula for mass burnout, and has proven to be destructive of community, since it undermines the idea that we discover our true identity through the group we belong to, which is not the workplace but the body of Christ.

Christ taught us by example that we too must shoulder the many crosses that the world and the flesh inflict on those who pursue a life of peace and holiness. Every one has to work, and every one has a burden to carry, but the difference is that now we can work, and take up our cross, with the power of the risen Christ, who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth, and who is at work both in us and in the people we serve.

As priests, our work is different from other forms of work, because God has appointed us to specific tasks in the Church and bestowed upon us the charisms to bring these tasks to fulfillment. Our calling and our work go together, which is clear from the Lord's initial calling of the Twelve: "Follow me," he said, "and I will make you fishers of men" (Mk 1:17). Being "fishers of men" is a job description.

Christ does not say that when a person becomes his follower that he will exchange heavy burdens for no burdens, or harsh yokes for no yokes, but says: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me ... for my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Mk 11:28-30). What he means is that we are called to share his yoke and burden, but it also means that he is sharing ours as well, that is, he is sharing the very burden we assumed at his invitation, when he called us, and this is what makes the burden light and bearable. Indeed, in the midst of carrying our cross, and the burdens of others, we can experience rest, the inner peace that only Christ can give.

Perhaps this is also a cure for the workaholic priest, to recognize that the whole yoke does not fall on your shoulders alone, that your burden is a shared one, and that, in the end, it is the Lord's ministry, the Lord's work, the Lord's priesthood that you have been asked to share, and it is he who has already borne our burdens, and has overcome them all on the cross and through the resurrection.

If we work in obedience to and love for the Lord, then no matter what we do or for whom we do it, we work in reality for the Lord, and we will receive our reward from the Lord, as St Paul says: "Whatever you do, do it with all your heart, as if for the Lord, and not for human beings, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance, for you serve the Lord Christ" (Col 3:23). But if we labor without this disposition, without this support, then we are no different than unbelievers, who do not labor for the Lord, or for the glory of God, but for themselves, or for some temporary need or gain, to acquire wealth, prosperity, honors, and all the other things that the world deems to be valuable.

The work you have been called to do is difficult and demands particular effort. Above all it requires patience, because there will always be those who wish to hinder it, to frustrate it, to resist, and pursue aims and interests contrary to the Gospel. Throughout Scripture and the history of the Church, it is clear that men are frequently called to serve in a capacity or community that has not called them. Think back to to Elijah's experience, when he told God: "The people have rejected me ... clearly I am not called to serve them" (1 Kgs 18). What was God's response? It was not to agree with the discouraged prophet, but rather to say: "Go back to the place I sent you, and to the tasks I assigned you, knowing that I will be your help."

We are frequently assigned to parishes that did not call us, and which perhaps did not or do not want us, or which have a number of people who are opposed to us. But it is not, or should not be the case that priests are appointed or approved by their congregations, subjected to humiliating job interviews where they are made to literally sing (if not dance) to the satisfaction of the lay leaders of the community. Giving such power to laymen and local parish leadership is a clear violation of New Testament polity regarding presbyters, as it is articulated in the Pastoral Epistles and elsewhere. We need to be clear about who it is that called us, and whom we ultimately are working for.

[*Or read after the Concluding Recommendations*] In closing, I would like to thank you for inviting me here to speak to you. The last time you so honored me was at the 2013 APC retreat in Naples, Florida. Most of you will know that I am not a parish priest, though I understand your struggles and the tremendous challenges you face.

You are like soldiers who have been sent to fight a war, but without the proper arms, without a battle plan, without a map, often fighting alone, wounded by the enemy, without a medic, without proper support, and without the leadership of your superiors who are often absent from the trenches and far from the front lines.

“For it seems to me that that God has exhibited us, his apostles, as the last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ’s sake. We are weak. We are held in disrepute. To the present hour we labor, working with our hands. When we are reviled, we bless; when persecuted we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate. We have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things” (cf. 1 Cor 4:9).

“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Jesus Christ, and God made him our wisdom, sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:27-31).