

THE SCOPE OF KINGDOM WORK

A CHRISTIAN VISION OF
SOCIETY, CULTURE
AND THE LIFE TO COME



BETHEL
SEMINARY

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THE LIFE TO COME

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations in this publication are taken from the New International Version (2011).

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INTRODUCTION

Many years ago, a group of eight young boys huddled with their Sunday school teacher in the clammy basement of their church. Each had been given a tiny piece of paper on which to write what he hoped to be when he grew up. Quietness prevailed as the boys moved their pencils ever so slowly and deliberately. Their writing skills were still tentative, so the task demanded their full concentration. Finally, they folded their little papers over and handed them in.

For the most part, the responses were predictable. Fireman. Doctor. Missionary. Rocket scientist. Businessman. And then, finally, this one. One little guy had simply written: “A *noremal* man.” He would be content, he appeared to suggest, to become a normal person. Such a delightful aspiration, and so endearingly misspelled.

I have kept that little piece of paper through the decades, for I was the boys’ eighteen-year-old Sunday school teacher. And obviously, I had been projecting on them the question that was bedeviling me. But that humble little response has reminded me ever since that there are more important considerations than where our profession fits in some culturally established pecking order of vocational prestige and influence. Could it be that the most important question is not what we will do, but how we will go about it, and with what intent?

.....

This booklet is a sequel to an earlier one entitled *Work with Purpose: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Work* (2017). The goal of the earlier booklet was to begin to look at human work through Christian eyes. It summarized the biblical foundations of this Christian view of work, noted additional insights generated by Christian reflection across subsequent centuries, and offered some constructive proposals for making the work endeavors of Christians more purposive and meaningful.

In doing so, it pointed out the great secret to finding meaning in our endeavors: to identify the larger purposes of God in the world, and then to find our place within those and begin contributing to

them. The most significant and consequential of all the revealed purposes of God for history is to establish the kingdom of God. And we have been invited to participate in this kingdom, and to advance its interests.

In this second booklet, we will explore in more depth the nature, and especially the scope, of kingdom work. We hope to show how a commitment to God's kingdom, properly understood in its full breadth, can infuse purpose and meaning into a great diversity of human occupations, and even the most ordinary and mundane of our life endeavors.¹

Our goal in writing this booklet is to help readers acquire, or appreciate more fully, a vision of kingdom work that encompasses all the dynamics of human society and culture, while continuing to appreciate the significance of important Christian endeavors like evangelism and church-planting, and while

continuing also to live this life in anticipation of the life to come. We hope that as a result, readers will be better able to appreciate the legitimacy of their own vocations and those of others.

The booklet is sub-titled "A Christian Vision of Society, Culture and the Life to Come." This promises, obviously, a vision of considerable breadth, one that extends well beyond the walls of the church. Its extended reach is eminently fitting, for God is not only the God of redemption and of Christians, but indeed the God of all creation. This vision encompasses the full scope of human society and human culture. Taken together, society and culture pretty much cover everything associated with how humans do life together. We have, moreover, added a reference to the life to come, because the grand Christian vision of reality is not confined to the

⋮ **Society:** A group of humans in relationship, and the structures that shape their interactions.

⋮ **Culture:** The shared, learned values and practices of a society (a total way of life).

1 Julie Canlis, *A Theology of the Ordinary* (Wenatchee, WA: Godspeed Press, 2017), 66.

here and now. It takes this life seriously, but its horizon stretches further. Among other things, it means that we should always pursue our endeavors now in light of what is to come.