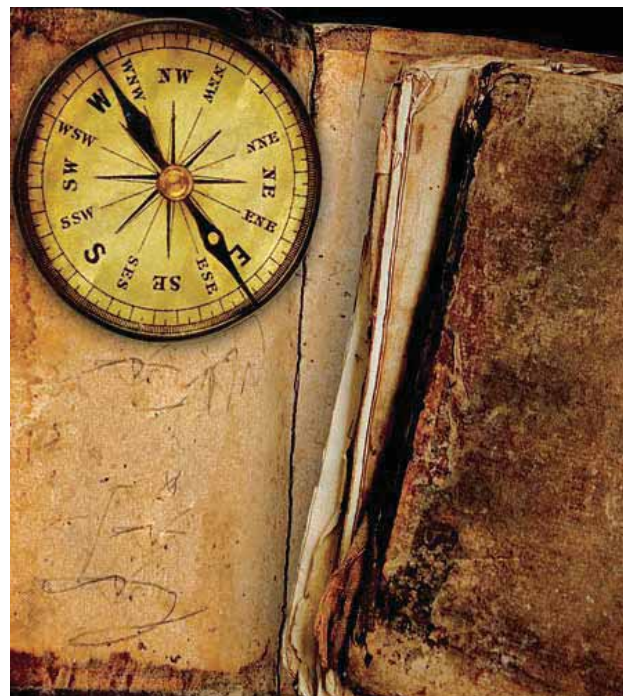
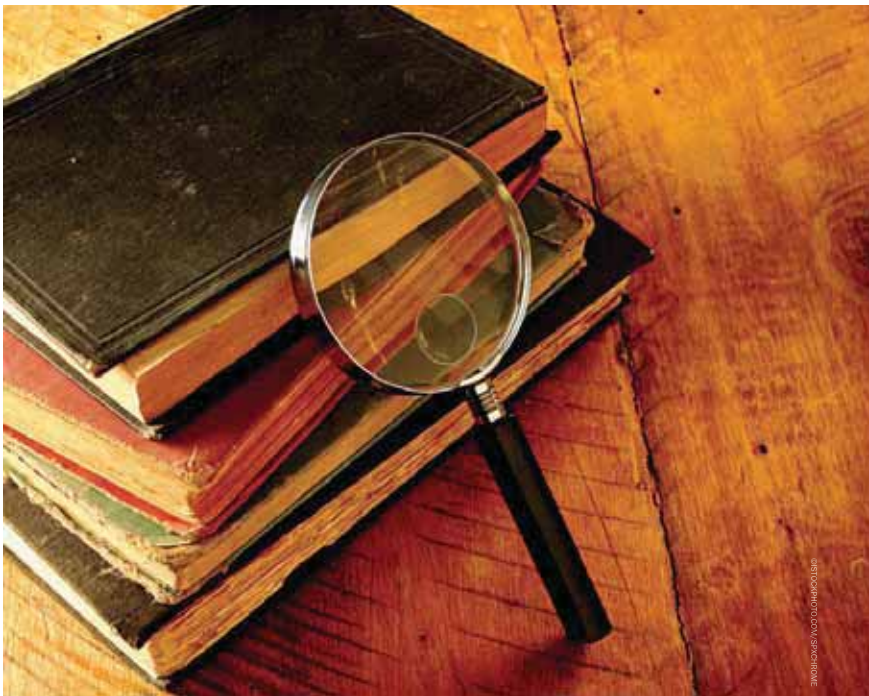


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BY DR. CHRISTIAN OVERMAN



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MANY THINGS HAVE CHANGED SINCE 1721. Some things—like men’s white powdered wigs and women’s corsets—we can live without. But some things have gone out of fashion that we really need to recover.

In 1721, Jonathan Edwards graduated from the Collegiate School at New Haven, known today as Yale University.¹ But before Edwards and his classmates could exit Yale, whether to work as pastors or merchants, they were all tested in a particular field of study that has since disappeared from virtually every school in America: *the practical art of God-centered work*.

This specific subject has not only disappeared from our schools, but from most of our churches and homes as well.

The course of study that Jonathan Edwards and his fellow Puritans completed had a name, a Latin term: *technologia*. It was a curriculum complete with textbooks. Technologia was not just a course on vocations or aptitudes. It was a holistic curricu-

lum that helped people approach work in the broader context of a Christian worldview. It was the biblical worldview that gave work—all kinds of legitimate work—remarkable purpose and meaning for Jonathan Edwards and his peers, whether they were missionaries, bankers, or homemakers.

Dr. David Scott, professor of history at Southern Evangelical Seminary, discovered the technologia curriculum while doing eight years of PhD research on Jonathan Edwards and the Puritans. “The Puritan curriculum of *technologia*,” writes Dr. Scott, “taught Edwards a God-centered view of all reality. He grew up in a church that believed it had an obligation to teach what it meant to live a God-filled life in

everything we do. That is why the textbooks of *technologia* began with the being of God and traced His truth through creation all the way to how it is lived out as a farmer, shoemaker, or merchant.”²

But today, there is little formal curricula available that combines an understanding of biblical worldview with a God-centered work life. This is what I call “The Missing Curriculum.”

How many texts are available today that specifically focus on the theology of work, or help students comprehend how the biblical worldview relates to things like repairing automobiles, designing software, or running any legitimate business?

OFF THE RADAR

I was the principal of a Christian school for 14 years. During those years, it never occurred to me that my school should provide specific instruction for students in the art of God-centered work. Frankly, I did not know there was such a thing as “theology of work” or anything close to it. Nor did I know that a full curriculum could exist on

the topic, as it did in the days of Jonathan Edwards.

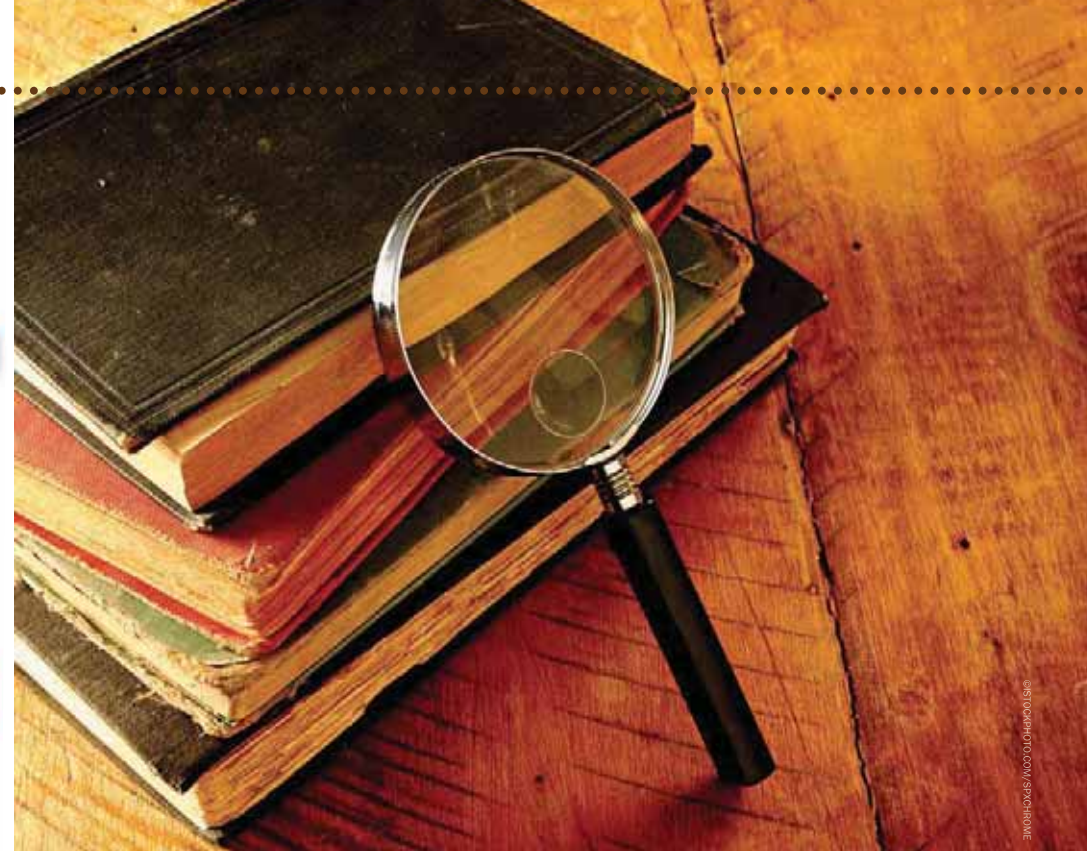
For many years, I, like many others, thought only pastors and missionaries did “God-centered work.” I failed to make any connection between selling shoes (which I did part-time while a college student) and the Kingdom of God.

So what does selling shoes have to do with the Kingdom of God? If we separate the two, we will never understand the answer. But as the English Puritan Pastor George Swinnock put it, “The pious tradesman will know that his shop as well as his chapel is holy ground.”

This is a teaching we do not often hear today. When was the last time you heard a sermon along the lines that “your shop as well as your chapel is holy ground”? But as we know from Genesis 1:26–28, God created humans in His likeness and image with *one functional purpose in mind*: to rule over the earth and all that it contains. And this *raison d’être* necessitates all kinds of work! Furthermore, it makes all legitimate work on Planet Earth a response to God Himself! If this isn’t “holy ground,” my friend, I don’t know what is.

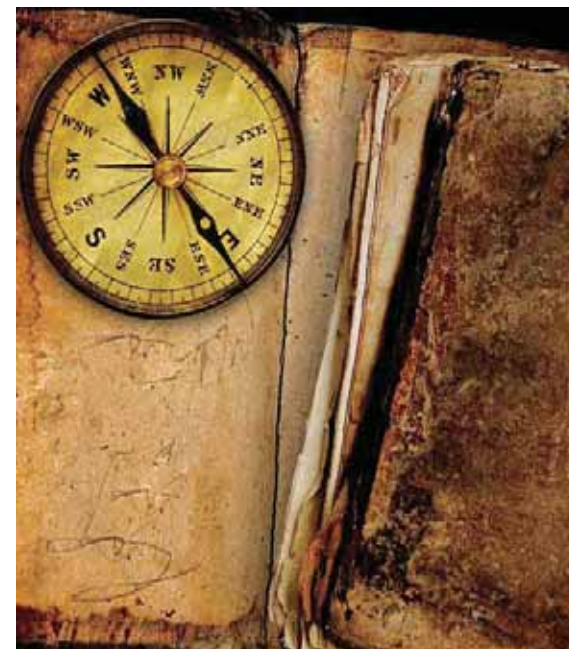
THE FIRST COMMISSION

Work, at its core, is an act of governance. Governance over wood, metal, cows, cotton, and carrots. Governance over sound waves, electrical currents, and wind. Governance over computer keyboards, fiber optics, and digital images. Governance over people. Governance over things. Governance over ideas.



“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over . . . all the earth” (Genesis 1:26). This profoundly important piece of information is often called “The Cultural Mandate,” or “The Dominion Mandate.” But I prefer to call it simply, “The First Commission.” And what a commission it is! Here we have a commission to rule over the entire globe!

Chuck Colson summed it up this way: “On the sixth day, God created human beings—and ordered them to pick up where He left off!” Randy Kilgore, a leader in the current faith-at-work movement, says, “God created a world that functions on order, and requires labor for its tending. He created you and me to be a part of that order, to do that labor. Even when our acts at work don’t seem to have eternal significance, their very rendering



fulfills His original commission to humans to tend His creation.”

GOD’S VICE-REGENTS

Creation-tending is a big job! Ruling over all the earth is a responsibility as broad as the world is wide and requires many varied occupations, including carpentry, civil service, high-tech work, and homemaking. It involves physical work (as with Adam the landscaper, tending and keeping the Garden) and mental work (as with Adam the zoologist, naming the animals).

Both kinds of work occurred before the Fall. Work is not a curse! It is our great and awesome responsibility as vice-regents over this remarkable planet. And we were made in the image of God so that we could carry out this function well. The curse just made our work more difficult.

Some people think that when Adam and Eve sinned, they forfeited their role as governors over all the earth. Like ambassadors caught in an act of treason, Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden and removed from their positions as God’s vice-regents. In this scenario, “earth-tending” could no longer be the job description of human beings.

If this is the case, then we are prisoners on a cursed planet, sent out to wander, spending our days toiling for food. Our work, then, is no longer a way of fulfilling the role God had in mind for us when He created Adam and Eve: “Let us make man . . . and let them have dominion . . . over all the earth.” Beyond providing for our own subsistence, work could no longer have any significant purpose.

NO SECULAR WORLD

If we embrace the notion that our original job description (the First Commission of Genesis 1:26–28) was rescinded at the Fall, we will have a very difficult time seeing how one’s shop as well as one’s chapel can be holy ground.

But what the Puritans seemed to understand so well is that because “the earth is the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1), God is still the owner of every pair of shoes in every shoe store in the world, and He claims rights to every customer who walks through the front door.

Because they saw Jesus as Lord of all (including all shoes and the selling thereof), the Puritans did not divide the world into “sacred” and “secular” compartments. They did not see some work as secular, and other work as sacred. For them, there was no “secular” world.

No, in Edwards’s day, the merchant was doing “the Lord’s work” as much as the pastor.

IF I COULD DO IT OVER AGAIN

If I could do it over again, I would have all my high school students complete a course on the art and science of God-centered shoe-selling. I would call it *More Than A Paycheck*. As a matter of fact, I recently wrote such a curriculum and called it just that!

I’d like the next generation to know that no matter what career paths they might take, whether in business, the arts, or homemaking, they will always be working in the Lord’s field. This is because there is no other place to work! It is all His turf! From the plastic of our computer keyboards to the rubber tires on our automobiles, it all belongs to Him, and He is “head above all” (I Chronicles 29:11).

I’d like to further impress upon students that no matter where we work, our ultimate authority is Christ. We might work in places that ignore the lordship of Christ, and in some places that actively deny it, but we will never work in any place that is exempt from it.

Is there any place that lies outside the realm of God’s affairs? Is there any sphere of activity that exists independently of God, on its own, in a vacuum, somehow separated from His ownership, interest, and involvement? Hardly! I would teach my students that they will never have a “secular” job, because there truly is no “secular” world.

While heaven may be the place we go when we die, Christ instructs His followers to occupy Planet Earth until He comes again. This act of occupation takes place in every legitimate field of human endeavor. It takes place as followers of Christ observe all that He commanded within the realms of business, government, the arts, media, education, and every sphere of legitimate work on this planet.

OPTING OUT?

The degree of corruption we sometimes find in these earth-tending spheres may be because Christ-followers have opted out of them or failed to realize that we are supposed to observe all that Christ commanded within the context of such jobs in the first place.

Jonathan Edwards and his peers understood that it is in the workplaces of the world where we have a prime opportunity to “observe all things that Christ commanded,” one of the central thrusts of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20.


It was the so-called Protestant work ethic that fashioned America into the land of opportu-

nity that it quickly became. Yet, today’s sacred-secular split has led many Christians to leave their Christianity outside the workplace door. As a consequence, people cannot always distinguish Christian ideals from non-Christian thought in the work world, and our economy has suffered greatly. I want to encourage the next generation to play a role in changing this. Will you join me?

CONCLUSIONS

The commitment to intentionally and systematically train young people in the art of God-centered work has largely disappeared from education. The custom of teaching students how to make connections between the biblical worldview and all forms of legitimate labor is no longer customary. It has gone the way of men’s powdered wigs.

But it can be restored. I believe we can once again train our young people to see “their shop as well as their chapel as holy ground.”

The powdered wigs can go. But the practice of equipping our sons and daughters with the ability to engage in their everyday work “as the work of God” is long overdue for a comeback. 



Christian Overman, the Founder of *Worldview Matters*, www.worldviewmatters.com, has taught classes in biblical worldview throughout the United States, as well as in Central America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. He is the author of *Assumptions That Affect Our Lives* and the *More Than A Paycheck* curriculum. He is also a commissioned Centurion, studying under Chuck Colson. He and his wife of 39 years, Kathy, have homeschooled, and have four adult children and ten grandchildren. His blog is at www.biblicalworldviewmatters.blogspot.com.

¹Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) entered Yale just prior to his 13th birthday and graduated at the top of his class four years later. He became an outstanding theologian who served as pastor, missionary to Native Americans, and third president of Princeton University. He and his wife, Sarah, parented eight children. Among their progeny are scores of pastors and missionaries, 120 college professors, 110 attorneys, 60 authors, 30 judges, 13 college or university presidents, three congressmen, and one vice president of the United States.

²David Scott, “A Church Without A View: Jonathan Edwards and our Current Lifeview Discipleship Crisis,” *Christian Apologetics Journal*, 7:2, Fall 2008.