

HUMAN VOCATION: Study 2

The Creational Mandate—and ‘the Fall’

Three Primary Points

There are three primary points I hope these studies will embed in our thoughts and understanding.

1. **There is a creational mandate.** Human vocation for all of humanity flows from God’s creational mandate to ‘be fruitful...’ (Gen. 1:28).
2. **There is a redemptional mandate.** Human vocation for consciously redeemed humanity includes the redemptive mandate to proclaim Jesus Christ, as the matrix of creation, through the setting forth of the gospel (Ephesians 3:8-12; Matthew 24:14; Matthew 28:16-20).
3. **There is an excellent way, *agape*,** given to the new humanity, by which this occurs (1Cor. 13).

The Creational Mandate

Then God said, ‘Let us make Man [humankind] in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea...’ (Gen. 1:26a). See also Gen. 1:28 below.

As those created in the image and likeness of God, we are designed to work. *The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it* (Gen. 2:15). It is part of our royal dignity, ‘*crowned with glory and honour*’ (Psalm 8), it corresponds to our physicality, and it corresponds to our created mental and emotional capacities to use our given resources, to have ‘**dominion**’ over the complexity and variety of all creation. To learn, to study, to observe, to relate to the creation and the creatures in service, decision-making, and care are all part of our brief. The undertaking of cultural pursuits, in the areas of agriculture, animal husbandry, industry and music are evident among the early descendants of Lamech, Adah and Zillah. Jubal was ‘the ancestor of all those who play the lyre and pipe’ (Gen. 4:21), while Tubalcain ‘made all kinds of bronze and iron tools’ (Gen. 4:22). By design, the creation has a potential which is undeveloped. It has an innate need for cultivation and culture-making.¹

So God created Man [humankind] in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them... (Gen. 1:27). Integral to the matter of human vocation is the plan of God that human beings work together, in partnership with one another. God’s given way is for man and woman to come together in a one-flesh union of marriage. And this, where the two-fold marriage of husband and wife, joined in faith-union with God, such that ‘*A threefold cord is not quickly broken*’ (Ecclesiastes 4:12). This reflects the Triune union of God within himself, this plurality of Father, Son and Spirit: ‘*Let us make Man in our image...*’ (Gen. 1:26a).

Happy Days

The magnificent account of God’s work in the creation (Genesis 1–2) of human beings, of bird life, oceans and the amazing world beneath the sea, the stunning, fascinating plant life on plains, in gardens and in jungles, the formidable mountains and magnificent rivers, the painted skies, the myriads of stars and planets, suns, moons and—so we are told—billions of galaxies, all manner of earthly creatures—large and microscopic—bugs and beetles, lions and cattle, together with the picture of angels shouting for joy, and morning stars singing together at the wonder of creation (Job 38:4-7), all remind us that *there was a time* prior to the entrance of evil, sin and death and its distortion and horror in our world. This untested period of innocence and freedom, of walking with God in the cool of the evening breeze, is now a scenario quite beyond our grasp, beyond our recall. So too, is a crystal-clear view of the best understanding of call, and vocation – given in the mandate of Genesis 1:28, and, pondered anew by David’s Psalm 8.

¹ Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavour*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2012, p. 58

Genesis 1:28 *God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'*

Psalm 8:1-9 ¹O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. ²Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. ³When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; ⁴what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? ⁵Yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honour. ⁶You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, ⁷all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, ⁸the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. ⁹O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Difficult Days

Among other things, our human powers and capacity for imagination, our reasoning, our true knowledge, and early understanding of life, our desire to work, and ability to be fruitful, were all marred, and deeply affected by what we call 'the fall'. The written Word helps us to think rightly.

The right judgments of God, 'thorns and thistles' (Gen. 3:18) 'increased pain in childbirth' (Gen. 3:16), 'sweat' and difficulty, often bitter male-female enmity, satanic interruption, enmity between human beings and the Evil one (Gen. 3:15), guilty fears of God, loss of identity, and so on, that ensued, changed our initial course. Work, vocation, calling – all now take place amidst painful struggles.

But given all this, humanity and creation were still destined for redemption through the blood of Christ, before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:7). The Messianic bruiser would ultimately strike the head of the evil Serpent, crushing him under foot (Gen. 3:15; Rom. 16:20).

Right there in Genesis 3, we see, however, that creation was subjected by God, to futility (Romans 8:20-21). But note: it was subjected to frustration and futility, *in hope!* Only through the redeeming Lord, Jesus Christ, can creation reach its truly appointed goal. He was ever the hope of the world. All of the vocations of human beings since Genesis 3, would have to wrestle with the effects of 'the curse'. 'Cursed is the ground' because of Adam. The dust of death now lies before humanity, daily, yearly. We experience disease, madness, cruelty, merciless war, hatred, and creatures out of harmony with each other, and with humanity.

Now, we can merely prayerfully utilise the helpful powers of our redeemed mind, our fallen, damaged—faculties—as Spirit-filled as they can be—to imagine what it *may* have been like for humanity prior to 'the fall', prior to sin's entrance. The original blessing of humanity, and the call to vice-regency, co-kingly reign meant that amazing developments were set before the human race. God's plan for humanity to extend the borders of Eden—to *Edenise* the whole of creation²—were filled with hope and purpose. Yet evil made entry into the very heart of humanity.

Throughout the biblical narrative, the Scriptures teach us of the powers of evil are at now work within the creation seeking to thwart God's plan, and to surpass it. We learn in Genesis 3 of the activity of the crafty Serpent, deceiving Eve, and of the sinister effects of Adam's sin, in exchanging *the truth of God for a lie* (Romans 1:25). Death entered the world. The murder of a brother, Abel, by Cain soon followed, and violence spread rapidly (Gen. 4:24). We find the identity of that Serpent confirmed for

² Geoffrey C. Bingham, *The Beautiful City of God*, Redeemer Baptist Press, p. 25

us, when we read in a later context, in Revelation 20:2. “He seized the dragon, that **ancient serpent**, who is the **devil**, or **Satan**, and bound him for a thousand years”.

Satanic powers inciting lawlessness, and the *accusing* of guilty humanity, are now at work in the creation, even if rightly limited under God’s sovereign hand (Rev. 12:10). The refusal of creatures celestial and terrestrial to worship God has spurned so much guilt within the human scene, and among the evil creatures of the cosmos. Refusing their true vocation, rebellious creatures ultimately work against themselves.

‘Rebellious creatures simple deny their essential selves and their created destiny when they do not live to the praise of His (God’s) glory. It is the guilt of this refusal which gives these creatures a fearful view of creation. Guilt invests creation with a dread nature. Nothing in it is trustworthy. Men fear land and sea and sky. They fear minerals on the earth. They fear weather and all natural happenings. They fear heights and depths. They fear their fellow creatures. Only the poets and artists seem to glimpse vagrant beauty and glorious purpose’³.

A summary of many of the effects of the fall, and humanity in disarray, are as follows: Apart from God, **Work Becomes Fruitless**. Pests, droughts, bushfires and floods can destroy the produce. **Work Becomes Pointless**. With only the horizontal component—**work can become meaningless**, ‘a chasing after the wind’ (Ecclesiastes 2:17) without any vertical dimension. **Work becomes selfish**. Doctors can work merely to buy more luxury goods, rather than to serve people in the way of healing, comforting and blessing others. Lawyers can also become consumed with desire for personal wealth, rather than with a desire to achieve a just outcome, to serve human society and community. **Work reveals our idols**. Money, egotism, envy of the neighbour, and fear of death can all corrupt our outlook.⁴ The systemic problems of corporate greed, unfair market forces, and the correlated matters of unemployment, exploitation of persons and of the environment, job dissatisfaction, poverty, laziness and the absence of any genuine hope can press humanity towards despair, and paralysing fear.

It is into this guilty setting, this milieu, this dysfunctional global community, that humanity now seeks to take up their vocation. It is right here that we are to hear God’s call. It is to this world that the appointed Saviour comes, in the fulness of time (Galatians 4:4). It is here that we all must learn to take up anew the calling upon our lives to engage with sin and master evil desire. As Cain was told: ‘*Sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it*’ (Genesis 4:8). We must all learn to seek the LORD’s strength, and be filled with the Spirit, as we undertake our vocations, as we go about all our relationships in faith, in employment, in family, in church, in community and in God’s world.

Nevertheless... God’s Blessing flows amidst the Curse

We need to recall, that the vocational mandate – and the blessing - given to man and woman in Genesis 1:28, to ‘be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and... have dominion...’, has never been revoked. God has continued blessed the breeding, swarming creatures of the waters (Genesis 1:22), and the birds of the air, and he has also blessed the Sabbath, seventh day, the holy day of rest from work (Genesis 2:3). Sometimes we pause and notice that creation is so beautiful, so amazing, so filled with wonder. At times we are shocked by evil, horrified by human sin, unsure, lost, or afraid of dark evil powers. So, it’s a wonderful world. But it is not as it initially was, and it is not as it will be.

It is into this grand creation, this disturbed creation, that the gospel comes. *The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it (understood it)* (John 1:5). Mercy, hope, and reconciliation are central components of the gospel. The Appendix is a prelude to the next study:

³ Geoffrey C. Bingham, *Creation and the Liberating Glory*, NCPI, p. 148

⁴ Keller, T. p. 83-152

Appendix 2

The preaching of the gospel really is good news for humanity, and good news for the creation. It is also good news for Christians who have become pessimistic or cynical about life in God's world.

As those called to live in faith, hope and love through Jesus Christ the Reigning, Triumphant Lord, we must face the difficulties and challenges of our world, and share in the sufferings of Christ crucified, and not merely let the whole situation overwhelm us. Proclaiming Christ is not telling the story of personal salvation for a future time, and then merely enduring the dark days, while waiting for heaven to arrive. No. Rather, it involves living as people of hope, expressing that hope within our vocation.

I would like to commend to you all, the book that is the **Winner of the 2022 Australian Christian Book of the Year** award. It was written by Tony Rinaudo, a Christian from Australia, who in 1981 went with his family to Niger in Africa, on the edge of the Sahara, to plant trees, to serve the LORD. Few survived in the hostile terrain. And those that did were cut down. But Tony stumbled upon a crucial insight...

'The Forest Underground' by Tony Rinaudo is published by ISCAST, 2021. ISCAST is the Institute for Christianity in an Age of Science and Technology: a network of people, from students to distinguished academics, exploring the interface of science, technology, and Christian faith.

Tony was involved with overseeing a preparatory Bible school, managing a property including a nursery, and an orchard and a dairy. He was also to supervise an SIM reforestation program. It all looked difficult, and he often questioned his missionary calling.

This is an excerpt from chapter 7.

"One day in May 1983, my vehicle was pulling a trailer loaded with tree seedlings. I stopped to reduce the air pressure in the tyres to enable the vehicle to travel more easily over the loose sand. Usually, I was in a hurry to get on with the job of planting trees. But not this day. Scanning the barren landscape, the futility and hopelessness of it all weighed heavily on me. North, south, east, west; as far as I could see there were empty, windswept plains. Even if I had hundreds of staff, a multimillion-dollar budget and many years to do the work, using the methods I was currently using, I would never make a significant lasting impact.

As I was about to get back into the vehicle, a bush on the side of the road caught my attention. Thinking that the bushes scattered across the landscape were just shrubs or weeds, I had never given them a second thought. I walked over and took a closer look. Combing my hand through the foliage, I let the leaves slide between my fingers. Tree leaves are like a species signature, and these leaves had the distinctive double-lobed shape of a camel's hoof print. *Pilistigma reticulatem!* The Hausa call it kalgo. This was not a bush. These leaves belonged to a tree. It had been cut down, and I was looking at shoots sprouting from a stump. These "bushes" were, in fact, dormant trees—ready and waiting to recolonise the land. I was surrounded by trees. I was standing on a subterranean forest.

In that instant everything changed. This was the answer to my prayer. This was the solution I had been seeking. And all the time it had literally been under my feet! Or as the Hausa would say: "The chicken went to sleep hungry. The next morning it was surprised and annoyed to discover that it was roosting on a granary."

Tony had noticed what was indeed, 'an underground forest'. Tony tried to convince a few locals these little bushes were not weeds, but a way to the future. Fence some land off, and see what happens, he suggested. He was mocked by some farmers, but a small few farmers agreed. This eventually led to the introduction of Farm Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR). In Niger alone local farmers have now rehabilitated over **six million hectares** of ruined land and doubled their yields and income. ... among other things, Tony is now a Climate Action Advisor with World Vision... It's a great story.