

Editorial: Living All of Life to God's Glory

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At Southern Seminary, over the last couple of years, we have been enjoying the work and ministry of the Commonwealth Project as it has been hosting conferences, bringing in various guest speakers from all over the country, and offering a number of lectures from Southern Seminary's own faculty. If you are not familiar with the Commonwealth Project, it is part of the Oikonomia Network, which is generously supported by a grant from The Kern Family Foundation.

Why was the Commonwealth Project established? It was established to help Christians integrate the Gospel and a sound Christian theology and worldview into every area of their lives. Convinced that God's Word and sound theology is never merely abstract, nor limited only to one sphere of life, and believing that Scripture needs to be applied to all aspects of our human existence, the Commonwealth Project's aim and goal is to promote correct biblical and theological thinking on the issues of work, vocation, economics, and general human flourishing. As creatures created in the image of God, our highest calling is to know, love, and obey our great and glorious triune God, but at the heart of that calling is to live in covenant relationship and to fulfill the very purpose of our existence. Ultimately the purpose of our existence, as Scripture teaches, is to glorify God through obedience to the creation mandate and to fulfill the Great Commission for the good of people, the truth of the Gospel, and the glory of God in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sensing that today the church and individual Christians are not instructed in these areas of work, vocation, and economics as they ought to be, the Commonwealth Project's aim is to equip Christians in these often neglected areas of our lives. Much of our discipleship in the church centers on our walk with God, but little of it wrestles with how Christians should be salt and light (Matt 5:13-16), do good to all as people as we have opportunity (Gal 6:10), to bring a Christian worldview to bear on the issues of work and economics, and how think bring Christian thinking to the public square in our civic and political life. The Commonwealth Project, in bringing this kind of instruction to the Seminary, is seeking to train pastors and future Christian educators in these important biblical truths so that we can multiple our efforts in the local church, thus calling the people of God to understand and embrace a strong sense of vocation in their lives as they speak and live God's truth before a watching world.

In many ways, the Commonwealth Project is bringing to the classroom the Reformation principle of living all of life to God's glory, so that the next generation of believers will live lives which embrace the beauty of being redeemed image bearers, learn to enjoy their daily work even in a fallen world, know what it means to fulfill our vocation, and to promote better the biblical concept of human flourishing in the larger society.

Today, it is an understatement to say that this kind of instruction is needed in the church. Living as we do in an increasingly secularized and relativistic age, the church, for a variety of reasons, has too often dichotomized the Christian life. Too frequently, we have artificially separated our spiritual life from our everyday life, and one of its consequences is our disengagement from society. But given that God has created us to rule over his creation, to work, to be salt and light in the world, and to apply God's Word to our entire lives, Scripture reminds us that our Lord is not only interested in our spiritual lives, he is also interested in us as whole people. Biblical salvation involves every aspect of our lives in relation to God, the world, and to others.

In the Reformation period these truths were in need of being recaptured just as they are needed today. In that period, a lack of clear biblical thinking led to a false view of life and the same kind of dichotomizing between the spiritual and the physical. The Reformation, on the basis of Scripture, rejected this way of thinking. For example, in terms of every believer's relationship with the Lord, they recaptured the biblical truth of the priesthood

of all believers. It was not merely some in the church who were priests, but because of Christ's great highly priestly work, and our faith-union with him, all Christians are priests before God. In addition, the Reformation recaptured the sense of work, vocation, and service because they believed that God created and valued both the spiritual and the physical and that it mattered to God what we did with our daily lives. In light of the creation mandate, all human beings are called to work, live, and act in such a way that we carry out our dominion work in this world as God's vice regents. Especially in redemption, this calling is true for Christians, because in Christ, we are now being restored to what God created us to be in the first place. In redemption, we are truly learning what it means to be human again, as the effects of sin are dealt with in Christ and by the transforming power of the Spirit. The Reformation nicely captured these biblical truths, and it is the conviction of the Commonweal Project, that we need to recapture them anew today for the church. In many ways, what Paul exhorted the Corinthian church to do, namely, whatever you do, whether we eat or drink, do it all for God's glory (1 Cor 10:31), we challenged today to do likewise.

It is for this reason that this issue of *SBJT* is focusing on various issues related to work, economics, vocation, politics, and the overall application of a Christian worldview to our society. Our contributors cover diverse topics, but all of them are united in bringing God's Word to bear upon the church and to address our common human task of God's vice regents in the world. It is my prayer that these essays will not only give you a sense of what the Commonweal Project is seeking to achieve at Southern Seminary, but that these articles will call us to apply the whole counsel of God to every area of our life, for the glory of Christ, the good of the church, and even the benefit of our larger society.