ET637 (=ET641) Workplace Theology

We spend at least one-third of our lives working, preparing for, or looking for work (with another third for rest and sleep and the final third for everything else). What does God’s word (theos + logos = theology) have to say about this working third of our lives? What does a theology of work look like? The purpose of this intensive residency course is to explore, seriously and constructively, a Christian way of thinking about work, calling, individual careers, and organizational realities. What is going on today, both the challenges and the opportunities, in today’s global workplace? What are, or could/should be, the purposes, the mission and vision, the values appropriate to this domain? How can the Bible help us understand work, business, and the broader economy and marketplace? What do Christians have to contribute to today’s workplace --- and what are the best strategies for being God’s “salt” and “light” out in the marketplace --- whether for starting new organizations and businesses or improving existing ones? What insights and experiences might workplace disciples bring in a constructive and helpful way to our church and parachurch organizations, and their leaders, to help them function better? And what help can the church provide to its members for their workplace lives?

OBJECTIVES & LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students who complete this course will be able to

1. Understand and describe the major contours, opportunities, and challenges of today’s workplace.
2. Understand and communicate a robust biblical theology of work, vocation, and economic life, including the positive purpose, value, and place of work and workplace organizations in a biblical perspective – and the biblical analysis of how good work goes bad, and what to do about it.
3. Articulate and promote biblical Christian insights in a constructive, positive way around colleagues, companies, and communities who may not share their biblical faith and values.
4. Articulate their personal sense of calling, philosophy of work and economics, mission and core values, both to Christian and non-Christian audiences.
5. Understand and more faithfully and effectively support the daily lives and challenges of the workplace laity who are members of their congregations.

FORMAT

This course will meet once per week from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. on Wednesday evenings. Course sessions will include lectures, discussions, guest panelists, and student presentations. We will engage in a good deal of biblical study of work-related themes and we will be reading and discussing four books.

Instructor

David W. Gill, Ph.D., is Mockler-Phillips Professor of Workplace Theology and Business Ethics and Director of the Mockler Center for Faith and Ethics in the Workplace at Gordon-Conwell. His books include a Christian ethics text Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles and a business ethics text It’s About Excellence: Building Ethically Healthy Organizations. He has taught Christian and/or business ethics for 40 years and lectured across North America and Europe. He is an experienced business and organizational ethics consultant and trainer.

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REQUIRED READING

Jim Collins. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don’t.* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2001). ISBN: 978-0066620992  Collins was co-author of *Built to Last,* the best-selling business book of the 90s; *Good to Great* is the best-selling management book of the past decade; a general market study of characteristics of high-performance, great companies and their leaders; Gillette CEO Colman Mockler (for whom GCTS’s Mockler Center was named) is Collins’s exemplar of great executive leadership.


theology of work and in-the-trenches examples are inspiring; her discussion of four pathways to integrate faith and work is the best out there..

Selected articles & interviews TBA.

**Recommended:**

**ASSIGNMENTS**
(email all papers to instructor in electronic form as Word documents with your last name the first word of the document file)

1. **Four Book Reviews.** 500 word summaries & critical reviews of each of the four required books by Collins, Hardy, Keller/Alsdorf, & Sherman (4 x 5 = 20% of grade)
2. **Interview Report.** A 1000 word summary with brief commentary on two interviews you conduct with (a) a Christian business/workplace veteran and (b) a veteran pastor or parachurch ministry leader. Topic: how do they understand, experience, and promote the connections between biblical Christian faith and the realities of the workplace? (20% of grade)
3. **Human Resources Topical Research Paper.** A 1000 word paper providing a biblical/theological perspective on an important human resources topic. (20% of grade)
4. **Work or Sabbath Sermon, Lesson, or Essay.** A 1000 word articulation of a theological perspective on some aspect of work or Sabbath that you can deliver to one of your current or potential audiences (20% of grade)
5. **Implications & Reflections Paper.** A 500 word personal reflection on what this intensive study means for your own work/ministry (10% of grade)
6. **Class Attendance & Participation** (10% of grade)

**SCHEDULE**

(1) **September 10**  **Workplace, Marketplace, Vocation, & Profession**
Introduction to subject area, terminology, conceptual framework: (1) personal work/vocation/career, (2) organization/company/corporation, and (3) larger economic systems; Four ways to "salt" the workplace.

(2) **September 17**  **Creative Work, Hard Work, Wise Work,**
How the biblical teaching on creation, fall, and providence can illuminate and guide our view of the workplace. God is our teacher and our example.

*Book Discussion (Review Due):* Jim Collins. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't.*

(3) **September 24**  No class meeting

(4) **October 1**  **Redemptive Work, After Work**
How the biblical teaching on redemption and sabbath can illuminate and guide our view of the workplace. God is our teacher and our example.

*Book Discussion (Review Due):* Timothy Keller with Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*

(4) **October 8**  **Character & Calling, Organizational Culture & Mission**
How the biblical teaching on redemption and sabbath can illuminate and guide our view of the workplace. God is our teacher and our example.

*Book Discussion (Review Due):* Amy L. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good*

October 15  No class meeting – reading week

(5) **October 22**  **HR/Personnel**

*Book Discussion (Review Due):* Amy L. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good*
October 24-25  Faith@Work Summit Conference  (Embassy Suites, Logan Airport)
This is a major national Faith@Work Summit Conference to be held at the Embassy Suites Hotel at Logan Airport. Depending on space available (conference limit is 300), our class may be able to attend part or all of the event.

(6) October 29  Finance & Marketing
How the biblical teaching on money, property, stewardship, debt, interest, and related topics can illuminate and guide our perspective and practice.

(7) November 5  Technology & Entrepreneurship
Technology, environmental challenges, and globalization are major drivers of change in the workplace today. How does a biblical theology illuminate and guide our perspective and practice on these topics?
Book Discussion (Review Due): Lee Hardy, The Fabric of this World:

November 12  No class meeting --- Reading week

(8) November 19  Globalization & Development
What does biblical Christian faith contribute to our understanding of leadership in the workplace and its activities and organizations?

November 26  No class meeting--- Thanksgiving eve

(9) December 3  Panel Discussion/Topics (TBA)
For or final class session we will either have a panel of three or four guest speakers or a presentation and discussion of student topical research interests and projects. Dependent in part on whether we are able to attend the Faith@Work Summit Conference.

PAPER ASSIGNMENT DETAILS
Submit all papers by e-mail as Word attachments with your last name the first word on the electronic file (eg “Gill. Hardy Review” or “Gill. Interview Report”). No paper allowed. Footnotes, end-notes, or notes in body of text--your choice

Book Reviews  500 words
In your written reviews: (1) Clearly identify the author of the work and the basis for his or her authority on the subject. (2) Concisely and accurately summarize the argument of the work, paying special attention to their explicit or implicit theology or philosophy. (3) Provide your own analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the work. What is helpful, what not? What is missing or not well supported? How does the book rate in terms of its theological perspective (well-done? Superficial? Partial? etc.).

Interview Paper  1000 words
A summary with commentary on two interviews you conduct with (a) a Christian business/workplace veteran and (b) a veteran pastor or parachurch ministry leader. Topic: how do you understand, experience, and promote the connections between biblical Christian faith and the realities of the workplace?

Set up an hour or so to personally (face-to-face) interview a business leader (company can be in any field or product area, large or small, old or new company); interviewee can be middle or upper-level executive but make sure it is someone with at least a few years of experience in leadership and management; find someone who takes his or her Christian faith seriously. Tell the prospective interviewee that you are doing a paper on faith and work and want to interview a business leader. Most of the time they will be glad to help you. Ask this person to describe briefly (1) their Christian faith and experience, (2) their work and business leadership/management experience, (3) how their faith and ethical values have affected the way they work, manage and lead. Have they ever experienced any conflicts between their faith and their work/business? Do they think their faith has helped them in their business leadership? Cost them? How do they think about religious diversity in their workforce? Does it cause problems or is it an asset? You should take the interview in whatever direction you think would be interesting and helpful.
Then find a veteran pastor or parachurch ministry leader to interview. How would they describe a “theology of work”? What would be their key points on how to work in a faithful Christian manner? What specifically do they do as pastors (teaching, mentoring, pastoring, praying, liturgy, communication, etc.) or ministry leaders to equip and support their people in the business world? Have they ever visited their parishioners’ (constituent’s) places of work? What do they do to stay current and informed on the challenges their business folk are facing? What help would they like from seminaries and from veteran Christian business folk to strengthen their ministry to the workplace? You should take the interview in whatever direction you think would be interesting and helpful.

In your paper, (1) Clearly identify the interviewees, explaining who they are, their business of ministry position & experience. (2) Concisely and accurately summarize their opinions on faith and work/business. (3) Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of their perspective. What is helpful, what not? What is missing or not well supported? Where do you disagree or find them superficial or less informed than they should be? etc.

HR Topical Research Paper. 1000 words
A paper providing a biblical/theological perspective on an important topic in human resources. Many of the most challenging issues in the workplace fall in the HR domain, e.g., hiring, firing, compensation, training, nurturing, disciplining employees. Employee relationships. You choose a problem or topic to research and write on. The paper is short but must be based on careful research into the problem or topic and must provide a biblical Christian way of thinking about it.

Sermon, Lesson, or Essay. 1000 words
Articulate to the extent possible within the 1000 word limit, a sermon, lesson, or essay on workplace theology (some aspect of it) that you can deliver to one of your current or potential audiences. This is practice articulating what you are learning about workplace theology and discipleship and passing it on in a church or workplace setting. Could be a sermon or lecture or lesson. Could be a Saturday workshop or seminar or retreat. Could be for a small group study. Could be written or oral communication-focused.

Implications & Reflections Paper 500 words
A personal reflection on what this intensive study means for your own work/ministry. What will you do with it all?

ATTENDANCE POLICY
Academic credit for a course requires regular attendance, not just completion of the assignments. Your personal participation and contribution is essential to the program. Attendance means being present for the entire scheduled class meeting, not just some part of it. In the event of an excused absence, for any reason, you are responsible for any information or class content missed and may be assigned additional make up work because of the absence. If you are absent from a significant portion of the course, or if you are frequently late for class meetings, even due to extenuating circumstances, this may result in a lower or even failing grade for the course. Please inform your professor/mentors well in advance of any urgent circumstances that may necessitate your being late or absent.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
Students are expected to review, understand, and comply with the academic integrity standards and commitments of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Our community values serious intellectual engagement and personal faithfulness more highly than grades or degrees. We are committed to being above reproach in our academic work as a reflection of our Christian faith and character. We are committed to honesty in all aspects of our work. Ask for help from your professor or your counselors and support group if you find yourself tempted to engage in any of the following violations of academic integrity --- or are just having great difficulty in your studies: Any of these violations will result in a failing grade in the course and a report to the dean.

- Submitting the your own same work, in whole or in part, in more than one course without explicit permission from your professor/mentors;
- Plagiarism, i.e., large and/or multiple unattributed, uncredited quotations or paraphrases of ideas from published or unpublished sources; Submitting as your own work paper(s) obtained from other sources or writers;
- Unpermitted collaboration with fellow students or others in preparing assignments.