

CHRISTIAN SOCIAL THOUGHT

Editor's Note: *The first four reviews in this section are related to this issue's thematic focus, common grace in business. The editor thanks guest editor Shirley J. Roels for commissioning these reviews.*

Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good

Steven Garber

Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2014 (239 pages)

In *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good*, Steven Garber provides a persuasive rationale and inspiration for both knowing the world and knowing its people as they are, while also, in love, through vocations taking on the responsibility and opportunity to positively impact the people and the community around us and make the world a better place for all.

Garber shares his deep personal discussions from years past, including piercing questions from global cultural leaders about loving their people, throughout history and into the present, while also shaping the future of their nations and cultures. He connects those hard foundational questions with the vocations of every person in every segment of life or work, encouraging them to be “common grace for the common good” in each person’s unique way, time, and place. He shares stories from authors, artists, and playwrights—of real people doing justice—together with examples from music, movies, politics, and religion. The author contrasts one person’s inability or unwillingness to concede personal responsibility with another’s willingness to embrace it. In the first case, Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi who orchestrated the Holocaust, refused to accept guilt for the horrors he committed

against millions of people during the Second World War. In the second case, Gary Haugen was moved by his observation of racial tension to work for reconciliation in apartheid South Africa, and among other activities, he served with the US Department of Justice in post-genocide Rwanda. He later formed International Justice Mission, an organization devoted to addressing hard global issues, including child prostitution and child slavery.

Garber compares our current world culture—characterized by numbness, futility, overwhelming information, and apathy—with the confrontation of reality by figures such as Vaclav Havel, founder of the Czech Republic, and Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who argue for taking personal responsibility for our world as fully human beings. The author shows the need for both the mind and the soul, both knowledge and compassion, and he uses the framework of the biblical covenant to describe how “a relationship is offered, a revelation is given, a responsibility is expected” (92). In addition he connects biblical prophetic exhortations to do the right thing (e.g., the parable of the good Samaritan) with an insistence that true knowledge should result in clear actions.

Garber shares how we learn by watching and seeing other real people who are doing things. He connects learning through apprenticing and role models with learning from and emulating the life of Jesus as God among us. He describes his conversation with Wendell Berry about Berry’s writings and vision of the greater economy of God’s kingdom and how all lesser economies must somehow fit with God’s economy. The author shares the stories of real people in real places with real jobs, careers, and vocations that include a home builder, a counselor, a community health physician, an internet developer, a developer of nations, a professor, an educator, a World Bank official, an attorney, a psychologist, a mother, and a business owner. Each of these persons is living out their vision through their vocation in their jobs, careers, and organizations as well as in their marriages and families, in the context of their churches and communities that bring hope and life while joining in God’s work and mission.

Garber warns against the human tendency to drift toward stoicism or cynicism when we are confronted with the harshness of life and difficult situations that require long periods to effect positive change or that sometimes may appear entirely resistant to it. He encourages others to instead imitate God who, knowing everything good and bad about everyone and everything, still chooses to love people and to act directly in their lives and the world. The author realizes that not everything will become right and good during this time before the return of Christ and the new kingdom and how that path can often be difficult. However, doing one’s best and celebrating what good can still be done through the grace of Christ is worthwhile and meaningful.

Garber asks what makes one truly happy and what worldview is the most coherent and fits reality best. He reiterates that the overall story and worldview of the Hebrew God and the God incarnate through Christ is still the best way to know well, to care deeply, and to love fully our neighbor and ourselves through living out our callings in our everyday vocations and activities.

I have much to agree with Steven Garber in his overall worldview and applications of related biblical texts. His delineation process, examples, and stories are consistent,

enlightening, inspiring, and thoughtful; his writing is clear, warmly personal, thought provoking, and deeply engaging. I would have liked him to explain more clearly his view of common grace and the common good, both of which he only briefly mentions a few times. The common good is perhaps easier to extrapolate from his text, but common grace may be somewhat less obvious, especially because this book can and should be read by non-Christians as well as Christians. While some of his stories and examples are international, it might also have been helpful to a potentially global audience to include a few more examples of twenty-first-century people around the world who are living out their vocations with common grace for the common good. We have so much to learn from our global friends. While Garber mentions living out one's faith daily in marriages and families, the example of one wife and mother includes her admirably also starting her own home stationery business. However, I wonder if it is his view that being a parent without a second employment-related job or vocational calling is also admirable. Perhaps these will be addressed more fully in an addendum or updated text in the future.

Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good adds penetrating questions, helpful insights, biblically grounded perspectives, and real-life examples to the existing literature on vocation and calling and the integration of faith in work. This book would be useful for professors and their undergraduate students to broadly inspire and give foundational meaning to the vocations and callings of those students. It would be particularly helpful for college students who are beginning to question and discern their own vocations and who are wondering why, where, and how to give of themselves with common grace in service to the common good.

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Make Your Job a Calling: How the Psychology of Vocation Can Change Your Life at Work

Bryan J. Dik and Ryan D. Duffy

West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania: Templeton Press,
 2012 (281 pages)

While humankind has always been in search of meaning in their lives and work, the newest generation of workers shows an intensity of interest that has stimulated new research and practical thinking on an age-old topic: calling. In recent years, there have been some illuminating books on this topic (e.g., *Courage and Calling* by Gordon Smith, *The Call* by Os Guinness, and *Fabric of This World* by Lee Hardy). These works are, without a doubt, valuable examinations of this important topic. While there is no shortage of books to address philosophical and theological underpinnings of *calling*, Dik and Duffy provide a fresh look by firmly grounding their presentation in the growing empirical research in psychology, management, and social science more generally. Unlike earlier works that have applied a singular focus, these authors apply a “scientist-practitioner” perspective