

the Austrians and Monetarists at the same time as dismissing socialism and Keynesianism, instead offering a worldly view of our economic dilemma. It is such worldliness that pervaded Luther's theology and makes his work such a rich seam for exploring everyday problems. Luther himself set up the problem very well for us when he insisted that the Christian cobbler should make good shoes, not bad shoes with little crosses on them.

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## The Divine Conspiracy Continued: Fulfilling God's Kingdom on Earth

**Dallas Willard and Gary Black, Jr.**

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It is a widely understood problem that, for many Christians, there is a disconnect between their faith and their work. One commonly proposed solution encourages greater involvement in church programs and engagement with spiritual practices. Yet, many who fill their lives with these activities find themselves asking, "Is this all there is to leading a good and meaningful life?" Some faith leaders encourage attending conferences where we hear the call to live radical or fearless lives for God. Such calls usually amount to spreading the gospel to unreached peoples or becoming a pastor or working for a Christian nonprofit ministry. Unfortunately, this approach leaves those who do not heed the call feeling either like second-class Christians or like it is impossible to lead a full life in God's world if one chooses to become a doctor, lawyer, educator, or entrepreneur.

What we need is an adequate vision of the *life* all Christ-followers are invited into. Gary Black, Jr. and the late Dallas Willard have done a masterful job of presenting such a vision in *The Divine Conspiracy Continued*. This volume extends Willard's initial work from *The Divine Conspiracy*, and even if one has not read that work, they will be able to fruitfully engage Willard and Black's ideas here. Chapters 1–3 summarize what the kingdom life with God amounts to. To begin, the authors remind us that "God's divine conspiracy is to overcome the human kingdoms of this world with love, justice, and truth." The main question for all of us (and that the book seeks to answer) is this: "How can we best participate in this reality?" (2).

Participation with God requires that we see him as a good and beautiful God who has good aims for us. God is always with us and for us in every area of our lives (Ps. 23, Ps. 119, Matt. 5). If that is right, then following Christ envelops our professional lives as much as our individual, family, and church activities. Work is no longer viewed as just a job that pays the bills; it is viewed as the natural place where I seek and find God. It is where I can join what he is doing there to bring blessing, peace, and reconciliation to all people (22–28). Put differently, one's professional work is the ideal space for spiritual formation into Christlikeness to take place, and this formation is for the sake of manifesting and demonstrating the goodness and peace (*shalom*) of God to a world that searches

for it in all the wrong places (30–32). Following Christ where we are professionally will have the natural effect of infusing human life with meaning and significance. This is the good life we have been looking for all along (33–35).

Who is well-positioned to guide their professions into this kind of life? The authors argue that leaders are ideal guides because they possess the relevant knowledge and experience to be followed, and their position is influential in achieving important goals. “Leadership” here receives a much needed (re)visioning. Many have experienced leadership as top-down, heavy-handed, or the mere exertion of power to get what the leader wants. However, this is not what the authors mean by *leader*. If you are in a position of influence, you must seek the good of those you lead. You must care for them as valuable persons Christ loves and desires his peace to inhabit. In short, leaders are servants who embody Christ’s loving character toward all whom they influence; and in so doing, they seek the well-being of everyone. The result will be trusted leaders (chap. 4).

Being a servant-leader does not happen all by itself or by merely believing it to be a good view of leadership. Leaders must have an intentional plan to become persons of good character. Besides seeking to be loving, a leader must structure his or her life to develop good character (i.e., the virtuous character of Christ) by practicing a few activities: welcoming accountability, keeping the golden rule, seeking political influence *only* for advancing public well-being, prophetically addressing corruption in their profession, mentoring young leaders, and seeking to lead wisely for the good of one’s organization and the broader community (chap. 5).

Most will be hard pressed to find problems with the author’s view of servant-moral-leadership, though some readers might still raise the following concern. Can one partner with God to overcome evil with good if one does not see himself or herself as a leader or does not occupy a standard leadership position in her organization? Although the authors do not address this question straightaway, I think Willard and Black’s answer is implied. Consistent with their view is that any person of influence is a leader regardless of their level of position in an organization. This possibility shows up not only in their discussions of the good person, the good life, and how we know what is good (chaps. 6–8) but also in their discussion of specific vocations (chaps. 9–13).

How does one become a person who influences others toward peace (*shalom*)? Three of the most important chapters in this book (chaps 6–8) provide a compelling answer to this question: We properly influence others by *actively* pursuing and practicing what is right and good. The authors argue that Christ-followers (and non-Christians) can *know*—not merely *believe*—Jesus’ depictions of the good/bad person and the good life and that right actions aim at advancing the well-being of others as reflecting reality. In addition, there is every reason to think we can know that tolerance, love, and grace are qualities of morally good persons (chap. 7) and that the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5) is virtue that enhances individual and social well-being (chap. 8).

Moral knowledge is insufficient to make one a person who influences others toward peace. One must also act on the knowledge gained, for practicing what is good/right molds one into the kind of person who routinely promotes what is best for everyone

with whom one is in effective contact. Why not see one's vocation as a natural arena for practicing the virtues and seeking a flourishing life for all? To help us make the connection between a good and meaningful life and one's vocation, the authors work through several concrete examples.

One is that we can discover the good aims of our vocation by asking what it exists for. Education exists *for* the transmission and preservation of knowledge from one generation to the next (131). Educators promote the well-being of their students by (at least) transmitting and preserving the knowledge relevant to their grade level or field of study. Therefore, educators pass along "soft" skills such as a concern for how to function well in the "real world" and virtues such as intellectual curiosity, courage, and a concern for the evidence that leads to the truth. Fulfilling these obligations is crucial for the well-being of both students and society because we need knowledgeable citizens in every sphere of social life (chap. 9).

Another important yet controversial example is economics and politics. The aim of these vocations is thinking carefully about and promoting social arrangements that enable the most people to lead good autonomous lives without fear of want (162). The authors argue that Christians should not succumb to the idea that any one economic or political system can engineer the ideal outcomes. At best, we work with God as his stewards to build a free and virtuous society. In their view, the free-market system is the best (though imperfect) economic arrangement for advancing common freedoms and welfare for all (163–72). What about vices such as greed and manipulation that arise in such arrangements? Their answer seems to be that we need to form people (1) who depend on and seek God's action alongside them, and (2) who are intent on "blessing" others, not merely seeking their own materialistic gain (173–98).

Finally, consider business. The primary good aims of business are to create meaningful and sustainable jobs and to provide goods and services that enrich people's lives. While the profit motive is important, these public goods supersede and should rein in the pursuit of profit. Such is God-bathed commerce and business that is a real calling for many Christ-followers to pursue wholeheartedly for the well-being of our communities (207–19).

As we embrace a more expansive vision for life—seeking to know and do what is best for the sake of others by means of our vocations—we are able to live life with God to the full as he intended it. In short, we are able to live good and meaningful lives in whatever arena we find ourselves. I highly recommend that individuals, small groups, and various church ministries spend time working through and discussing this book and applying its practices together. Doing so will transform people and their professions for the good of the world.

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