



WINDOW TO BGST NEWSLETTER



OCT 2019

WTB 2019-10



MILLENNIALS, WORK AND THE BENEDICTINES

BY TAN WEN LI

Adapted from Isa 57:20-21

**'But the [millennials] are like the tossing sea,
which cannot rest,
whose waves cast up mire and mud.**


"There is no peace," says my God, "for the [millennial]."

Work is a restless place for the millennial. Studies have suggested that the average worker currently holds ten different jobs before the age of forty, and the youngest workers among us may hold twelve to fifteen jobs in their lifetimes¹. Many factors have contributed to this shift from lifelong job tenure to occupational nomadism – perhaps above all else, an inevitable disappointment at the inability of work to produce satisfaction, meaning or engagement. For the millennial, the constant restless search for a better job is a constant restless search for transcendent meaning, for an ideal or cause bigger than the self to which the self can be satisfactorily devoted; but, contrary to those who argue that organisations can improve employee engagement if they are able to infuse the workplace with spirituality, work cannot provide the ultimate nexus for meaning. Rather, as Benedict's *Rule* suggests, meaning is found in

God alone; work is made meaningful only through our relationship with God, and entails seeing work in relation to the larger picture of creation, human relationships, and the whole of life.

Work as the Stewardship of Creation

The vision undergirding Benedict's *Rule* unfolds from an understanding of the human being as one engaged in *vocation*. Though the link between vocation and occupation is understandably strong, Benedict's understanding of vocation is not primarily about work; rather, it is first and foremost a call to pursue a relationship with God, to be 'a faithful partner and friend [of God]².



One of the consequences of a call to relationship is a call to a particular understanding of creation and God's sustaining work. Gen 1's vision of mankind in a partnership of fruitful labour with God is the vision sustaining the original integrity and purpose of work – work is not only a means to support oneself and a means of charity and service to others, but an 'expression of our particular gifts as partners with God in bringing the whole of creation to its intended fulfilment'³. Closely related to this application of vocation to work is the process by which humans discover their individual, unique gifts, a concept widely utilised in modern society today.

At the same time, however, Benedict's understanding of vocation is not explicitly tied to a special, unique work which only a particular individual can and should do. In fact, it is worth noting that the notion of gifts and talents hardly appears in the *Rule* at all. In the few specific job descriptions that are included in the *Rule*, character and spiritual maturity are emphasised as key indicators of suitability, not gifts or talents – thus the cellarer is to be one of 'good character'⁴ (not one with mathematical gifting), while the abbot is to be chosen for his 'worthy manner of life and his fundamental wisdom'⁵ (not his leadership abilities or talent for public speaking).

Some points of application may be suggested here. The age of the millennial is one somewhat

pre-occupied with self-discovery – with understanding what my gifts and talents are, what kind of personality traits I have, how my personal history shapes my strengths and weaknesses. The constant search for a new job is so often the search for a better fit, a special and unique work which only I am equipped to do, and which will somehow bring significance and direction to my life. Yet an over-emphasis on vocation as a unique and individual work does not necessarily result in personal satisfaction (it is more likely to result in workaholism), particularly if it results in spirituality being sought *in* work, rather than as the product of a call to relationship with God. For Benedict, vocation seems to have been a much more fluid concept that encompassed both the reality of individual uniqueness and community conformity. The millennial who is unable to find the perfect job fit, who does not feel drawn to any kind of work in particular, or who feels drawn to a work which he may not feel equipped to do, need not despair that they have not discovered the unique work which God has created them to do; Benedict calls us first and foremost to find meaning in relationship with God and community, in the course of which the stewardship of creation becomes a natural outworking in our lives.

Work as Character- and Community-Building

"Work in Benedict's vision is primarily a school



for the building of character and community – the whole of the monastic lifestyle participates in the training of the individual in virtue. Of these virtues, the three greatest are stability, obedience and conversion of life. Stability speaks of the perseverance and commitment of an individual. Yet it is not a blind sense of loyalty but a choice, carefully and reflectively undertaken – the *Rule* is read to potential brethren at least three times during the initial probation period of nearly a year, and its difficult demands clearly set out. It is also about commitment to a community, not a particular occupation or work, for it recognises that each person entering or leaving the community will impact others in profound ways. Closely linked with stability is the second of Benedict's three great virtues, obedience. Obedience speaks of mutual submission in the context of community – not merely the submission of younger brethren to older, or of brethren to the abbot, but of all the brethren to one another. Benedict's belief in mutual submission and love is undergirded by a strong call to personal humility, for humility enables the individual to live and persevere in community. It is a virtue very much at odds with the culture of the modern workplace, which more often than not emphasises confidence, self-promotion and a healthy dose of aggression.

In fact, the virtues of humility, obedience and stability are all deeply counter-cultural. There are many ways in which they cannot be simplistically applied to the modern workplace – for example,

the pace of technological and scientific change often necessitates the constant upgrading of skills, which may result in job changes if the individual is unable to find opportunities for professional development in his workplace. Likewise, obedience to one's superiors may not always be prized in work environments where mutual questioning and challenging are encouraged. Yet there are two important ways in which Benedict's virtues can shape and form our thinking about work. First, work does not have meaning merely because of what it produces, but because of how it shapes character; and second, a well-formed character in turn infuses the workplace with meaning, because it values the workplace as a community, not merely as a place of production.

For the millennial, the notion of the workplace as a training ground for character is not always welcome. One does not want to think about responding in humility, obedience or perseverance when faced with the reality of tedious, routine work, dehumanising structures or tyrannical bosses. Yet the restlessness of heart which many millennials experience is so often rooted in a failure to develop character, a failure to see how uninspiring or overly-challenging situations can be transformed with perseverance, humility and love, rather than simply abandoned for the next better fit. A failure to develop character also propagates the same cycle of dehumanising work structures, in which workers are not members of a community requiring



commitment from one another, but cogs in a wheel whose primary function is simply to produce. When we start to consider our workplaces as places of community, by contrast, we recognise that meaning comes not only from self-fulfilment but from the success of the community working together.

Conclusion

Benedict's *Rule* has a wealth of practical wisdom that may be used to illuminate many aspects of work, including leadership, management and even innovation. This essay has attempted to deal with only one aspect, the *Rule's* relevance for the millennial struggling to find meaning in the workplace. It has attempted to show that work in itself, though intrinsically good and valuable, is insufficient to provide meaning. Benedict would probably have agreed with Isaiah that the tumultuous restlessness of the tossing sea has its roots in the evil of the heart, the antidote for which must begin with a transformation of the individual's attitude to himself, human relationships, and work in the context of creation.

¹ Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-many-jobs-average-person-have-his-her-lifetime-scott-marker>. Accessed Nov 7, 2018.

² Vest, Norvene. *Friend of the Soul: A Benedictine Spirituality of Work* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 40.

³ Vest, *Friend of the Soul*, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Chpt 31.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Chpt 64.

Bibliography

Primary Text

The *Rule of Benedict*

Secondary Texts

Dollard, Kit. *Doing Business with Benedict: The Rule of St Benedict and Business Management* (New York, 2002)

Galbraith, Craig S. and Galbraith, Oliver III. *The Benedictine Rule of Leadership: Classic Management Secrets You Can Use Today* (Massachusetts, 2004)

Klassen, John M. 'Leadership and Joy: Insights from the Rule of St Benedict', in *Vision*, Vol. 15(2) (2014)

McKenzie, Jennifer. 'Benedictine Spirituality and Congregational Life: Living Out St Benedict's Rule in the Parish', in *Congregations*, Vol. 30(1) (2004)

Rock, Michael. *St Benedict's Guide to Improving Your Work Life: Workplace as Worthplace* (New London, 2015)

Vest, Norvene. *Friend of the Soul: A Benedictine Spirituality of Work* (Cambridge, 1997)

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-many-jobs-average-person-have-his-her-lifetime-scott-marker>

2019

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

CONFERENCE (FRI-SAT)

18-19
OCT

"CHRISTIAN^x 2019: THE CHURCH IN A
DIGITAL WORLD"

Church and Industry Leaders from Singapore.

Topic Experts from CODEC Research Centre
for Digital Theology, Durham University.

Fri, 9:00am - 9:00pm, Sat, 9:00am - 5:00pm

@ Bethesda (Katong) Church, Sanctuary

bit.ly/christianx19

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARKER PALMER RETREATS

Fees: S\$600 each. BGST Members & Alumni are
entitled to **50% discount**

Discounted fees: S\$300/each

**To register for these retreats, contact Ian 9830-8401 or
Andrew 9820-0904**

RETREAT / (FRI-SAT)

22-23
OCT

"THE COURAGE TO CARE RETREAT"

Speaker: Mr Greg Sunter

9:00am - 5:00pm @ Katong Village Hotel

RETREAT / (FRI-SAT)

24-25
OCT

"THE COURAGE WAY RETREAT"

Speaker: Mr Greg Sunter

9:00am - 5:00pm @ Katong Village Hotel

www.bgst.edu.sg

BGST'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER (FRI)

1
NOV

"HUMAN FLOURISHING AND THE ARTS"

Dr Jeffrey Greenman, Constance Fourie, Aaron Lee, and Wendy Wong

6:30pm - 10:00pm

@ Kent Ridge Guild House

Purchase a seat or table [here](#) or email shoni@bgst.edu.sg.

CONFERENCE (SAT)

2
NOV

"THEOLOGY OF FOOD - EAT, DRINK & BE MERRY"

Dr Jeffrey Greenman

1:00pm - 7:00pm

@ St Andrew's Cathedral

bit.ly/theologyoffood

TCM PUBLIC TALK CHINESE (SAT)

16
NOV

"中医与基督教的对话"

Speakers: 迪亚拉博士, 赖柏

华博士, 刘佩菱医师

9:00am - 4:30pm

@ 武吉班让堂卫理公会 (圣殿)

bit.ly/tcmnov16

TCM PUBLIC TALK ENGLISH (TUE)

19
NOV

"CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON TCM"

Speakers: Dr Lai Pak Wah, Diarra
Boubachar, Dr Liew Joanna

7:30pm - 9:00pm @ St Andrew's
Cathedral - Prayer Halls

bit.ly/tcmnov19



YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO

BGST's 30th Anniversary Dinner

*Human Flourishing and the Arts
with Dr Jeffrey Greenman*

FEATURED PANELISTS

Constance Fourie, Aaron Lee, and Wendy Wong

FRI, 1 NOVEMBER 2019

6:30 pm - 10:00 pm

Cocktail Hour and Silent Auction at 6:30 pm
Programme begins promptly at 7:30 pm

KENT RIDGE GUILD HOUSE

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RESERVE YOUR SPOT TODAY

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S\$3,000 per Table

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Dinner | Speakers | Silent Auction | & More...



IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

EARLY CLOSING ON 1 NOV

We will be closing early on 1 Nov at 5:00pm for the BGST Anniversary Dinner.

EBSCO

The implementation of the Digital Theological Library (DTL) over recent months has been a success, with students able to access thousands of materials online! Because library-users now have access to the DTL, we will not be renewing our subscription to EBSCO. Access to EBSCO materials will expire in October; we apologise for the inconvenience caused.

NEW HOURS FOR THE LIBRARY

The book drop and collection service has been well-used since its introduction in July. The recent launch of Digital Theological Library (DTL) also means students can access a plethora of online books. Due to these changes, the BGST library is no longer having extended hours on Monday and Thursday, with effect from 2 September 2019. The library will remain open on Saturdays and the **New Operating hours will be Monday-Saturday (9 am - 6 pm).**

FREE LIBRARY BOOKS

With the launch of the Digital Theological Library, BGST is downsizing its physical library, and **giving away hundreds of books!**

Come browse the titles from Monday to Saturday, 9am to 6pm (closed during lunch).
A love gift would be appreciated.

OUR BOOK CORNER IS CLOSING

Take advantage of our parting gifts! **Book Clearance from 5-50% discount** including course texts. While stocks last.

WHAT OUR STUDENTS THINK ABOUT THE DTL



DTL Digital Theological Library

<http://libguides.thedtl.org/home>

The DTL provides access to a large number of dictionaries, encyclopedias, books, and journal articles. The easiest way to access these resources is via a web browser. Some resources can be downloaded in PDF format. Other resources can be checked out for offline reading.

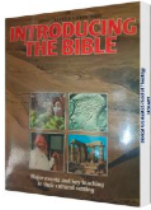
I have found that the DTL provides helpful access to reference materials. If I wish to refer to a dictionary entry or read a section of a book, I can do this easily via my web browser.

BENJAMIN GRANDEY

The DTL has helped me in my studies because it has given me digital access to theological books that I would not otherwise have access to. I would have to travel to the library or spend money to buy those books. But with the DTL, it is easier for me to access those books so that I can use them in my studies for my assignments. This has helped me as I wrote my assignments to be able to quickly access those books which has helped me to shorten the time needed to write those assignments as well as increase the quality of the assignments written.

CLARENCE TONG

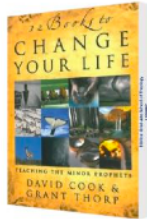
LIBRARY NEW BOOKS



INTRODUCING THE BIBLE

Hughes, Gerald.

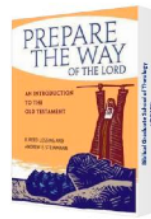
Bible-Introductions



12 BOOKS TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE: TEACHING THE MINOR PROPHETS.

Cook, David

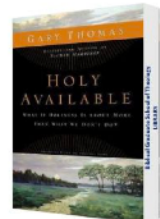
*Bible-OT-Minor
Prophets-Study and
Teaching*



PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

Lessing, R. Reed (Robert
Reed)

Bible-Old Testament



HOLY AVAILABLE: WHAT IF HOLINESS IS ABOUT MORE THAN WHAT WE DON'T DO?

Thomas, Gary L.

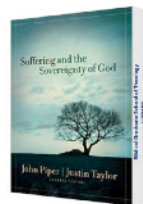
Christian Life



50 SMALL GROUP WORSHIP IDEAS

Townend, Stuart.

*Creative Worship Ideas -
Christianity*



SUFFERING AND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Piper, John

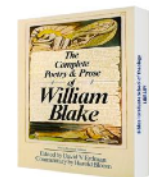
*Providence and
Government of God-
Christianity*



C. S. LEWIS'S LIST: THE TEN BOOKS THAT INFLUENCED HIM MOST

Werther, David

*Religion-Christianity-
Literature & the Arts*



THE COMPLETE POETRY AND PROSE OF WILLIAM BLAKE

David V. Erdman

*William Blake-Poetry &
Prose*

FULL NEW BOOK LIST AT

<https://bgst.vlibonline.com/images/201909-bull.html>

A hand is shown dropping a coin into a glass jar. The jar is filled with coins and has a white label with the word 'DONATE' written on it. Several coins are scattered on the surface next to the jar. The background is a warm, out-of-focus yellow.

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