



## Review of Gregorio Guitián's *Theology of Work: New Perspectives*, Routledge 2024, 326 pp.

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In this volume on the Theology of Work, the editor Gregorio Guitián shares with us an enriching exploration of this branch of economic theology. The various contributors provide us with fascinating insights in the theological contemplation and discussion of work. Nevertheless, it should be noted that these 'new perspectives' are another case of respected scholars being prone to the cult of the new. The book actually does us a great favor by unearthing old views from the dust of libraries, in which many have languished for ages. Most of the ideas presented date back millennia, although some have been thought out in quite recent centuries. Luckily, these old perspectives bring a certain novelty, breathing a freshness and vivacity which are rarely found in the spontaneous and unlikely concepts of yesterday. They have stood the test of time.

The book originated from a Catholic research group at the University of Navarra, of which both the editor and most of the contributors are members. As such, the book is firmly grounded in the orthodox Catholic tradition. Broadening the scope of the book are several contributions from Protestant and Eastern Orthodox writers. Together, the articles provide a comprehensive overview of the theology of work.

The contributors regularly pay tribute to Protestant theology for having a well-developed theology of work. The traditional distinction between the contemplative and the active life had long impeded the development of a serious Catholic theology of work. Earthly work had been judged to be far below the level of spiritual contemplation. However, the Reformer Luther and subsequent Lutheran and Reformed theologians developed a concept of vocation in which worldly and ecclesiastic work are essentially on the same plane. This made it possible to consider work a good thing.

Unfortunately, the book does not provide insight into this well-developed Protestant theology of work. The only contribution from a Protestant perspective is an unlucky juncture of a vigorous rejection of the Weber thesis and a praise of Christian Socialism. The innocent Catholic reader will walk away with the impression that Weber invented the Protestant work ethic, and that Christian Socialists developed the first Protestant theology of work. A chapter on the Protestant concept of vocation should have been part of the book (my study on Udemans can provide the interested Dutch-speaking reader with some insights: Biemond

forthcoming). Moreover, it is likely that this concept of vocation engendered a work ethic (Tawney 1961, 242), although this did not necessarily lead to capitalism. A more nuanced discussion of the Weber thesis would have been welcome, for which I refer the readers to Hudson (1961).

But despite this lacuna, the book certainly has a great deal to offer. The book's three parts (Context, Integration, and Challenge) count sixteen contributions. The first part tries to understand work in the broader context of life and theological thought. Among others, there are contributions on the relationship of work to rest, creative art, and Christology. The latter contribution, by the late Antonio Aranda, starts with the often-overlooked observation that Christ participated during the biggest part of his life in the ordinary human job of a carpenter. Aranda then goes on to provide an impressive account of how ordinary work can be a sanctified part of a holy life.

The second part focuses on integrating the different dimensions of work into a unified whole. This part includes contributions on work in Ecclesiastes, work and liturgy, and work and contemplation, among others. Francisco Varo explores the parallels between the tabernacle liturgy in Leviticus and human work. He argues that holiness is not merely a category that pertains to spiritual life, but that it encompasses purity and order, which are equally relevant in daily work. He then explores the meaning of various purity and food laws, and sketches potential contemporary implications. Martin Schlag also provides an interesting contribution on the connection between contemplation and ecological economics. He maintains that a contemplative life diminishes the role of consumption and provides room for "creation spirituality."

The final part deals with several viewpoints that challenge the view that work is good. It consists of contributions dealing with the Weber thesis, the feminist critique, the anti-work movement and the challenge of secularization. I would like to single out the contribution of Mary Hirschfeld as being particularly interesting. She highlights the importance of unpaid work being done in the household, mostly by women, which tends to be completely overlooked by economists focusing on GDP. Moreover, she calls attention to the necessity of consuming wisely, in order to avoid wasteful consumption and ill-spent money. And not unimportantly, all of this is built upon an interesting interpretation of Aristotle.

In short, I can highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the theology of work. Moreover, this should be required reading for all labor economists, in order to broaden their view of what work is and could be. Only those interested in the Protestant theology of work will need to look elsewhere. But still, even for them this volume will be welcome reading.

**References**

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