



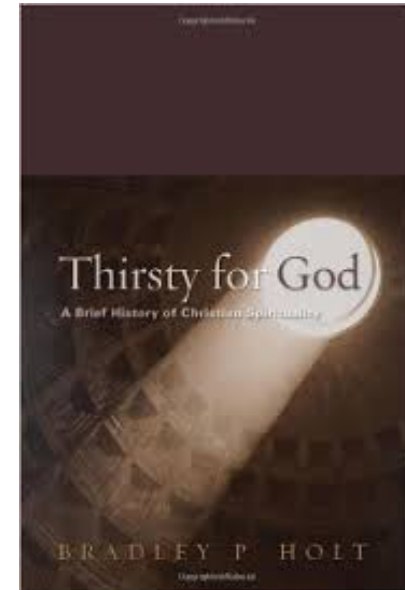
# A Christian Spirituality for Hopeful Earthkeeping

Geneva Lecture  
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Trinity Western University  
23 March 2016

# Christian Spirituality

- True and sound wisdom of knowing God and of knowing ourselves in relation to Him
- Christian spirituality is not a vague mystical experience or a self-help project, but “integrates relationships to God and creation with those to self and others”



# Purpose of lecture

- It will be argued in this lecture that:
  - believers *are* workers and keepers of the earth by virtue of who we are as believers in Christ.
  - This new status of participating in Christ transforms us towards a practice that expresses God's concerns towards others and all of creation.

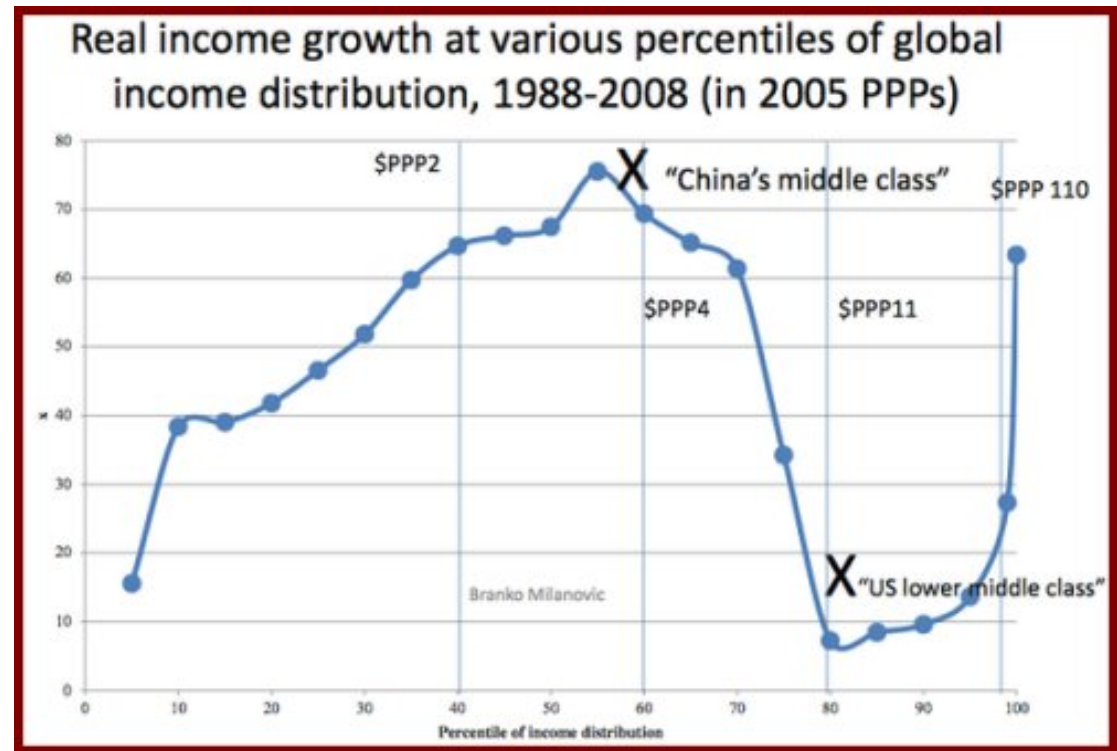
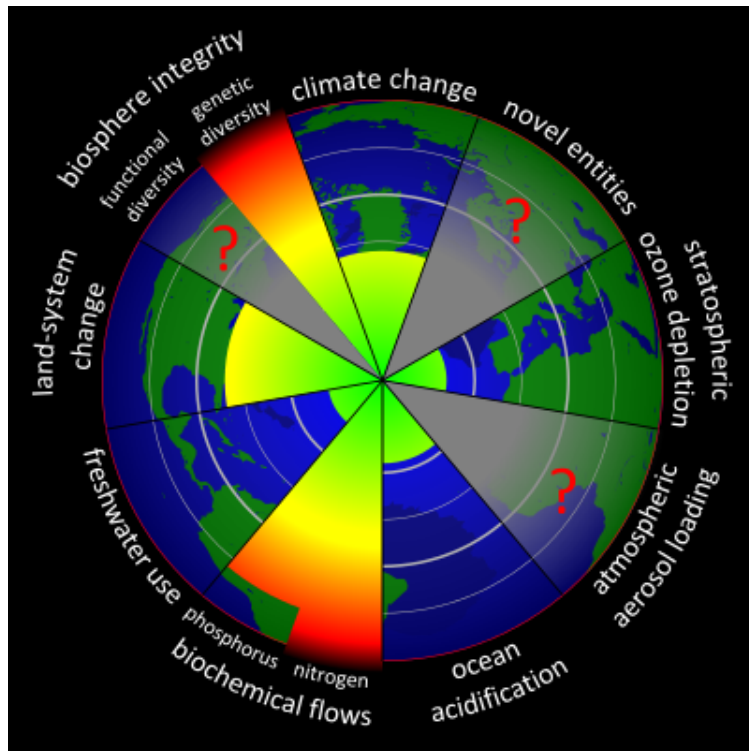


# Structure

- Is there a problem in our common household?
  - What are the main proposed solutions and why are these inadequate?
- Digging deeper, what is then the real problem?
  - What are adequate responses to the real problem?
    - Who are we really?
    - What are the implications?
- How do you and I respond?
  - What does this mean for our work and vocations?
- How would such a response affect the common household – the economy, society and culture in which we live?



# Is there a problem?



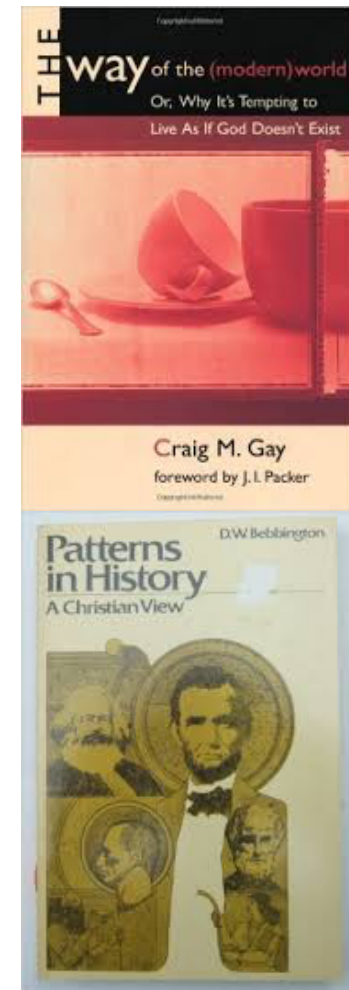
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*how can the entrepreneurial impulse, the investment of capital and employment of labour, factors that drive the growth of economies, be reconciled with earthkeeping, social justice and dignity of human work in a biblically responsible way?*

# Modernity's responses

- Humans are sole agents to address these problems – post-Enlightenment dominant view
  - People are mere objects, no “affective spirituality”
- Human agency and power of state – utopian
  - No tolerance public spirituality
- Reject civilization
  - Search for “timeless truths of authentic spirituality”
- Loss of all confidence
  - Eclectic spirituality for particular individuals or groups



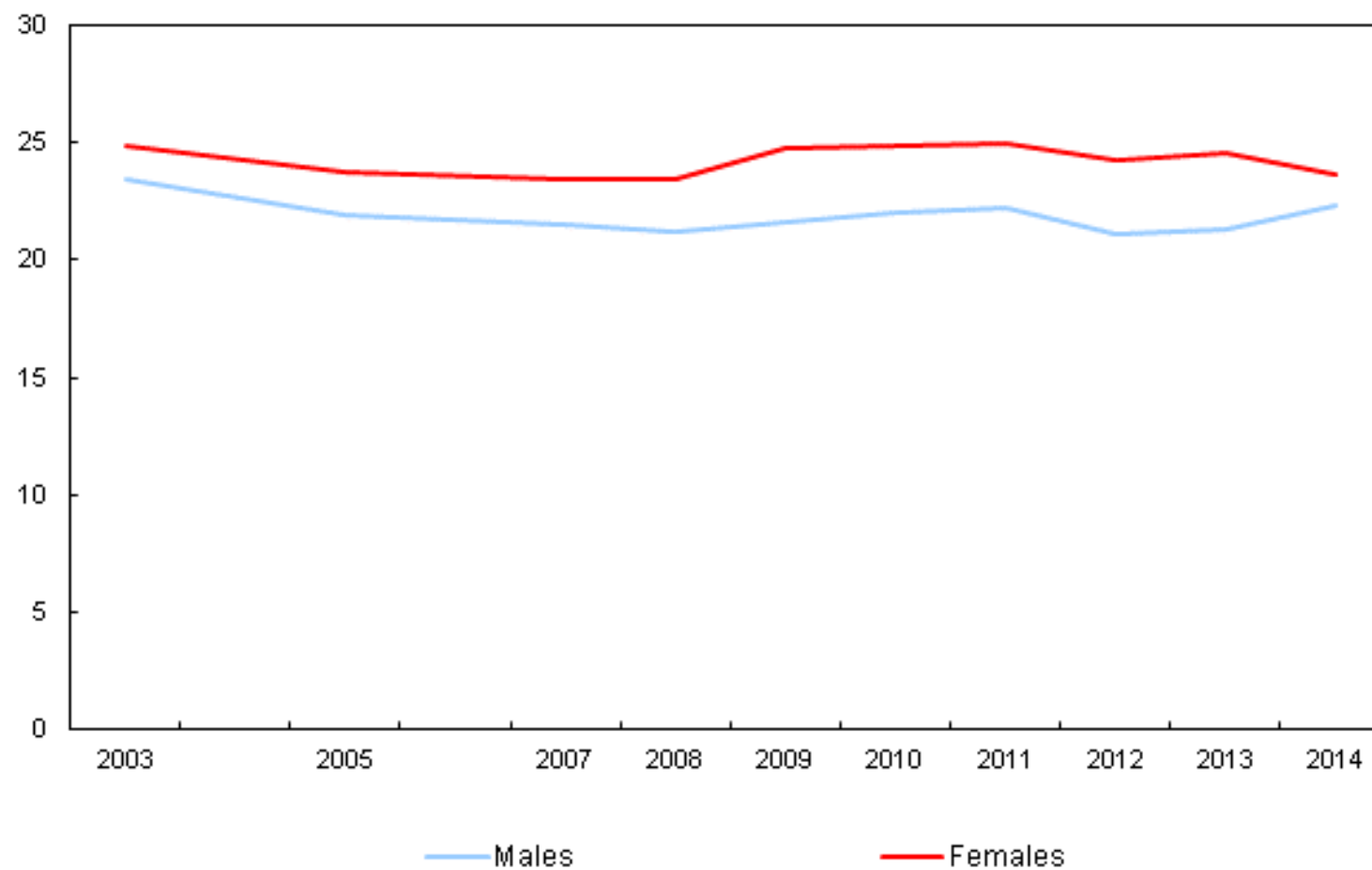


# What is the real problem?

- “the assumption that even if God exists he is largely irrelevant to the real business of life”
- BUT, a new reality is already contained in Jesus Christ.
  - *“So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”* (Col 3:1 NRSV)
  - places the earthly reality in perspective and transforms it.

**Chart 1**  
**Percentage reporting most days "quite a bit" or "extremely stressful", by sex, household population aged 15 or older, Canada, 2003 to 2014**

percent



**Source:** Canadian Community Health Survey, 2003, 2005, 2007 to 2014.

# Real problem?

- The real problem characterizing the main views governing the narratives of modern culture are that they all have a tendency towards the rejection of what it means to be a human person
- Biblical narrative dominated “by the figure of a living God who acts, speaks, calls, and expects an answer”
- Personal existence is “...the creative act of the personal God who graciously calls us into relationship with himself”

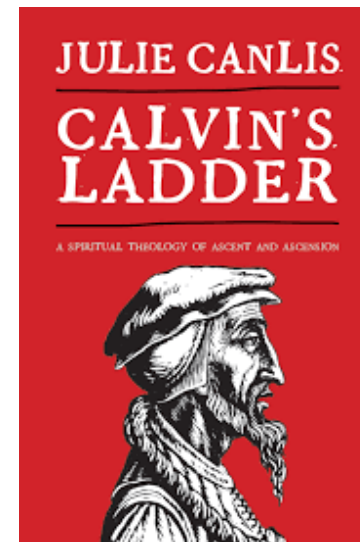
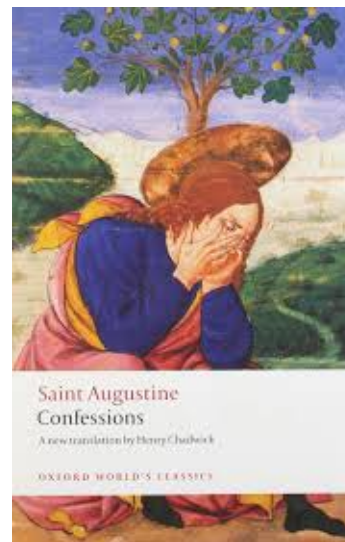
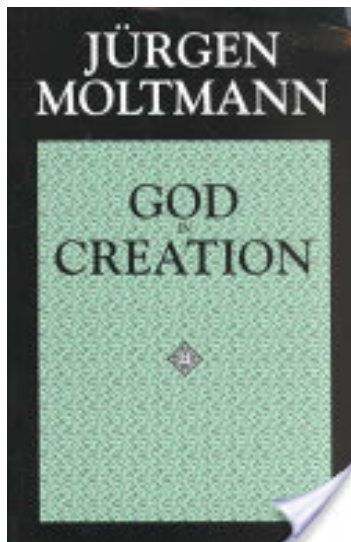
# Adequate response? Who are we really?

- “true knowledge of the human person begin[ning] with the relationship between God and humans...[that is] with the person and work of Jesus Christ”
- But, how does the shape of the relationship between God and humans look like?





# Moltmann, Augustine, Calvin

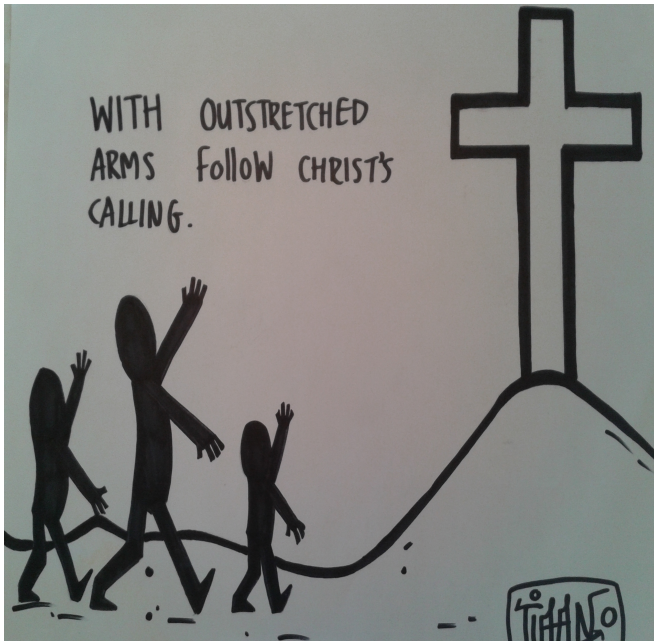


# Views on who we are

- Moltmann:
  - Relational anthropology: “indwelling of human beings in the natural system”, “deposit of relationality”
  - Methexis: having a share in something
- Augustine
  - Rational anthropology: “put in authority over all irrational animals by your image and likeness, that is by the power of reason and intelligence”
  - Remaining human capacity or endowment that reflects the divine being
- Calvin
  - Koinonia: share with someone in something
  - “locates anthropology in the realm of communion with God”
  - Relational anthropology: “theology of adoption”

*To be human is not derived from anything humans are endowed with or possess, but means to be in relation to another person, Jesus Christ, who is in free communion to us by the Holy Spirit.*

# What are the implications?



- “participatory communion” with Christ has radical implications for an ethic of working and keeping the earth
  - ethic starts in a restful conscience and in true gratitude
  - with “outstretched arms” we may be “following Christ’s calling”
- communion with Christ is the goal to which all of creation strains
  - Christ the Mediator is the “sustainer of creation” from beginning to end



*The “spiritual engine” of hopeful working and keeping of the earth therefore lies in the truth of a believing Christian’s renewed communion with God in Christ and in a truly grateful response for such a great gift.*

# How do we respond?

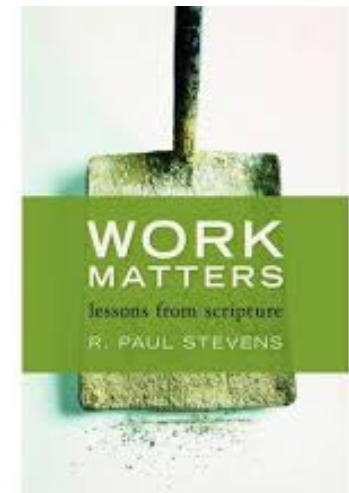
- die in Christ, meaning to let go of our earthly nature
  - and not in error to encourage an otherworldly orientation
- be clothed in compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, love and peace
- to the benefit of one another
- give thanks to the Father through him

# Ethics of working and keeping the earth

- An ethics of Christian working and keeping of the earth starts with Christian virtues that “flow from our status as those raised and ascended to the right hand of the Father in Christ”
- Not our own straining, working and studying is the engine of working and keeping the earth, but Christ is, for in him all things were created and in him all things hold together
- True meaning lies in participating with Christ in God’s work
  - meaning is not derived from who we are or what we do

# Meaning for work and vocations?

- work performed “under the sun” is often toilsome as “...we were not made for work in the first place, but rather for God”
- how we can most effectively partake in the work God has prepared for us - roll away the obstacles that obstruct our relationship with the Father
- Keeping spiritual disciplines in solitude and in community are life-giving interventions
- “let our lives speak” – gift of time, enjoy life, fear God, workplace as mission
- Wisdom, knowledge, happiness is gift from God



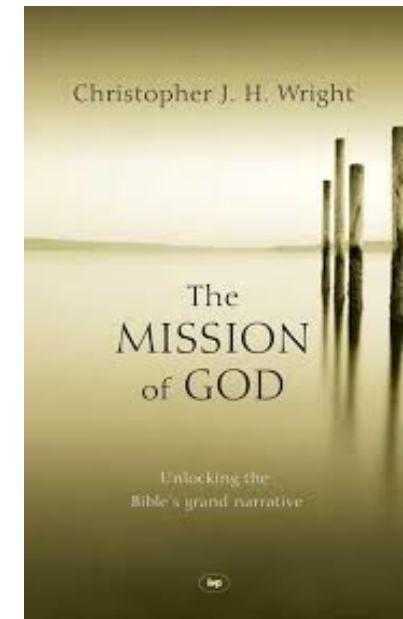


# How affect broader household?

- Meaningful economies are neither linked to the fulfillment of an intrinsic goal of perfect individual human happiness, nor to a goal of ecological sustainability
- Starting point to a meaningful economy would be to engage with the question what divine-human relationships mean for human living and behavior

# God's universal mission

- Bible as the “story of God’s mission through God’s people in their engagement with God’s world for the sake of the whole of creation”
- Bible speaks of a universal God with a universal mission announced in particular to Abraham and his seed, accomplished in Christ (Gal 3: 16), and to be finally completed in the new creation
- We can only really be keepers of the earth under the priestly blessing that the Lord will bless and *keep* us (Num 6:24).
- We will not be a blessing to ourselves or to others without faith and (often costly) obedience.



# Engagement and confrontation


- “constructive engagement”
  - God loves all of his creation
  - to care for creation, to be workers in and keepers of the earth, flows from a love and obedience of God and is part of Christian mission
- “courageous confrontation”
  - Defending God’s justice
  - speaking into the exploitation and greed in society and the corruption that comes with power
  - participate in God’s mission to achieve justice and mercy in His world and assist others in a holy, ethical living before the Lord

# A call to the workers and keepers of the earth

- We can be a blessing to others and all of creation
- We are made righteous and adopted as God's children in and through Christ
- We as believers have received the gift to participate in God's work.

"The LORD bless you  
AND Keep you:  
The LORD make His Face  
Shine UPON you & Gracious  
AND Be to you:  
The LORD lift up His  
Countenance UPON you,  
AND Give you Peace."





Thank you for your attention!

Questions?  
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