

The Dehumanization of Labor: Historical Roots, Modern Manifestations, and Theological Responses

RACHEL M. HAMMOND
Calvin University

ABSTRACT: This paper examines labor dehumanization from the Industrial Revolution to the present, drawing connections to theological concepts. It explores the shift from Taylorism and scientific management to the human relations movement and highlights the continued existence of dehumanizing practices in modern work settings, such as call centers, the gig economy, and knowledge workers. Additionally, it discusses artificial intelligence's role in potentially exacerbating or mitigating these issues. Integrating the theological concepts of the *imago Dei*, total depravity, and redemption, the paper identifies opportunities for Christian managers to address labor dehumanization through redefining productivity for knowledge workers, prioritizing employee well-being and flourishing, and considering the appropriate use of AI technologies.

KEYWORDS: labor dehumanization, scientific management, human relations movement, artificial intelligence, knowledge workers, theological concepts, employee well-being

INTRODUCTION

The dehumanization of labor has been a persistent and troubling issue since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, accentuated by the widespread adoption of Taylor's scientific management (Huang et al., 2013). As mechanization and efficiency became the primary goals, workers were often reduced to mere cogs in a vast industrial machine. This paper aims to illuminate the historical and contemporary dimensions of labor dehumanization, intertwining these insights with theological concepts. By examining the tenets of the *imago Dei*, total depravity, and Christ's redemption, this paper highlights the crucial importance of addressing dehumanization in contemporary management practices, particularly for those guided by Christian principles. This exploration seeks to diagnose modern labor practices' maladies and propose redemptive strategies for creating workplaces where human dignity and flourishing are central.

DEHUMANIZATION OF LABOR

Taylorism and Scientific Management

Looking back at the scientific management theories developed at the start of the Industrial Revolution, employees were often considered incapable of thinking independently (Huang et al., 2013) and operating as interchangeable components in a mechanistic system that could be optimized for maximum efficiency and standardization. Taylor (1911) employed time studies in manufacturing environments to determine the minimum time required to complete tasks, minimize fatiguing motions, and identify the necessary rest intervals throughout the process. Workers were then given the expected output, which was anticipated to lead to maximum productivity and prosperity for the employer and the employee through differential piece rates (Gilbreth, 1912). Frank and Lillian Gilbreth (1919, 1923), contemporaries of Taylor, also conducted motion and fatigue studies to enhance operational efficiency and minimize unnecessary fatigue among employees. They believed that teaching employees the most efficient way to do work would lead to economic benefits for the organization, the employee, and society (Gilbreth

& Gilbreth, 1919, 1923; Gilbreth, 1909). Notably, the Gilbreths introduced a human-centric element into scientific management by focusing on fitting work to the worker. They believed that by finding the best tasks for employees, they could achieve peak performance, which could be individually rewarded, rather than being treated as a machine (Derksen, 2014). Additionally, they thought that promotion charts would help employees visualize their progression through the organization (Gilbreth & Gilbreth, 1916).

Taylor believed that unions were unnecessary, thinking that his approach allowed for tasks, working hours, and wages to be set objectively. However, the opposition stated that the scientific management approach stripped workers of their personality, initiative, freedom, and individuality, putting science in the hands of management as too powerful a tool (Derksen, 2012). This led to the mistreatment of employees in the name of increased productivity and the erosion of workplace protections from leaders who sought only to maximize shareholder value. In 1912, the House Committee on Labor concluded:

[A] machine is an inanimate thing – it has no life, no brain, no sentiment, and no place in the social order. With a workman it is different. He’s a living, moving, sentient, social being.... He would be less than a man if he did not resent the introduction of any system which deals with him in the same way as a beast of burden or an inanimate machine. (p. 3)

After World War I, there was a consensus that the human factor was the way forward.

The Human Relations Movement

Theorists such as Chris Argyris (1957), Elton Mayo (1930), Mary Parker Follett (1924), and Douglas McGregor (1960) believed that solving industrial problems rested in the human element. These writers helped shift the conversation towards the other end of the theoretical spectrum with the human relations movement. Argyris’ (1957) work set the stage by positing that formal, structured organizations run counter to the needs of healthy individuals. Highly specialized work and controlling bosses lead to passivity, physical or psychological withdrawal, and even sabotage (Bolman, 2017). It is only through reality-centered leadership (Argyris, 1957) or Theory Y management (McGregor, 1960) that employees can move toward self-actualization. Mayo’s work moved along this path, based on the assumptions that individuals have a propensity to cooperate and that altering an individual’s

environment can improve mental health and satisfaction (Saracheck, 1968). These assumptions led to Mayo’s Hawthorne studies in the 1920s, which included the Hawthorne effect, where worker performance improved due to the attention shown to subjects rather than changes in working conditions. Despite widely documented issues with the methodology, the influence of these findings helped spawn the development of the field of industrial psychology (Levitt & List, 2011). Mary Parker Follett was also an early contributor to the human relations movement. She appreciated Taylor’s ideas regarding establishing task specifications but was a strong proponent of the need for integration and coordination to achieve business goals rather than a coercive approach (Metcalfe, 1930). In addition, she believed that even subordinates could contribute their knowledge, providing an early look at the role of the knowledge worker (Metcalfe, 1930).

This was a turning point in management theory as theorists began to see the need for more balance between productivity and psychological well-being. One such theorist was Frederick Herzberg (1974), who stated that scientific management defined “people as functions, not humans” (p. 52) and instead posited that a manager’s primary quest should be to create employee job enrichment (Herzberg, 1974). This was part of his Two-Factor Theory, which found that factors contributing to job satisfaction were distinct from those causing job dissatisfaction. These intrinsic factors, or motivators, were related to the nature of the work itself and included factors such as achievement, recognition, and personal growth (Herzberg, 1959). If engaged, these would motivate employees to perform better and improve job satisfaction. Hackman and Oldham built on Herzberg’s work with their Job Characteristics Model, which theorized that specific psychological states, experienced meaningfulness, experienced responsibility, and knowledge of results mediated the relationship between job characteristics and worker motivation, satisfaction, and performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). These ideas influenced job design and enrichment practices as well as performance management systems that focused on intrinsic rewards and engagement strategies that emphasized opportunities for growth and meaningful work (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005).

Researchers continue to investigate the best way to balance productivity and employee well-being today. For example, Klotz et al. (2023) found that incorporating natural elements into the workplace enhances both productivity and employee well-being. Similarly, Teevan

(2021) advocated for a redefinition of productivity in the hybrid workplace, one that encompasses well-being, social connections, and collaboration.

Contemporary Manifestations of Dehumanization in Labor

Despite the positive changes inspired by the human relations movement, the dehumanization of labor has persisted in certain areas. This is evident in the tenets of scientific management that remain prevalent in many workplaces, such as call centers, fast-food establishments, and platform gig worker environments. It is also apparent in how productivity is defined for knowledge workers, the impact of constant connectivity on work-life balance and burnout, and the influence that artificial intelligence (AI) and generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) have on these employees.

Examining the persistence of scientific management principles first, many customer service environments expect employees to adhere to strict productivity metrics and time constraints, with limited room for personalization or autonomy in their work. While this may help an organization's bottom line, "increases in worker productivity may not necessarily lead workers to be happier with their jobs, especially if workers feel pressured to work faster and faster" (Brynjolfsson et al., 2023, p. 24). This dynamic is evident in fast food chains like McDonald's, where standardization is used to maximize efficiency and minimize variation, effectively limiting worker autonomy while maintaining organizational control (Bowen & Lawler, 1992; Two Teachers, 2023). Similarly, in call centers, target-setting as advocated by Frederic Taylor is used for both quantitative and qualitative measures (Bain et al., 2002). In these environments, workers experience "increased machine-pacing of work, routinization of work processes, boredom, and increased stress associated with speed-up of job cycle times" (Batt & Moynihan, 2004, p. 26).

Another path toward dehumanization is the rise of the gig economy, which allows employees to bring their specialized knowledge or skills to a company as contractors, thereby decreasing costs for organizations. One example is platform companies, such as those offering delivery or transportation services, which primarily utilize gig or independent contract workers as part of their business model. There has been some movement towards minimum pay standards and unionization in this sector. In November 2024, Massachusetts became the first state to approve collective bargaining rights for app-based

drivers (Leblanc, 2024; Raymond, 2024). However, informal work often still results in uncertain income, unrestricted working hours, weakened bargaining power regarding working conditions, and a limited ability to challenge injustices. This contradicts the notion of decent work, as defined by the International Labor Organization (Novianto et al., 2023).

The gig economy can also extend to knowledge workers, who own the means of production in their heads (Drucker et al., 1997) and are often defined as those who "think for a living" (Davenport, 2005, p. 3), such as writers, graphic designers, and software developers. While the gig economy can offer flexibility and autonomy, allowing workers to choose their schedules and pursue multiple income streams, it also presents potential problems. One example is the digital platform economy, where algorithmic control is used to monitor the behavior of gig workers to ensure it meets stated requirements, taking away flexibility and autonomy. This surveillance mechanism has been shown to cause high levels of risk and uncertainty, which can lead to burnout (Lang et al., 2023).

Outside of the gig economy, knowledge workers are also "universally acknowledged as a crucial cog in the machine" (Khan & Nasim, 2023, p. 3), bringing the threat of dehumanization into the reality many more employees face today. This characterization of knowledge workers as cogs starts with how their productivity is measured. Far from the Bethlehem Steel factories where Taylor tracked output per unit of time for each discernible task, today's employees manage shifting workloads, contend with competing priorities, and use non-standardized approaches to complete tasks. Measuring this output ranges from self-reported worker data that asks how productive people feel and worker activity data, such as counting sent emails or written lines of code (Teevan, 2021), "using visible activity as a crude proxy for actual productivity" (Newport, 2024, p. 20), and not being able to identify productivity metrics at any granular level (Davenport, 2011). The result of this push for productivity without any clear measures or limits has led to pseudo-productivity, defined as "the use of visible activity as the primary means of approximating actual productive effort" (Newport, 2024, p. 22). It has also led to a level of constant connectivity, particularly for exempt or salaried workers, defined as an "organization's ability to remain continually connected to their employees both during and after work hours, resulting in the organization being a pervasive and omnipresent force in the lives of those employees" (Steffensen et al., 2016, p. 1). Research

has shown that as employees check devices during family time, it can lead to spousal resentment, work-family conflict, and lower organizational commitment (Ferguson et al., 2016). This constant connection to work is not only problematic for family units but also for individuals. It has also been shown to lead to job burnout, defined as a “psychological syndrome in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job” (Maslach et al., 2001) that includes the three dimensions of extreme exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of efficacy (Maslach et al., 2001). A 2022 McKinsey study found that one in four employees surveyed globally across various demographics were experiencing symptoms of burnout (Brassey et al., 2022), often attributed to always being on call, unfair treatment, unreasonable workloads, low autonomy, and lack of social support (Moss, 2021).

Finally, the exponential growth of AI and GenAI technologies has the potential for both productivity growth and dehumanization. This increase in productivity would be through both automation and augmentation of tasks. A recent study found using AI technologies can improve productivity by 40% for highly skilled workers (Dell’Acqua et al., 2023). While this will continue to evolve with the advent of even more advanced AI technologies, researchers believe that AI can be utilized for providing feedback on in-person interactions, task input, risk assessment, and decision-making data. However, they consider that activities such as face-to-face communication, public speaking, ethical decision-making, judgment, instinct to act, compassion, physical abilities, and unstructured work will remain the domain of humans (Pizzinelli et al., 2023). Translating this to impact on specific careers, the Pew Research Center identified jobs such as budget analysts, data entry clerks, tax preparers, technical writers, and web developers as types of positions likely to have high exposure to AI and its potential to perform key job activities (Kochhar, 2023), but it is becoming clear that the majority of workers will feel the impact of AI at some level.

New AI technologies also have the potential to impact the way that employees approach their work, including ethical decision-making. Bankins and Formosa (2023) articulated that AI could provide more data-driven choices, allowing for less human bias and greater transparency in decision-making, but could also degrade and diminish autonomy, confuse chains of accountability, and create dependence on AI for ethical decision-making. This harkens back to Braverman’s work in 1974, where he cautioned against the potential “Atrophy

of Competence”—the user who learns to rely on the machine’s judgment or the user who is not trained in moral judgment under the guidance of a wise person. Bankins and Formosa (2023) supported this point, stating that with AI, the ability to cultivate and use skills such as judgment, intuition, context awareness, and ethical thinking could be diminished and deskilled if AI technologies are providing an over-abundance of support when it comes to using judgment for ethical decision making or acting on an AI-created risk assessment.

Bankins and Formosa (2023) also expressed that AI technologies could make work less meaningful by diminishing task significance, weakening autonomy in decision-making, and reducing human interaction in the workplace. They connect this to Hackman and Oldham’s (1976) Job Characteristics Model, as task significance and autonomy are two core job dimensions that lead to meaningfulness and responsibility. Without these components, job satisfaction, motivation, and performance would be significantly impacted.

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON LABOR DEHUMANIZATION

This paper covers only a small slice of history and does not address issues like slavery, child labor, discrimination, or dangerous working conditions. Even with this limited scope, the theological concept of total depravity explains the persistent frustration and sinfulness evident in workplace dehumanization. However, it would be incomplete without first examining the concept of the *imago Dei*, which is central to the creation of humans, and finishing with the implications of Christ’s salvation and shalom.

Biblical View of the *Imago Dei*

The starting point for the *imago Dei* is creation. Genesis 1:27 reads, “So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them” (NIV, 2011). This verse presents the *imago Dei* as a defining truth of human identity; we are creatures that uniquely reflect God. Two key insights emerge. First, being made in God’s image carries a sense of vocation or purpose, as referenced in Genesis 1:28a: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky....’” This verse, often referred to as the cultural mandate, states that

humans, as God's image-bearers, are appointed by God to steward creation and cultivate culture (Genesis 2:15) as part of our purpose. Tim Keller (2012) explains that this call to subdue was given before the fall; God called humans to help creation thrive and flourish. As we pursue our different vocations, we are to "see work as a way of service to God and our neighbor, and so we should both choose and conduct our work in accordance with that purpose" (Keller, 2012, p. 59).

Second, in the ancient Near Eastern cultures surrounding Israel, it was often thought that only kings or high priests bore the image of a god, representing divinity on earth. In contrast, the Bible states that all humans are made in God's image, not just an elite few. This universalizes the ability to use His power to develop civilization (Middleton, 2014) and confirms that there are no humans who are less valuable than others; we all bear God's image.

Theological Perspectives on the *Imago Dei*

Within Christian theology, scholars have long debated the meaning of being created in God's image. While all affirm the *imago Dei*, there are different ways to understand its nature, including the spiritual/structural and relational views.

The spiritual/structural view, common among early Protestant Reformers, focuses on the qualities or capacities in human nature that reflect God. John Calvin (1536), for instance, taught that man was created in the image of God, and "though the divine glory is displayed in man's outward appearance, it cannot be doubted that the proper seat of the image is in the soul" (I.15.3). He went on to explain that the image of God principally resided in the "clarity of intellect, rational governance of the passions, and proper regulation of the senses" (as cited in Plantinga et al., 2023, p. 210). The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) reflects this approach, stating that God created man "after His own image, in true righteousness and holiness, that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love Him and live with Him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise Him" (Q.6). Similarly, the Belgic Confession (1561) states that God made man "good, righteous, and holy, capable in all things to will agreeably to the will of God" (Article 14). In this view, to be in God's image is to possess a nature related to God's with the ability to reason, to appreciate beauty, and to make moral judgments. Further, it is something innate in each person, distorted by sin and in need of deliverance through Christ, where we "are so renewed as to bear the image of God in

knowledge, purity, righteousness, and true holiness" (Calvin, 1536, I.15.4).

A second perspective, proposed by 20th-century Swiss Reformed theologians like Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, contends that the *imago Dei* is not as much about what humans are but about how humans relate. In this view, being in God's image means being "called to live in right and responsible relationship with God and with one another" (as cited in Plantinga et al., 2023, p. 211), along with creation. After the fall, these three relationships demonstrate long-lasting deterioration, further highlighting the centrality of relationships as part of the *imago Dei* (Cortez, 2010) and the need for redemption through God's grace. The way these relationships ought to be is mirrored in the Trinity, where the three "persons dwell in communion in perichoretic love with one another" (Plantinga et al., 2023, p. 215). Specifically, Jesus demonstrated the self-giving and sacrificial love that we are called to as we love God and others (Plantinga et al., 2023), stated in Matthew 22: 37-39: "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

These two perspectives address different aspects of the *imago Dei*. We were created with capacities that reflect God's nature, and we are called to use those gifts in relationship with God and others. However, we do this incompletely, due to our fallen nature and the distortion of God's image in our lives.

Total Depravity

The theological doctrine of total depravity asserts that sin has corrupted every aspect of human nature, including the mind, will, and emotions (Calvin, 1536), encompassing the *imago Dei*. In the Institutes, Calvin (1536) explains it as "wherefore, although we grant that the image of God was not utterly effaced and destroyed in him, it was, however, so corrupted, that anything which remains is fearful deformity" (Book I, XV, 4, p. 164). All humans are born with this sinful nature, which makes all spiritually blind slaves to sin, unable to hear God's truth, and incapable of choosing God (Venema, 1992). Ephesians 2:1-3 explains the condition of the sinner by saying:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work

in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

Total depravity does not mean that we are all as bad as possible but that nothing goes untainted by sin. It can be used to explain how sin is shown in habits, practices, and patterns that impact the integrity of not just individuals but also families, communities, and cultures. The multiplying power of corrupting sin can result in cultures of indifference toward God, cross-pollination of wrongdoing, and generations of sexism and racism (Plantinga, 2010). Total depravity explains how, despite a wealth of evidence supporting the treatment of employees with kindness and compassion (Carucci, 2021), systems and structures exist that treat employees as a cog in a machine (Khan & Nasim, 2023). It also explains how human technology, including AI tools, can be used to exploit rather than serve and perpetuate biases instead of breaking harmful cycles. At the end of the day, despite Jesus' Great Commandment in Matthew 22:37–39, unjust and demoralizing systems persist. Sin is “the oldest and deepest human problem” (Plantinga, 2010, p. 2), “culpable shalom-breaking” (Plantinga, 2010, p. 4), and has “corrupted our entire nature” (Belgic Confession, article 14).

Despite this pervasive sin, the *imago Dei* is not entirely erased but only distorted (Belgic Confessions, 1561; Canons of Dort, 1619). In the Belgic Confessions (1561), it states, “They lost all their excellent gifts which they had received from God, and retained none of them except for small traces which are enough to make them inexcusable” (Art. 14). Calvin (1536) stated it this way: “Therefore, in reading profane authors, the admirable light of truth displayed in them should remind us that the human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its Creator” (2.2.15-16). Even when considering our sinful nature and those unreconciled to God, humankind is given a voice of conscience, cultures that reflect God's nature, and a desire for truth and justice (Plantinga, 2010).

Redemption and Shalom through Christ's Grace

But the reality of the corrupted *imago Dei*, even with how we as sinners can still reflect God's nature, is not the end of the story. Through Christ's death and resurrection, He offers us the gift of salvation. As Ephesians 2: 8-9 states, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through

faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” Salvation is not something we can earn; it is a gift of God's mercy and love.

By this grace, we are made new. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” This transformation is not just personal but has implications for how we live and work. Romans 12:2 urges believers, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” And in Galatians 2:20, Paul declares, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Christ calls us to be agents of renewal, seeking shalom, or flourishing, in our relationships with God, ourselves, others, and creation (Sherman, 2022). Though the fullness of this flourishing will only come at Christ's return, we are invited to live into God's call to use wisdom and discernment to navigate the gap between what can be done and what should be done (Wong & Rae, 2011).

REDEMPTIVE BEHAVIORS FOR THE DEHUMANIZATION OF LABOR

The doctrine of total depravity states that sin has tainted everything, including the *imago Dei*, and it is only through God's grace that humankind is reconciled to God (Calvin, 1536). Christian managers have both the opportunity and responsibility to recognize the *imago Dei* in their employees and seek to renew the places where sin has caused the dehumanization of labor in the workplace, understanding that the task will never be complete on this side of heaven. Some opportunities for Christian managers include redefining productivity for knowledge workers, prioritizing employee well-being and flourishing, and considering the appropriate use of AI technologies.

Redefining Productivity for Knowledge Workers

As mentioned previously, conceptions of pseudo-productivity (Newport, 2024) and constant connectivity for knowledge workers are leading to job burnout and weakened organizational commitment (Ferguson et al., 2016). In his book *Slow Productivity*, Cal Newport (2024) challenges traditional notions of productivity

that emphasize visible activity and immediate results, proposing instead to focus on fewer, more meaningful tasks; align work with natural rhythms; and prioritize quality over quantity. Newport's perspective offers a new approach for managers of knowledge workers to support behaviors that could lead to sustainable and meaningful work outcomes. Instead of rewarding lines of code and late-night email messages, Christian managers should value focused work and saying no to non-essential commitments. Managers should also support workers who desire flourishing family relationships and rhythms of work that include taking Sabbath rest and enjoying God's creation.

In doing so, managers can follow the example of Christ during his ministry here on Earth. Instead of being overwhelmed by the needs of the people, He intentionally took time away from the crowds to pray and rest (John 6:18). As he interacted with people, He showed empathy and compassion to those who were suffering, including the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years (Matthew 9: 20-22) and Mary and Martha when they had just lost their brother Lazarus (John 12:28-35). He chose to do things that were for the good of others.

Examples from the business world include companies like Hobby Lobby (Scott, 2024) and Chick-fil-A (Taylor, 2019), which have chosen to stay closed on Sundays to give their employees time to relax and enjoy the Sabbath. Some organizations have taken intentional steps to support their employees holistically, including the Vermeer organization in Pella, Iowa. They established an on-site childcare center for their employees, who work non-traditional manufacturing shifts, to give parents peace of mind while at work. In addition, they provide their employees with an on-site medical clinic and pharmacy at reduced costs, making it easier for employees to get the care they need and saving them money on their prescriptions (Bright Horizons, 2024).

Prioritizing Employee Well-Being and Flourishing

Building human connections fosters a sense of belonging, loyalty, and commitment that contributes deeply to organizational flourishing. While this can be viewed as good business practice, given that engaged and committed employees tend to be more innovative and productive (Clark & Redding, 2023), it is even more important from a Christian perspective. As mentioned earlier, each employee bears the *imago Dei* (James 3:9), making them intrinsically valuable, not merely instrumentally useful. This should inspire Christian

managers to respect employee perspectives, empathize with their struggles, and build relationships marked by care and dignity. Even routine processes such as performance management should reflect this ethic through gathering feedback on employees' experiences, understanding root causes of behavioral challenges, designing development plans that promote flourishing, and helping employees realize their God-given potential.

This stewardship of employee flourishing brings to mind the Parable of the Talents from Matthew 25, where Jesus tells the story of a master who entrusts his servants with varying amounts of wealth before leaving for a journey. While he is away, the servants take different approaches to managing their responsibilities. Two of the servants invested and multiplied what they had been given, while one buried what he had been given; when the master returned, he rebuked the servant who buried his wealth while commending the others for being "good and faithful" (Matthew 25:21). This parable reminds Christian managers to invest time in the employees entrusted to their care, allowing them to live into their purpose and calling (Wong & Rae, 2011), and calls to mind the individualized consideration from transformational leadership, with its focus on coaching and mentoring in a differentiated way (Bass, 1990).

This theological truth should also translate to the language used in human resource management, which in recent years has shifted from the term human resources to talent management or people operations. This shift may signal a deeper recognition of employees as individuals with unique gifts, aligning with 1 Cor. 12: 4-7: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." However, Christian leaders must ensure this is not merely a semantic change or another way for organizations to deploy strategic assets to sustain a competitive advantage (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). As Cawley and Snyder (2015) emphasize, "[W]e must reject the perspective that views God's prized creation—people—primarily as organizational capital or property that provide a return on investment" (p. 170). Proper talent management should include stewarding employee abilities and vocations in a way that honors their intrinsic worth.

Appropriate Use of AI Technologies

So far, artificial intelligence has been discussed as another path to dehumanizing work. However, when

implemented thoughtfully, both AI and GenAI technologies have the potential to transform work processes in ways that enhance rather than diminish the human experience, giving people the opportunity to pursue more meaningful work. This includes enhancing unstructured work by automating mundane tasks, such as data entry and routine analysis (Banks & Formosa, 2023), and tailoring work experiences by analyzing employee performance data and suggesting tasks that are appropriately aligned. This shift can lead to greater job satisfaction, stronger motivation, and a sense of purpose as employees are engaged in activities that leverage their unique skills and creativity (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Unlike Taylorism, which reduced workers to tools of efficiency without the ability to think independently (Huang, et al., 2013), AI can empower employees by offering insights that enhance their decision-making and provide time for slower productivity. However, when AI is misused, it risks creating a new form of Taylorism by reducing workers to data points and imposing rigid efficiency standards without considering human well-being.

The potential of augmented work with AI, if done appropriately, has been shown in different contexts. For researchers, AI can quickly identify patterns and themes, especially when time is of the essence. This was found to be true when researchers were completing reflexive thematic analysis on long COVID, which led them to insights more quickly while not replacing the critical thinking and interpretation from the researcher (Hitch, 2024). In education, combining AI chatbot tools and visually engaging content was found to be transformative, not just augmentative, making the learning experience dynamic and individually responsive to each student (Murali et al., 2024). The healthcare industry is already implementing AI tools, including documenting clinical notes so doctors can focus on crucial patient conversations rather than administrative tasks and identifying missed incidental findings for radiology (Lubell, 2025). These are just a few examples; every industry is quickly discovering ways that AI could be used in their fields. Whether it will bring flourishing or dehumanization remains to be seen.

FUTURE STUDY

The ideas presented in this paper have the potential to lead to future studies, including the resonance between Newport's (2024) concepts of slow productivity and the pursuit of organizational flourishing, which would

benefit from further investigation. This could involve studying the implementation of slow productivity principles within faith-based organizations to explore alignment with Christian perspectives, such as sabbath and shalom. Such research might lead to the development of a faith-based framework around productivity that is holistic, collaborative, and intentional. The literature concerning work intensification and the Intensification of Job Demands model (Kubicek et al., 2014) could serve to measure the impact of these changes.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, the author has explored the historical and contemporary issues surrounding the dehumanization of labor and the theological resources available to Christian managers seeking to respond faithfully. From the early days of scientific management to today's modern workplaces, the temptation to reduce workers to mere inputs remains. However, the biblical doctrine of the *imago Dei* reminds us that every person is created in God's image; is inherently valuable; and is called to live in relationship with God, others, and creation. While the doctrine of total depravity explains the persistence of systems that degrade and exploit, Christian managers are called to be agents of renewal through redefining productivity in ways that honor human limits, cultivating workplaces marked by dignity and trust, and using emerging technologies like AI to enhance, not erode, meaningful work. By grounding management practices in these theological truths, Christian leaders can resist reductionist views of labor and promote a redemptive vision of work centered on human flourishing.

REFERENCES

- Argyris, C. (1957). *Personality and organization: The conflict between system and the individual*. Harper & Brothers.
- Bain, P., Watson, A., Mulvey, G., Taylor, P. & Gall, G. (2002). Taylorism, targets and the pursuit of quantity and quality by call centre management. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 17(3), 170-185. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-005X.00103>
- Bankins, S. & Formosa, P. (2023). The ethical implications of artificial intelligence (AI) for meaningful work. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 185, 725-740. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-023-05339-7>

- Bass, B. M. (1990). From transactional to transformational leadership: Learning to share the vision. *Organizational Dynamics*, 18(3), 19–31. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616\(90\)90061-S](https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(90)90061-S)
- Braverman, H. (1974). *Labor and monopoly capital: The degradation of work in the twentieth century*. Monthly Review Press.
- Bassett-Jones, N. & Lloyd, G.C. (2005). Does Herzberg's motivation theory have staying power? *Journal of Management Development*, 24(10), 929-943. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02621710510627064>
- Batt, R., & Moynihan, L. (2004). The viability of alternative call centre production models. *Call Centres and Human Resource Management*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230288805_2
- Belgic Confessions (1561). *The Belgic confession of faith*. <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/belgic-confession>
- Bolman, L. (2017). Chris Argyris: The iconoclast. In D. B. Szabla, W. A. Pasmore, M. A. Barnes, & A. N. Gipson (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of organizational change thinkers* (pp. 17-36). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-52878-6_29
- Bowen, D.E. & Lawler, E.E. (1992). The empowerment of service workers: What, why, how, and when. *Sloan Management Review*, 33(3), 31-39. <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-empowerment-of-service-workers-what-why-how-and-when/>
- Brassey, J., Coe, E., Dewhursts, M., Enomoto, K., Giarola, R., Herbig, B., & Jeffery, B. (2022). *Addressing employee burnout: Are you solving the right problem?* McKinsey Health Institute. <https://www.mckinsey.com/mhi/our-insights/addressing-employee-burnout-are-you-solving-the-right-problem#/>
- Bright Horizons. (2024). *A flexible people strategy fuels a rural manufacturer*. <https://www.brighthorizons.com/article/employers/vermeer-hr-strategy>
- Brynjolfsson, E., Li, D., & Raymond, L.R. (2023). *Generative AI at work*. (Working Paper #31161). National Bureau of Economic Research. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w31161>
- Calvin, J. (1536). *Institutes of the Christian religion*. https://biblehub.com/library/calvin/the_institutes_of_the_christian_religion/index.html
- Carucci, R. (2021). To retain employees, give them a sense of purpose and community. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2021/10/to-retain-employees-give-them-a-sense-of-purpose-and-community>.
- Cawley, B.D. & Snyder, P.J. (2015). People as workers in the image of God: Opportunities to promote flourishing. *Journal of Markets & Morality*, 18(1), 163–187. <https://www.marketsandmorality.com/index.php/mandm/article/view/1063>
- Clark, D. & Redding, A. (2023). 4 fundamental ways to boost employee engagement. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2023/11/4-fundamental-ways-to-boost-employee-engagement>.
- Collings, D.G. & Mellahi, K. (2009). Strategic talent management: A review and research agenda. *Human Resource Management Review*, 19(4), 304– 313. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2009.04.001>
- Cortez, M. (2010). *Theological anthropology: A guide for the perplexed*. T&T Clark International.
- Davenport, T.H. (2005). *Thinking for a living: How to get better performances and results from knowledge workers*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Davenport, T.H. (2011). Rethinking knowledge work: A strategic approach. *McKinsey Quarterly*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/quarterly/overview>
- Dell'Acqua, F., McFowland III, E., Mollick, E. R., Lifshitz-Assaf, H., Kellogg, K., Rajendran, S., Krayner, L., Candelon, F., & Lakhani, K. R. (2023). *Navigating the jagged technological frontier: Field experimental evidence of the effects of AI on knowledge worker productivity and quality*. (Working Paper No. 24 – 013) Harvard Business School Technology & Operations Mgt. Unit. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4573321>
- Derksen, M. (2014). Turning men into machines? Scientific management, industrial psychology, and the “human factor.” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 50(2), 148-165. <http://doi.org/10.1002/jhbs.21650>
- Drucker, P.F., Dyson, E., Handy, C., Saffo, P., & Senge, P.M. (1997). Looking ahead: Implications of the present. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/1997/09/looking-ahead-implications-of-the-present>
- Ferguson, M., Carlson, D.S., Boswell, W., Whitten, D., Butts, M., & Kacmar, K. (2016). Tethered to work: A family systems approach linking mobile device use to turnover intentions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. <http://www.doi.org/10.1037/api0000075>
- Follett, M.P. (1924). *Creative experience*. Longman Green and Co.

- Two Teachers. (2023). *Frederick Taylor's scientific management principles: McDonald's case study*. Two Teachers. <https://www.twoteachers.co.uk/post/frederick-taylors-scientific-management-principles-mcdonald-s-case-study>
- Gilbreth, F. (1909). *Bricklaying system*. The Myron C. Clark Publishing Company.
- Gilbreth (1912). *Primer of scientific management*. D. Van Nostrand Company.
- Gilbreth, F., & Gilbreth, L. (1916). The three position plan of promotion. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 65, 289-296. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1013584>
- Gilbreth, F., & Gilbreth, L. (1919). *Fatigue study: The elimination of humanity's greatest unnecessary waste, a first step in motion study*. The MacMillan Company.
- Gilbreth, F., & Gilbreth, L. (1923). Scale cage in motion study for finding the factor of the one best way to do work: A device and method for inserting measurement in non-stereoscopic pictures. *Journal of Personnel Research*, 65-69.
- Hackman, J.R. & Oldham, G.R. (1976). Motivation through the design of work: Test of a theory. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 16(2), 250-279. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073\(76\)90016-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073(76)90016-7)
- Heidelberg Catechism. (1563). *The Heidelberg Catechism*. <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/heidelberg-catechism>
- Herzberg, F. (1959). *The motivation to work*. Wiley. 79-85.
- Herzberg, F. (1974). New perspectives on the will to work. *Management Review*, 63(11), 52-54.
- Hitch, D. (2024). Artificial intelligence augmented qualitative analysis: The way of the future? *Qualitative Health Research*, 34(7), 595-606. [10.1177/10497323231217392](https://doi.org/10.1177/10497323231217392)
- Huang, K., Tung, J., Lo, S. C., & Chou, M. (2013). A review and critical analysis of the principles of scientific management. *International Journal of Organizational Innovation*, 5(4), 78-85. <https://www.ijoi-online.org/attachments/article/34/FINAL%20ISSUE%20VOL%205%20NUM%204%20APRIL%202013.pdf>
- Keller, T. (2014). *Every good endeavor: Connecting your work to God's work*. Penguin Books.
- Khan, A. & Nasim, S. (2023). Mapping research on the subjective well-being on knowledge workers: A systematic enquiry deploying bibliometrics. *Management Review Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-023-00399-5>
- Klotz, A. McClean, S., & Tang, P.M. (2023). A little nature in the office boosts morale and productivity. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2023/07/research-a-little-nature-in-the-office-boosts-morale-and-productivity>
- Kochhar, R. (2023). *Which U.S. workers are more exposed to AI on their jobs?* Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/07/26/which-u-s-workers-are-more-exposed-to-ai-on-their-jobs/>
- Kubicek, B., Paškvan, M. & Korunka, C. (2015). Development and validation of an instrument for assessing job demands arising from accelerated change: The intensification of job demands scale (IDS), *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 24(6), 898-913, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13591045.2015.1081888>
- Lang, J. J., Yang, L. F., Cheng, C., Cheng, X. Y., & Chen, F. Y. (2023). Are algorithmically controlled gig workers deeply burned out? An empirical study on employee work engagement. *BMC Psychology*, 11, (354). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-023-01402-0>
- Leblanc, S. (2024, July 10). Massachusetts ballot question would give Uber and Lyft drivers right to form a union. *AP*. <https://apnews.com/article/uber-lyft-ballot-question-unions-massachusetts-549852e06ecb8ed754855a70c232e06f>
- Levitt, S. D., & List, J. A. (2011). Was there really a Hawthorne effect at the Hawthorne plant? An analysis of the original illumination experiments. *American Economic Journal*, 3, 224-238. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25760252>
- Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2001). Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 397-422. <http://www.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.397>
- Mayo, E. (1930). The human effect of mechanization. *The American Economic Review*, 20(1), 156-176. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1805670>
- McGregor, D. (1960). *The human side of enterprise*. McGraw-Hill.
- Metcalf, H. C. (Ed). (1930). *Some discrepancies in leadership theory and practice*. Business Leadership. Isaac Pitman & Sons.
- Middleton, J.R. (2014). *A new heaven and a new earth: Reclaiming biblical eschatology*. Baker Academic.
- Moss, J. (2021). *The burnout epidemic: The rise of chronic stress and how we can fix it*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Murali, R., Ravi, N., & Surendran, A. (2024). Augmenting virtual labs with artificial intelligence for hybrid learning. 2024 IEEE Global Engineering Education Conference (EDUCON), 1-10. [10.1109/EDUCON60312.2024.10578649](https://doi.org/10.1109/EDUCON60312.2024.10578649)

- Newport, C. (2024). *Slow productivity: The lost art of accomplishment without burnout*. Penguin Random House.
- Novianto, A., Wulansari, A. D., & Keban, Y. T. (2023). Searching for a better job: Indonesian gig workers and the limits of decent work agendas. *Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation*, 17(2), 71-90. <http://www.doi.org/10.13169/workorglaboglob.17.2.0071>
- Pizzinelli, C., Panton, A., Tavares, M. M., Cazzaniga, M., & Li, L. (2023). *Labor market exposure to AI: Cross-country differences and distributional implications*. (Working Paper: WP/23/216). International Monetary Fund. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2023/10/04/Labor-Market-Exposure-to-AI-Cross-country-Differences-and-Distributional-Implications-539656>
- Plantinga, R. J., Thompson, T., R., & Lundberg, M. D. (2023). *An introduction to Christian theology* (2nd Ed). Cambridge University Press.
- Plantinga, C. (2010). *Sin: Not the way it's supposed to be*. Carl F. H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding. https://henrycenter.tiu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Cornelius-Plantinga_Sin.pdf
- Raymond, N. (2024, November 6). Massachusetts voters allow Uber, Lyft drivers to unionize. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/massachusetts-voters-allow-uber-lyft-drivers-unionize-2024-11-06/>
- Saracheck, B. (1968). Elton Mayo's social psychology and human relations. *Academy of Management Journal*, 11(2), 189-197. <https://doi.org/10.2307/255256>
- Scott, C. (2024, November 8). *Why is Hobby Lobby closed on Sundays? The complete story behind the retailer's unique policy*. Expert Beacon. <https://expertbeacon.com/why-is-hobby-lobby-closed-on-sundays-complete-story/>
- Sherman, A. (2022). *Agents of flourishing*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press.
- Steffensen, D. S., McAllister, C. P., Brooks, C. D., & Perrewe, P. L., (2016). Not at the table: A diary study analyzing the effects of constant connectivity on work-family conflict. SMA Annual Conference. https://www.academia.edu/42914049/Not_at_the_Table_A_Diary_Study_Analyzing_the_Effects_of_Constant_Connectivity_on_Work-Family_Conflict
- Synod of Dort. (1619). *Canons of Dort*. Christian Reformed Church. <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/canons-dort>
- Taylor, F.W. (1911). *The principles of scientific management*. Harper.
- Taylor, K. (2019, June 2). Why Chick-fil-A's decision to close on Sundays is a brilliant business strategy. *Business Insider*. <https://www.businessinsider.com/chick-fil-a-closed-on-sunday-business-strategy-2019-6>
- Teevan, J. (2021, September 9). Let's redefine "productivity" for the hybrid era. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2021/09/lets-redefine-productivity-for-the-hybrid-era>
- United States Congress. House. Committee on Labor. The Taylor and other systems of shop management. Hearings before Special Committee of the House of Representatives to investigate the Taylor and other systems of shop management under authority of H. Res. 90 ... [Oct. 4, 1911-Feb. 12, 1912] (1912). Washington: Government Printing Office.
- Venema, C. P. (1992). Total depravity: The third main point of doctrine. *The Outlook*. <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/total-depravity-third-main-point-doctrine>
- Wong, K. L. & Rae, S. B. (2011). *Business for the common good: A Christian vision for the marketplace*. IVP Academic.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Rachel Hammond's academic background includes a DBA in management from Anderson University, an MM from Aquinas College, and a BA in communication arts from Cornerstone University. She is currently an associate professor of management and a department chair at

Calvin University's School of Business. Her teaching expertise includes organizational behavior and human resource management. Hammond's research interests focus on the transformative impact of artificial intelligence on workplaces and classrooms, as well as the integration of faith into the field of management. She has also contributed to the academic community as a co-editor of a textbook exploring the synergy between marketing and AI. Before her academic tenure, she gained industry experience in human resource management, training, and development within the banking sector.