



preface

We human beings spend a lot of time working. Whether we log hours in an office, store, factory, or field for a regular paycheck; whether we cook, clean, and care for children as we make a home for ourselves and others; whether we write, paint, or play music in the hopes that the fruits of these labors might one day be appreciated by others, we spend many hours of each day engaged in work. Work has been around as long as our species has walked the earth. As long as humans have worked, we have spent time complaining, celebrating, lamenting, and rejoicing in work. Most of us work in order to live: work helps secure enough food for us to survive and provide a roof over our heads. But many work and do not partake in these basics of a humane life. Hard work, in a world of vast economic disparity, does not necessarily result in a living wage. In our day, as in the past, work can become unforgiving and backbreaking, a drudgery that is little more than slavery. Others struggle to find work, a reality that has become increasingly visible during this time of global economic recession. Yet, as many seek work, others become addicted to work in the hopes of securing more consumer goods.

Darby Ray's study of work attends to each of these realities and the distortions of work that have become prevalent in our day. She acknowledges the pain of work as well as its promise. Though work can degrade persons and destroy the

environment, its real purpose, in light of the Christian story, is to form persons and construct the world. This timely and thoughtful book offers an unvarnished glimpse at some of the problems facing work and workers in our day, mines the Christian scriptures and the history of its reflection on work for fresh wisdom to address those problems, and offers a sacramental vision for work that focuses on subsistence, selfhood, and service. The result is a renewed call for workers to partake in the abundance of life and to work so that all might take part in an economy characterized by grace and gift, rather than exchange and competition. And for that to take place, there still is a lot of work to do.

David H. Jensen