

Christian formation at work: Scripture, science, spiritual experience, and ethical vocation in African contexts

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RECEIVED	REVISED	ACCEPTED	PUBLISHED
30 July 2026	09 September 2026	09 September 2026	10 September 2026
ABSTRACT Workplace spirituality research increasingly recognizes religion as a source of identity and ethical motivation, yet generic constructs of spirituality leave unresolved how tradition-specific norms should govern contested spiritual experience. This article develops a Scripture-governed account of Christian formation for African workplaces through an integrative review, a bounded OpenAlex evidence map (142 records; 24 core records), biblical-theological analysis, and contextual ethical synthesis. It distinguishes theological normativity from fallible experience, cultural interpretation, and empirically tractable mechanisms. In dialogue with psychology, anthropology, organizational studies, labor data, and debates about methodological naturalism, the article argues that Christian formation should neither reduce spiritual claims to naturalistic explanations nor treat dreams, witchcraft attributions, prosperity, or suffering as self-authenticating revelation. The proposed Scripture-Governed Formation-at-Work model integrates four constraints: normative asymmetry, causal humility, ethical externality, and non-instrumentality. Together they order vocation toward truthful discernment, neighbor-love, worker dignity, justice, contentment, and Christlike faithfulness. Keywords: African Christian theology, Christian spiritual formation, religion and science, spiritual discernment, theology of work, vocation, workplace ethics, worker dignity			
HOW TO CITE	Sangwa, S. (2026). Christian formation at work: Scripture, science, spiritual experience, and ethical vocation in African contexts. Open Journal of Business Theology, 6(3), Article 135. https://doi.org/10.65655/ocp.ojbt.159		
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1. Introduction

Research on religion and work increasingly treats religious identity as organizationally consequential, while workplace spirituality studies examine meaning, transcendence, connectedness, community, and leadership. Systematic reviews show that religious identity intersects with belonging, occupational identity, well-being, and organizational relationships (Héliot et al. 2020; Dik, Daniels, and Alayan 2024; Maidl et al. 2022). A persistent conceptual problem remains, however. Generic measures of spirituality can clarify psychosocial processes and organizational outcomes, but they cannot determine whether a spiritual interpretation is true, normatively legitimate, or faithful to the tradition whose language it uses. For Christianity, formation is therefore not merely heightened meaning or self-transcendence. It is a norm-governed transformation of perception, desire, judgment, and conduct in relation to God, Christ, Scripture, the Spirit, and the community of faith.

The problem becomes sharper in African settings, where biomedical, psychological, economic, ancestral, charismatic, and occult explanations may coexist or compete. Research on faith healing, witchcraft accusation, and religious interpretations of distress shows that spiritual causality remains a socially consequential category (Mashau 2016; Read 2019; Yoder et al. 2021). The appropriate scholarly response is neither to romanticize a singular 'African worldview' nor to dismiss spiritual discourse as a category mistake. African societies contain diverse Christian traditions, languages, economies, and cosmologies. Yet the recurrent intersection of spiritual interpretation with illness, adversity, prosperity, and moral responsibility raises a focused epistemological question: how can Christians take spiritual reality seriously while avoiding causal overreach, occult legitimation, syncretism, and the conversion of subjective experience into an independent authority?

Workplace power makes the question ethically concrete. In Rwanda, informal employment accounted for 90.4 percent of total employment in 2024, with a higher informal-employment rate among women than men (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda [NISR] 2025a). In 2025, unemployment was higher among women and youth, while labor underutilization reached 56 percent nationally (NISR 2026a). In May 2026, labor underutilization reached 59.7 percent and was 66.1 percent among women (NISR 2026b). These indicators do not establish exploitation, but they identify a labor market in which insecurity and unmet employment needs can weaken workers' bargaining position. Christian formation must therefore be assessed not only by inward experience but also by how believers use power toward economically dependent neighbors.

A further pressure concerns attention. Digital work normalizes notifications, platform-mediated interaction, and expectations of accessibility. Experimental evidence indicates that smartphone interruptions can increase self-reported inattention and hyperactivity-like symptoms in nonclinical populations (Kushlev, Proulx, and Dunn 2016), while research on digital workplace spirituality identifies both new possibilities for connection and new forms of fragmentation (Walter 2024). A Christian account of formation at work must therefore address attention without converting prayer or contemplation into another productivity technique. What repeatedly claims attention can shape desire, habit, and practical judgment.

This article asks: How should a Scripture-governed understanding of spiritual formation shape Christian discernment, economic motivation, vocational identity, and ethical leadership within secular African workplaces? Four

subsidiary questions guide the analysis. First, how should Scripture, religious experience, cultural interpretation, and empirical science be related when Christians evaluate dreams, spiritual warfare, and unusual experiences? Second, how should biblical teaching on work, wealth, contentment, and neighbor-love correct both secular materialism and prosperity-oriented Christianity? Third, what does Christian formation require of leaders when workers are economically vulnerable? Fourth, how can churches form believers for ordinary work without reducing vocation to ecclesial ministry or entrepreneurial success?

The gap addressed here is integrative rather than topical. The reviewed literatures separately examine workplace spirituality, religious identity, work as calling, African spiritual causality, prosperity, and religion-science method, but the bounded corpus revealed no framework that jointly specifies tradition-specific normativity, limits on causal inference about spiritual experience, the moral significance of workplace power, and protection against reducing spirituality to prosperity or performance. The article addresses that gap through the Scripture-Governed Formation-at-Work (SGFW) model. Its thesis is that Christian formation requires differentiated epistemic authority: Scripture is normative within the declared confessional framework; experience, testimony, tradition, and cultural interpretation are meaningful but fallible; and empirical inquiry has genuine authority regarding publicly investigable mechanisms without, by method alone, settling every metaphysical question. Vocation is thereby ordered toward faithful stewardship, justice, truthfulness, worker dignity, and neighbor-love rather than spiritual self-optimization or guaranteed success.

2. Method

This study combines an integrative review with bounded evidence mapping, biblical-theological analysis, and contextual ethical synthesis. Integrative review is appropriate when a problem crosses empirical, conceptual, and theoretical literatures that cannot be reduced to a common effect-size question (Whittemore and Knafl 2005; Snyder 2019). The OpenAlex component is intentionally bounded and is not represented as an exhaustive systematic review. PRISMA 2020 informed only the transparent accounting of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Page et al. 2021). Because retrieval was relevance-ranked and capped by the search interface, neither the article nor Figure 1 claims full PRISMA compliance, database exhaustiveness, or comprehensive coverage of all eligible scholarship.

The theological method is explicitly confessional and is analytically distinguished from the evidence map. Within the Protestant Scripture-governed framework adopted here, canonical Scripture functions as the final normative authority for theological claims; this is a declared starting premise, not a finding generated by the literature search. Interpretation follows grammatical-historical, literary, canonical, and redemptive-historical controls: passages are read in their immediate setting, located within covenantal and canonical context, and applied only after their communicative function is established. This procedure is intended to prevent proof-texting, especially when texts about prosperity, authority, spiritual gifts, or work are transferred into modern managerial settings. Biblical references use the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) unless otherwise stated.

The science-religion boundary is treated as a contested philosophical question rather than a settled slogan. John Perry and Sarah Lane Ritchie (2018) defend methodological naturalism as a discipline for empirical inquiry, whereas Andrew B. Torrance (2017, 2018) argues that Christian inquiry should remain open to theology-engaged science while

exercising theological humility about special divine action. The present article adopts a narrower domain claim on which these positions substantially converge for this inquiry: empirical methods are authoritative for publicly tractable mechanisms, empirical anomaly alone does not identify divine action, and a theological ontology of spiritual beings does not by itself justify a case-specific supernatural diagnosis. This preserves scientific accountability without converting methodological restraint into metaphysical closure.

2.1 Search Strategy and Bounded Evidence Mapping

The structured search was executed on August 11, 2026, through the Sider Scholar interface to OpenAlex, a large open scholarly index whose interdisciplinary coverage is useful but uneven across fields and records (Priem, Piwowar, and Orr 2022). Two exploratory scoping queries were used only to calibrate term specificity and were excluded from the review corpus. Six prespecified queries addressed: (1) Christian spirituality and workplace; (2) Christian work, vocation, and theology; (3) African Christianity, witchcraft, and spiritual discernment; (4) prosperity gospel, Africa, and wealth; (5) digital distraction, attention, and workplace spirituality; and (6) religious identity and workplace ethics. Eligibility was restricted at screening to works published from January 1, 2015, through August 11, 2026; older foundational sources were added separately through purposive citation tracing and targeted verification.

The interface exposed at most 25 relevance-ranked records per query. Query-level exports contained 24, 23, 24, 22, 24, and 25 records, respectively, for a total of 142. Deduplication used DOI or OpenAlex identifier where available and normalized-title comparison as a secondary check; seven duplicates were removed. Of 135 records screened by title and abstract, 103 were excluded for insufficient connection to the research domains. Thirty-two records proceeded to full-record eligibility assessment; eight were excluded for reasons reported individually in the supplement, leaving 24 records in the bounded evidence map. Figure 1 reports the arithmetic flow and Table 1 reproduces the exact query-level counts. The supplement lists included records and full-record exclusions.

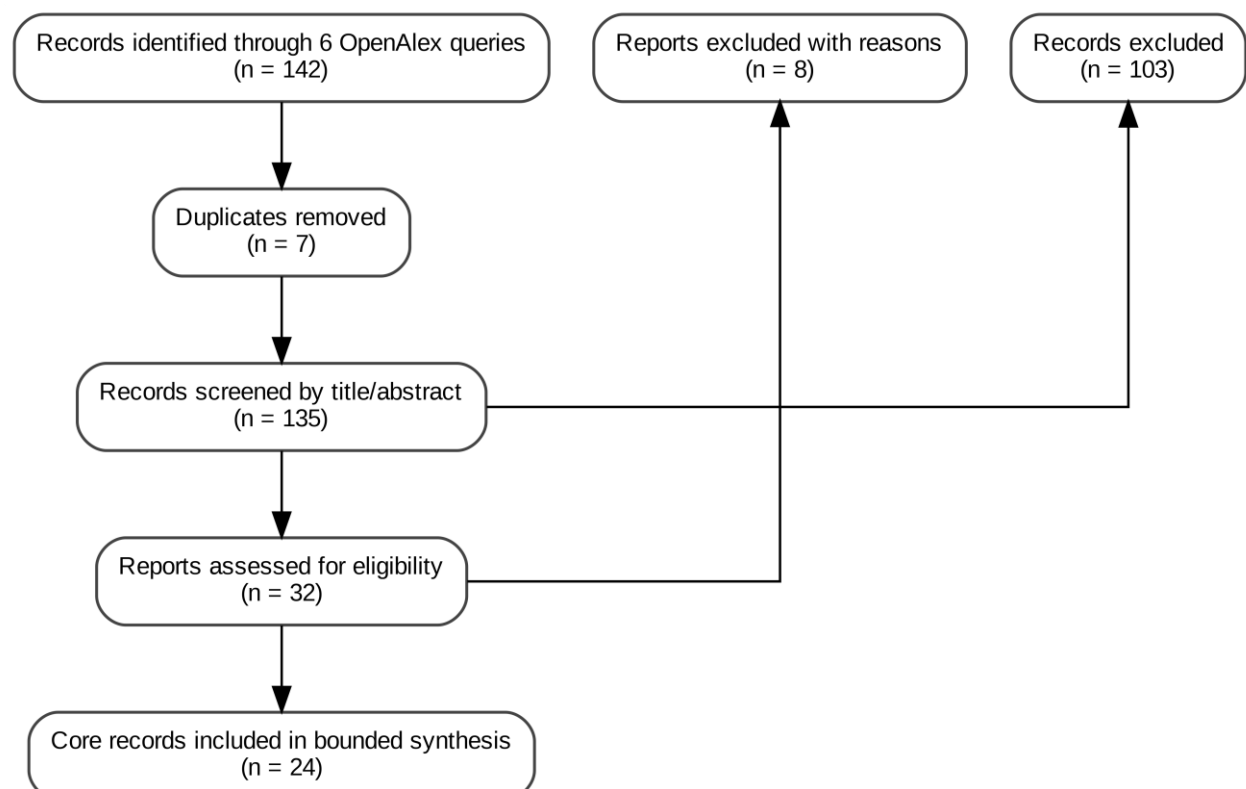
The retrieval ceiling is a material source of selection bias because relevance ranking is algorithmic and dynamic. The search did not exhaust Scopus, Web of Science, ATLA Religion Database, JSTOR, ProQuest, or EBSCO, and it should not be interpreted as a census of OpenAlex. Screening followed one decision stream rather than independent dual review, so no inter-rater reliability statistic is available. Foundational reviews, major theological works, methodological sources, and official labor statistics identified through citation tracing or targeted verification were therefore treated as supplementary evidence outside the 24-record map and were not added to its numerator. These constraints are reported to prevent a level of systematic-review certainty that the design cannot support.

Table 1. Bounded OpenAlex search strategy and records returned

Query	Search expression	Eligibility years	Records
S1	Title: "Christian spirituality"; abstract: "workplace"	2015–2026	24
S2	Christian work vocation theology	2015–2026	23
S3	African Christianity witchcraft spiritual discernment	2015–2026	24
S4	prosperity gospel Africa Christian wealth	2015–2026	22
S5	digital distraction attention workplace spirituality	2015–2026	24
S6	religious identity workplace Christian ethics	2015–2026	25

Source. Author review log from the Sider Scholar/OpenAlex searches executed August 11, 2026. Records are relevance-ranked exports capped at 25 per query; the counts are evidence-mapping counts, not database totals.

Figure 1. Flow of the bounded OpenAlex evidence-mapping corpus.



Source. Author review workflow. The flow reports 142 identified records, 7 duplicates removed, 135 screened, 32 assessed for eligibility, 8 full-record exclusions, and 24 included records. Foundational sources added by citation tracing are outside these counts.

2.2 Eligibility, Appraisal, and Synthesis

Records were eligible when they were English-language scholarly works published within the search window, addressed at least one of the specified domains, and contributed empirical evidence, systematic synthesis, or substantive conceptual or theological analysis. Sources were excluded when religion or spirituality was incidental, spirituality functioned only as a generic wellness variable without relevance to religious identity or the research question, the African material did not illuminate spiritual discernment or economic ethics, or scholarly provenance was inadequate. Foundational books and older sources were handled separately rather than mixed into the bounded article-level corpus.

Because the corpus is methodologically heterogeneous, a single numerical quality score would imply false comparability. Appraisal therefore used source-type-appropriate criteria. Empirical studies were assessed for design transparency, sampling, analytic fit, and warranted inference; reviews for search transparency, inclusion logic, and synthesis quality; and conceptual or theological works for definitional precision, source adequacy, engagement with counterarguments, and inferential coherence. Appraisal affected the weight assigned to claims rather than functioning as an ideological exclusion filter. Sources that challenged the article's theological position were retained when methodologically relevant.

Synthesis proceeded in three stages. First, extracted claims were organized into five domains: workplace religious identity and spirituality; vocation and economic motivation; African spiritual causality and discernment; attention and digitalization; and leadership, dignity, and labor vulnerability. Second, biblical-theological analysis tested normative claims associated with each domain. Third, interdisciplinary integration distinguished empirical mechanism, cultural meaning, theological norm, and prudential ethical judgment. Across the domains, four recurrent constraints emerged and were used to structure the SGFW model: normative asymmetry, causal humility, ethical externality, and non-instrumentality.

2.3 Reflexivity, Scope, and Limitations

The article adopts a Protestant, Scripture-governed normative stance and does not claim religious neutrality or pan-Christian consensus. Catholic and Orthodox traditions order Scripture, tradition, and ecclesial authority differently, and the model should be read within its declared confessional boundary. Transparency about that boundary is preferable to presenting theological judgments as if they were generated by social-scientific data. Confessional commitment nevertheless does not exempt the argument from accurate representation of other perspectives, empirical correction, or conceptual criticism.

The study also does not treat Africa as a single worldview or Rwanda as representative of African workplaces. Rwanda serves as a concrete labor-market context, while African theological and social-scientific sources are drawn from several settings. The article does not adjudicate cessationist and continuationist disputes in full; its narrower claim is that even continuationist accounts require testing of private experience and do not permit a second canon. No review protocol was preregistered. The English-language, relevance-ranked, single-stream evidence map should therefore be read as a transparent component of an integrative constructive argument, not as an exhaustive systematic review.

3. Workplace Spirituality, Religious Identity, and the Problem of Normativity

Workplace spirituality is established but conceptually unstable. Definitions commonly cluster around meaning, connectedness, transcendence, inner life, values, and calling (Lahmar, Chaouki, and Rodhain 2025). YingFei Héliot et al. (2020) show how religious identity intersects with occupational identity, organizational norms, and well-being, while Bryan J. Dik, Denise Daniels, and Alexandra Alayan (2024) argue that organizational research can no longer treat religion and spirituality as peripheral. Yet the breadth that makes 'spirituality' empirically portable can strip it of tradition-specific content. A construct defined mainly by meaningfulness or connectedness can encompass Christian discipleship, Buddhist mindfulness, secular purpose, humanistic transcendence, or a corporate culture program without discriminating among incompatible accounts of ultimate reality and the good.

This ambiguity becomes ethically significant when organizations instrumentalize spirituality. A practice may be meaningful to employees and still be appropriated as a technique for productivity, compliance, or affective control. Volker Kessler (2017) shows how terms such as 'vision,' 'metanoia,' and 'evangelist' migrate into management discourse and acquire meanings detached from their theological origins. The reverse problem occurs when Christian leadership literature baptizes management concepts with biblical vocabulary without adequate exegesis. Theologically serious workplace spirituality must resist both reductions: religion to an organizational resource, and Scripture to a repertoire of motivational management slogans.

Christian spirituality has a more determinate grammar. Its center is not generic transcendence but life in relation to the Triune God through Christ, formed by the Spirit in accordance with the Word. Peter McGhee (2019) argues that integrating Christian spirituality at work requires personal and organizational dimensions rather than a privatized faith added to professional life. Domènec Melé and Joan Fontrodona (2017) likewise situate Christian business spirituality within a moral tradition concerned with human dignity, common good, virtue, and responsibility. These accounts establish that faith need not be confined to explicitly religious organizations, but they also sharpen the normative question: which desires and practices count as Christian formation? Organizational outcomes cannot answer that question by themselves.

A Scripture-governed account treats formation as the gradual shaping of perception, desire, judgment, and action toward Christlikeness. It rejects a voluntaristic model in which transformation depends chiefly on willpower. [Philippians 2:12–13](#) (CSB) holds human obedience and divine agency together; [Galatians 5:16–25](#) (CSB) locates moral fruit in walking by the Spirit; and [2 Corinthians 3:18](#) (CSB) portrays transformation as the Spirit's work. Prayer, Scripture meditation, worship, confession, fellowship, and service therefore function as receptive and responsive practices rather than technologies by which the self manufactures holiness. Louise Kretzschmar's (2020) analysis of African and Western Christian leadership similarly connects spiritual disciplines with moral character.

This distinction also reframes 'secular work.' A workplace can be secular institutionally, in the sense that it is not governed by ecclesial authority and includes diverse convictions, without being morally neutral, spiritually empty, or hostile to religion. Peter L. Berger's (2014) pluralization thesis describes modernity as a condition of multiple plausibility structures

rather than simple religious disappearance. Charles Taylor (2007) likewise interprets secularism as a changed condition of belief. The practical Christian question is therefore not how to

escape a plural workplace but how to inhabit it faithfully without coercion, withdrawal, or privatized discipleship.

Table 2. Interdisciplinary synthesis of the literature

Domain	Synthesis	Representative sources
Religious identity and workplace spirituality	Religion shapes identity, meaning, belonging, values, and work outcomes; generic “spirituality” risks detaching practice from confessional norms.	Héliot et al. 2020; Dik et al. 2024; Maidl et al. 2022; McGhee 2019
Spiritual experience and causal attribution	Extraordinary experience has psychological and cultural conditions; intensity and apparent fulfillment do not by themselves establish divine causation.	Lifshitz et al. 2019; Ng 2020; Leavey et al. 2016
African spiritual causality and healing	Spiritual explanations are socially serious but heterogeneous; witchcraft accusations may also function as idioms of distress and can harm vulnerable persons.	Read 2019; Mashau 2016; Yoder et al. 2021; Marshall 2016; Rio, McCarthy, and Blanes 2017
Vocation, wealth, and entrepreneurship	Calling and religion can deepen meaning and agency but can also enable overwork or instrumentalization; prosperity claims require theological critique.	Thompson and Bunderson 2019; Henley 2017; Smith et al. 2021; Mashau and Kgatle 2019; Heuser 2015
Leadership, dignity, and power	Christian leadership cannot be reduced to an effectiveness technique; dignity, justice, accountable power, and worker vulnerability are central to ethical evaluation.	Eva et al. 2019; Melé 2016; Melé and Fontrodona 2017; Nicolaides 2020; Slater 2018
Digital attention and formation	Digitalization can support connection while increasing interruption and attentional fragmentation; formation requires non-instrumental practices of attention.	Walter 2024; Kushlev et al. 2016; O'Donnell 2015; Kristensen 2018

Source. Author synthesis of the representative scholarship cited in the table.

4. A Scripture-Governed Epistemology of Spiritual Experience

Questions of spiritual discernment require disciplined differentiation among canonical revelation, personal and communal experience, cultural interpretation, and empirical explanation. Confusion occurs when evidence proper to one level is made to perform the work of another. A vivid dream establishes that an experience occurred; vividness alone does not establish divine revelation. Sleep science may illuminate mechanisms of dreaming without proving that divine providence is impossible. Conversely, biblical affirmation of spiritual evil does not establish that a particular episode of fatigue, financial loss, depression, or conflict has a demonic cause. This is a problem of warranted inference, not merely of competing worldviews.

Psychological research clarifies why extraordinary experiences should not be self-authenticating. Michael Lifshitz, Michiel van Elk, and T. M. Luhrmann (2019) synthesize evidence linking the trait of absorption with a greater propensity for spiritual experience. Sleep research also shows active processes of memory consolidation and reactivation (Klinzing et al. 2019). Such findings do not ‘explain religion away.’ They show that intense, memorable, and meaning-laden experience has cognitive and neurobiological conditions. Theologically, this supports epistemic humility: intensity is insufficient evidence of revelation.

Scripture itself demands restraint. The Bible records revelatory dreams while also warning against deceptive prophecy. [Deuteronomy 13](#) (CSB) makes covenantal fidelity more decisive than an apparently successful sign; [Deuteronomy 18:9–14](#) (CSB) prohibits divination and related occult practices; and [Jeremiah 23](#) (CSB) condemns prophets who elevate dreams God has not given. In the New Testament, [1 Thessalonians 5:19–22](#) (CSB) holds openness and testing together, while [1 John 4:1–6](#) (CSB) commands discernment in relation to the apostolic confession of Christ. These passages do not yield a mechanical algorithm. They establish a theological pattern in which spiritual claims are tested rather than enthroned.

For a Scripture-governed Christian epistemology, canonical revelation therefore has asymmetrical authority. Private experiences may prompt prayer, reflection, or cautious attention, but they cannot establish doctrine, override clear

biblical teaching, excuse occult consultation, or compel morally questionable action. This conclusion remains compatible with differing views on the continuation of charismatic gifts. A continuationist can affirm contemporary prophecy while maintaining that it is tested and noncanonical; a cessationist will set a narrower expectation. Both positions can agree that a Christian should not let dreams function as an autonomous decision-making oracle.

The distinction between ontology and causal diagnosis is especially important in African contexts. Christian Scripture affirms personal spiritual evil, and any theology that simply denies this because it is not experimentally observable would move from methodological naturalism to a metaphysical claim that empirical method itself cannot establish. Yet the converse error is equally serious. The existence of spiritual evil does not warrant an inference from misfortune to demonization. Research on witchcraft accusations in Sierra Leone shows that such claims can function as idioms of distress within complex socio-ecological conditions and can place already vulnerable children at further risk (Yoder et al. 2021). Ethnographic work in Ghana likewise shows that faith healing and biomedical mental-health systems inhabit morally and socially complex relationships rather than a clean binary between ‘belief’ and ‘science’ (Read 2019). Mashau (2016) documents multiple healing streams in African settings and explicitly cautions against treating Africa as culturally homogeneous.

These findings do not decide the metaphysics of witchcraft. They do demonstrate why causal interpretation requires discipline. When a believer is ill, exhausted, sad, economically unstable, or psychologically distressed, Christian care should not begin by treating those states as diagnostic signs of demonic attack. Ordinary creaturely causes, social injustice, trauma, grief, disease, sleep deprivation, economic pressure, and mental illness remain morally and scientifically relevant. Leavey, Loewenthal, and King (2016) found that clergy explanations of mental illness can combine social and spiritual meanings, which illustrates both the possibility of holistic care and the danger of collapsing different causal registers. Christian pastoral discernment should therefore be non-reductive in both directions: it should neither exclude spiritual reality a priori nor spiritualize conditions that call for medical, psychological, legal, organizational, or economic intervention.

Ruth Marshall's (2016) analysis of spiritual-warfare prayer shows that such discourse is not merely private belief but a

practice that can shape moral and political agency. That observation increases the need for theological discipline. Ephesians 6:10–18 (CSB) locates Christian struggle in relation to spiritual powers, yet the armor specified is truth, righteousness, readiness associated with the gospel of peace,

faith, salvation, the Word of God, and prayer. The text does not license speculative assignment of every adversity to a demon. Its formative force is toward steadfast truthfulness, righteousness, faith, and prayer rather than fascination with hidden agencies.

Table 3. Epistemic roles in Christian discernment

Source of knowledge	Epistemic status	Proper role	Characteristic error
Canonical Scripture	Normative theological authority within the adopted Christian framework	Doctrine, moral norm, testing of spiritual claims	Proof-texting or private reinterpretation detached from context
Personal spiritual experience	Phenomenologically real but fallible	May prompt prayer, reflection, cautious action	Treating vividness, coincidence, or apparent fulfillment as self-authenticating revelation
Cultural interpretation	Contextual meaning system	Clarifies how experiences are named and socially mediated	Essentializing “African worldview” or equating cultural explanation with causal proof
Empirical science	Authoritative for empirically tractable mechanisms within methodological limits	Clarifies sleep, attention, illness, organizational effects, labor conditions	Turning methodological naturalism into metaphysical naturalism
Practical wisdom	Integrative judgment under Scripture	Chooses faithful action amid uncertainty	Claiming certainty about God’s hidden purposes

Source. Author conceptual synthesis developed from the biblical-theological and interdisciplinary analysis.

5. Vocation, Wealth, and the Formation of Desire

A Christian theology of work begins before markets. Genesis 1:26–28 and 2:15 (CSB) locate human agency within creation as derivative, creaturely, and accountable. Humans cultivate and exercise responsibility within a world they did not create and do not ultimately own, which provides a firmer basis for stewardship than the claim that prosperity proves divine favor. Miroslav Volf (1991) interprets work through participation in God’s transforming purposes, while Kathryn Tanner (2019) criticizes capitalist demands for relentless competitive self-investment. Read together, these perspectives distinguish vocation from careerism: vocation can require faithful service within, and sometimes resistance to, distorted economic structures.

Research on work as calling likewise reveals a double edge. Jeffery A. Thompson and J. Stuart Bunderson (2019) associate calling with meaning and commitment but also identify costs when sacrifice, overwork, or exploitation become normalized. The ambiguity matters for Christian ethics because employers may exploit precisely the worker’s language of mission or service. Vocation therefore requires limits as well as dedication, including refusal of totalizing work claims and recognition that the worker is a person before being a productive resource.

Entrepreneurship research similarly shows that religion can influence entrepreneurial behavior and values, but not in a mechanically predictable direction (Henley 2017; Rietveld and Hoogendoorn 2022). Smith, McMullen, and Cardon (2021) call for a theological turn in entrepreneurship precisely because religion introduces ultimate commitments and normative questions that conventional entrepreneurship theory often brackets. Such a turn is useful only if theology retains critical force. If theological language merely supplies motivation for growth, risk-taking, or wealth accumulation, religion has been added to entrepreneurship without judging it.

Biblical teaching on wealth is more complex than either suspicion of material goods or prosperity theology. Deuteronomy 8:11–20 (CSB) acknowledges abundance within Israel’s covenant history while warning against the claim that human power produced it. The passage cannot serve as an unconditional promise that obedient modern entrepreneurs will become wealthy. Proverbs 10:22 (CSB) belongs to wisdom literature, where ordered patterns should not be converted into

contractual guarantees. Joshua 1:8 (CSB) addresses Joshua’s covenantal commission to obey Torah; it is not a timeless formula for business success.

The New Testament sharpens the moral center. Luke 12:13–34 (CSB) denies that abundance constitutes life; Matthew 6:19–34 (CSB) redirects disciples from anxious accumulation toward trust in the Father’s care; and 1 Timothy 6:6–19 (CSB) condemns the love of money, commends contentment, warns the rich against misplaced hope, and redirects wealth toward generosity. James 4:13–17 (CSB) exposes presumptuous planning, while James 5:1–6 (CSB) condemns wealth accumulated through injustice, including withheld wages.

These texts reframe success. Christian faithfulness can coexist with profit, expansion, professional advancement, and material provision, but none is a reliable index of God’s approval. Philippians 2:8–11 (CSB) places Christ’s exaltation through the path of obedient humiliation, which resists identifying divine favor with conventional status. Christian formation must therefore subordinate economic goods to love of God and neighbor. Prosperity teaching becomes theologically disordered when it makes wealth a predictable consequence of faith, offering, positive confession, or obedience. In postcolonial African contexts, Mashau and Kgatle (2019) critique prosperity preaching for reinforcing greed and propose relational responsibility as an alternative; Kate Bowler’s (2013) historical analysis shows how prosperity theology can transform health and wealth into moral verdicts on believers.

The corrective is not romantic poverty. Stewardship requires prudence, savings, investment, provision for dependents, generosity, and competent economic action. What Scripture disallows is the conversion of provision into ultimate security, of success into spiritual status, or of employees into instruments for personal gain. The spiritually formed worker or entrepreneur asks not only ‘Can this increase the bottom line?’ but ‘What does faithfulness require toward those whose lives are affected by this decision?’ That question moves economic ethics from self-protection to neighbor-love.

6. Ethical Leadership, Worker Dignity, and Power

Christian leadership is often described as servant leadership, but the phrase becomes conceptually thin when detached from Christology. Organizational research reports constructive associations with follower and organizational outcomes while

also identifying definitional fragmentation and theoretical weakness (Eva et al. 2019). A Christian account cannot define servanthood merely as a strategy that improves performance. [Matthew 20:25–28](#) (CSB) contrasts status-seeking rule with service and grounds that pattern in the Son of Man's self-giving mission; [Philippians 2:3–8](#) (CSB) locates humility in Christ's obedient self-giving. The normative center is cruciform regard for others, not managerial effectiveness.

This matters where leaders control scarce opportunities. Rwanda's labor data make the asymmetry visible. In 2024, 90.4 percent of employment was informal (NISR 2025a). In 2025, unemployment stood at 12.4 percent, with higher rates among women and youth, and labor underutilization reached 56 percent (NISR 2026a). In May 2026, unemployment was 13.4 percent and labor underutilization 59.7 percent (NISR 2026b). A manager operating in such conditions may know that workers have few alternatives. That knowledge creates heightened responsibility rather than a license to extract maximum effort, because formal consent can coexist with constrained choice. The ethical problem is therefore one of power as well as contract.

Humanistic management provides a useful conceptual bridge. Domènec Melé (2016) treats dignity, common good, development, transcendence, and stewardship as constitutive of genuinely humanistic management. Christian ethics can affirm these categories while locating dignity in creation and neighbor-love. [Genesis 1:26–27](#) (CSB) identifies human beings as God's image-bearers; this does not yield a managerial decision rule, but it excludes reducing workers to variables in another person's production function. [Luke 10:25–37](#) (CSB) extends neighbor responsibility across social boundaries, while [James 5:4](#) (CSB) gives concrete moral weight to unpaid wages by portraying the cries of defrauded laborers as heard by God.

New Testament household codes require careful historical handling. [Colossians 3:22–4:1](#) and [Ephesians 6:5–9](#) (CSB) address ancient slavery, not modern employment contracts. To transfer commands to enslaved persons directly into managerial practice would ignore the institution and reproduce its asymmetry. Yet the reciprocal address to masters is theologically significant: masters are commanded to act justly and fairly and are reminded that their authority is itself accountable. The contemporary implication is not an equation of slavery with employment but a principle of limited, answerable power. This also prevents misusing [Romans 13:3](#) (CSB), a text about governing authorities, as an employer-reward principle, or [Hebrews 13:17](#) (CSB), a text about spiritual oversight, as a description of corporate managers.

Organizational ethics also requires attention to the possibility that religion can intensify power rather than restrain it. A leader who claims divine sanction for ordinary business decisions can make disagreement appear spiritually rebellious. A founder who treats a personal dream as God's strategic directive may place employees under pressure to comply with a claim they cannot test. A prosperity-oriented leader may interpret declining profits as spiritual failure and transfer anxiety downward through excessive targets. Scripture-governed formation counters these tendencies by making leaders more accountable, not less. Claims of divine guidance should produce humility, truthfulness, openness to testing, and moral consistency rather than immunity from questioning.

The same principle applies to religious difference. In a plural workplace, Christian witness should not be confused with coercion. Leaders may act from Christian convictions while respecting the conscience and legal dignity of colleagues who do not share them. Religious identity research indicates that workplace structures can intensify identity conflict or facilitate compatible participation (Héliot et al. 2020). Faithful witness therefore requires transparent reasons, consistent standards,

nondiscrimination, and conduct whose justice can be experienced by outsiders. First Peter 2:12 and 3:15–16 (CSB) offers a posture of honorable conduct and reasoned hope rather than domination.

At its strongest, Christian workplace spirituality thus changes the moral meaning of authority. Power becomes a trust, profit a contingent good, employees neighbors, expertise a form of stewardship, and success an occasion for gratitude rather than self-deification. Failure, likewise, need not mean abandonment by God. This grammar is spiritually edifying precisely because it liberates the believer from the exhausting need to interpret every gain as divine approval and every loss as spiritual defeat. Faithfulness is steadier than fortune.

7. Attention, Technology, and Everyday Formation

Theological traditions have long treated attention as integral to prayer, discernment, and moral vigilance, while contemporary digital systems increasingly compete for attention as an economic resource. James Williams (2018) argues that digital architectures can capture and redirect attention at scales that challenge reflective agency. Technology is not intrinsically corrupting: digital tools enable collaboration, access, learning, and religious community. The formative question is whether repeated interruption trains reactivity at the expense of sustained reflection.

Empirical evidence supports a modest version of this concern. Kushlev, Proulx, and Dunn (2016) found that maximizing smartphone interruptions increased self-reported inattention and hyperactivity symptoms, while Yoshija Walter's (2024) model places digitalization, psychological processes, spirituality, and workplace conditions in interaction. Aislinn O'Donnell (2015) argues for contemplative attention that resists reducing mindfulness to a self-management intervention, and Mette Lund Kristensen (2018) similarly critiques instrumentalized mindfulness under conditions of acceleration. Christian formation can receive the attentional insight without importing incompatible metaphysics or translating prayer into a productivity device.

Within a Christian framework, attention is ordered by love. [Psalm 1:2](#) (CSB), Jesus' repeated withdrawal for prayer in [Luke 5:16](#) (CSB), and the call to attend to what is true and worthy in [Philippians 4:8](#) (CSB) all assume that attention can be cultivated. Workplace application is therefore practical rather than legalistic: believers may need rhythms that protect Scripture reading, prayer, worship, embodied rest, and undistracted presence to neighbors. Such practices are means of availability to God and resistance to fragmented desire, not techniques for earning favor.

This corrects a false choice between spiritual life and ordinary work. First Corinthians 10:31 (CSB) places ordinary embodied action under the glory of God, while [Colossians 3:12–17](#) (CSB) situates conduct within renewed character. The aim is integration: attention to God should make the worker more truthful, just, patient, and present in ordinary responsibilities, not less competent or accountable. Spiritual practices that do not travel into workloads, wages, promises, emails, hiring, conflict, and care for colleagues remain morally incomplete.

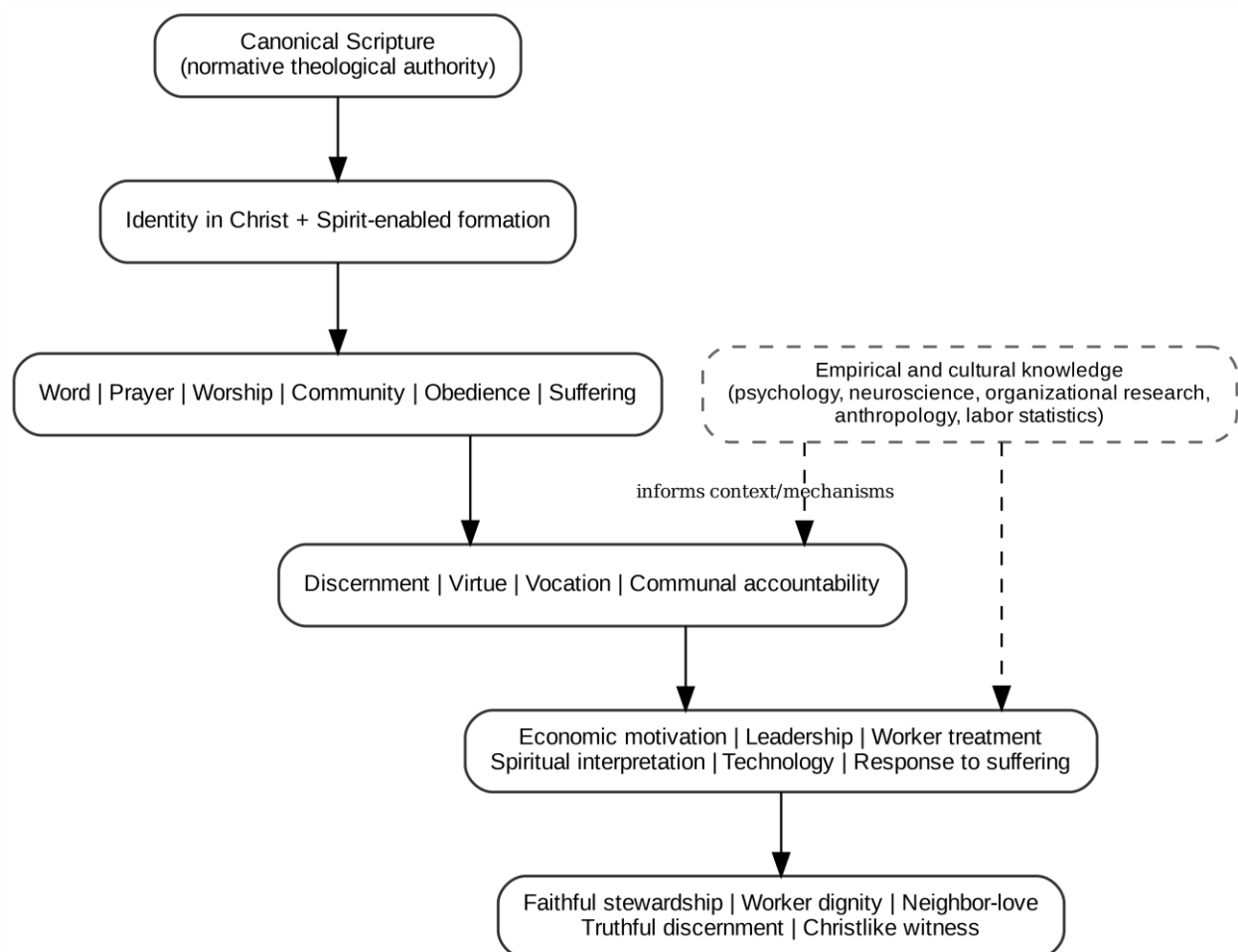
8. The Scripture-Governed Formation-at-Work Model

Figure 2 presents the Scripture-Governed Formation-at-Work (SGFW) model as a normative-conceptual framework rather than an empirically estimated causal model. Its distinctive contribution lies in four constraints. Normative asymmetry means that sources of knowledge do not perform identical

tasks: within the adopted framework, Scripture governs theological norm while empirical inquiry governs publicly tractable mechanisms. Causal humility prohibits moving from theological ontology or unusual experience to confident diagnosis of a particular hidden cause. Ethical externality requires spiritual claims to be tested partly by how they affect vulnerable neighbors and the use of power. Non-instrumentality prevents prayer, vocation, virtue, or faithfulness from being reduced to techniques for productivity, wealth, or organizational performance.

These constraints order the remaining elements of the model. Identity in Christ and Spirit-enabled formation locate transformation in grace rather than autonomous self-construction. Word, prayer, worship, community, obedience, and suffering form capacities for discernment, virtue, vocation, and communal accountability. Empirical and cultural knowledge enters laterally, informing mechanisms, patterns, contexts, and consequences. Neuroscience, psychology,

Figure 2. Scripture-Governed Formation-at-Work (SGFW) model.



Source. Author conceptual synthesis. Arrows represent normative and formative ordering, not statistically estimated causal effects. Empirical and cultural knowledge informs mechanisms, contexts, and consequences without functioning as a rival theological canon.

9. Discussion

The synthesis contributes a differentiated account of epistemic authority to religion-and-science scholarship. Dreams, spiritual warfare, and healing are often forced into a false binary in which scientific explanation excludes spiritual reality or spiritual reality exempts claims from scientific scrutiny. The SGFW model rejects both moves. Its four constraints specify a middle discipline: empirical mechanisms deserve empirical investigation; theological claims remain explicit theological claims; anomaly is not a shortcut to divine causation; and spiritual interpretation remains accountable to moral consequences. This positions the article within the Zygon

anthropology, organizational research, and labor statistics can clarify what is happening without becoming a rival theological canon; theological claims, in turn, do not replace competent inquiry into illness, working conditions, or organizational effects.

At the decision level, formation bears on economic motivation, leadership, treatment of workers, interpretation of spiritual experience, technology use, and response to suffering. The model's outcome language is deliberately non-prosperity-oriented: faithful stewardship, worker dignity, truthful discernment, neighbor-love, and Christlike witness. These do not guarantee profit, prestige, security, or organizational growth. Costly faithfulness therefore remains intelligible: a leader may forgo a bonus rather than overburden workers; a worker may refuse dishonest practice; a believer may seek medical care rather than label illness demonic; an entrepreneur may abandon a profitable opportunity that requires deception.

debate between defenses of methodological naturalism and proposals for theology-engaged science (Perry and Ritchie 2018; Torrance 2017, 2018), while applying that debate to ordinary religious experience and workplace ethics.

The second contribution is to reconnect spiritual formation with economic ethics. Workplace spirituality scholarship often emphasizes meaning, belonging, and well-being, but a Christian account is incomplete if it neglects wealth, power, justice, and vulnerability. The Rwandan context illustrates why: high informality and labor underutilization make workloads, remuneration, safety, voice, and fair treatment ethically salient. Astrachan et al. (2020) argue that religious and spiritual orientations can shape the values and goals through which

family businesses understand ethical behavior; the SGFW model adds a stronger critical claim by refusing to assess spirituality through organizational sustainability or performance alone.

Third, the analysis contributes to African Christian theology by resisting both epistemic dismissal and romanticization. Obaji M. Agbiji and Ignatius Swart (2015) show that religion in Africa can be implicated in corruption and poverty while also contributing to social transformation. That ambivalence matters. African religiosity should neither be idealized as inherently moral nor treated as a residue to be modernized away. Spiritual-causality claims deserve serious description, but within the adopted Christian framework they also require testing. Scripture can affirm spiritual conflict while rejecting divination, acknowledge suffering without declaring sufferers demonically targeted, and affirm provision without turning wealth into a sacrament of favor.

The resulting account is also ecclesially demanding. Churches often form believers intensively for worship gatherings while leaving economic ambition, professional power, technology, and workplace compromise underexamined. If Christian formation is preparation to live all of life before God, then congregations require a thicker theology of ordinary vocation. Formation should address money, contracts, leadership, exhaustion, digital attention, corruption, workplace pluralism, worker vulnerability, and the interpretation of spiritual experience. This does not mean turning sermons into management training. It means helping believers discern how the gospel reshapes what they love and how they use power.

Several counterarguments clarify the framework's boundaries. A secular organizational scholar may object that canonical normativity is unavailable as publicly shared evidence. The article does not ask social science to endorse biblical authority; it declares a confessional norm and then shows how empirical evidence can discipline causal claims made within that norm. Catholic or Orthodox theologians may dispute the model's ordering of authority; that disagreement is acknowledged rather than dissolved under a generic label of Christianity. A continuationist may worry that caution about dreams suppresses the Spirit, while a cessationist may regard the framework as too open. The narrower claim is shared discipline: extraordinary claims, if made, are tested and do not become an autonomous canon.

A prosperity-oriented reader may argue that Scripture contains genuine promises of provision and examples of wealthy faithful persons. This is true and should prevent a theology that treats poverty as inherently virtuous. The dispute concerns inference. Biblical provision cannot be converted into a technique by which faith reliably produces wealth, nor can abundance be used as a stable measure of spiritual maturity. A managerial reader may object that costly ethical restraint can threaten competitiveness. Christian ethics has no warrant to promise otherwise. The framework's claim is more demanding: if profitability can be preserved only by deception, exploitation, or treating persons as disposable means, the Christian moral problem is not solved by the market's approval.

The study has important limitations. The bounded OpenAlex export privileges algorithmic relevance ranking and does not exhaust discipline-specific databases. The evidence map is English-language, used one screening stream, and was not preregistered; it therefore supports transparent integrative synthesis rather than exhaustive systematic-review inference. Rwanda is a contextual illustration, not a basis for continent-wide generalization, and the Protestant authority structure of the SGFW model is not presented as pan-Christian consensus. The model is conceptual and requires empirical testing. Future research should compare Christian traditions and African sectors, examine how organizational power shapes religious language, and test whether formation practices are associated with ethical decision-making without reducing holiness to an organizational outcome variable.

10. Conclusion

Christian life in a secular workplace is not sustained by choosing between scientific rationality and spiritual reality, nor by baptizing every unusual experience as divine guidance. It requires disciplined discernment. Within the framework developed here, Scripture governs theological norm, empirical inquiry investigates empirical mechanisms, cultural knowledge clarifies situated meanings, and practical wisdom integrates them in accountable action. The four SGFW constraints preserve these distinctions while requiring spiritual interpretation to face its ethical consequences. This ordering allows believers to take both truth and mystery seriously without claiming more than either theology or science can warrant.

The practical consequences are substantial. Dreams may be received with humility but not enthroned as a private canon. Witchcraft and spiritual warfare may be treated as theologically serious categories without turning ordinary illness, sadness, fatigue, or economic loss into automatic evidence of demonic causation. Wealth may be received gratefully without becoming a measure of divine favor. Work may be embraced as vocation without allowing employers or employees to make productivity an idol. Leadership may be exercised decisively while remaining accountable to the dignity of those with less power.

Most importantly, spiritual formation is not a technique for becoming unusually successful. It is the Spirit-enabled formation of a person who learns to abide in Christ, love truth, resist greed, seek justice, serve neighbors, endure suffering without manufacturing explanations God has not revealed, and work faithfully whether visible success follows or not. Such a life can be profoundly ordinary: a truthful report, a fair workload, a refused bribe, a patient response, a protected worker, a prayer offered without spectacle, a business decision that values conscience above gain. In that ordinarieness, Christian vocation becomes spiritually luminous. The secular workplace is not outside God's concern. It is one of the places where discipleship is tested, neighbor-love becomes concrete, and the character of Christ is either obscured or made visible.

Declarations

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS	Sixbert SANGWA: Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, writing - original draft, writing - review and editing, and visualization.
FUNDING	This research received no external funding.
COMPETING INTERESTS	The author declares no competing interests.
ETHICS APPROVAL	Not applicable. The study analyzed published literature and publicly available official statistics and involved no human participants or identifiable private data.

INFORMED CONSENT	Not applicable.
DATA AVAILABILITY	This study analyzes published literature and publicly available official statistics; no original participant data were collected. Exact search strings, query-level counts, screening arithmetic, included-record metadata, full-record exclusion reasons, and appraisal notes are supplied in the accompanying review supplement.
MATERIALS AND CODE AVAILABILITY	No software code was developed for this study. The review materials are described in the accompanying supplement.
USE OF GENERATIVE AI	Generative AI-assisted tools supported literature discovery, evidence organization, screening assistance, drafting, bibliographic cross-checking, and figure preparation. AI was not treated as an author or as an independent source of evidence. The human author retains responsibility for the research design, source claims, theological judgments, interpretation, and final publication.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	None.
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS	Review supplement containing exact search strings, query-level counts, screening arithmetic, included-record metadata, full-record exclusion reasons, and appraisal notes.

SCRIPTURE TRANSLATION. Biblical citations use the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) unless otherwise indicated; biblical passages are interpreted in literary and canonical context.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE. Open Journal of Business Theology is a title of Open Christian Press, a publishing imprint of Open Christian University and Center for Faith and Work. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

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