Journal of Business Ethics (2023) 183:947–962
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05067-4

ORIGINAL PAPER

'Whose Call?' The Conflict Between Tradition-Based and Expressivist Accounts of Calling

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Received: 31 May 2021 / Accepted: 4 February 2022 / Published online: 21 February 2022
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Abstract
Research evidencing the consequences of the experience of 'calling' have multiplied in recent years. At the same time, concerns have been expressed about the conceptual coherence of the notion as studies have posited a wide variety of senses in which both workers and scholars understand what it means for workers to be called, what they are called to do and who is doing the 'calling'. This paper makes both conceptual and empirical contributions to the field. We argue that Bellah et al.'s (Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life, University of California Press, 1996) contrast between tradition-based and expressivist understandings of 'calling' highlights a fundamental but neglected fissure in the literature. Expressivist accounts amongst both scholars and research participants require only that 'calling' be deeply felt by those who experience it. However, tradition-based accounts require an external caller. Exemplifying this, workers who attest to a divine call and scholars who write about 'calling' in the context of particular Christian traditions understand 'calling' in terms of a relationship with God. These accounts cannot but be in radical tension. We suggest that this conceptual confusion can be understood in terms of MacIntyre's notion of 'tradition-constituted rationality.' The implications of this argument for practice are evidenced in our report of a study of adherents to one such tradition, workers at a Christian organization that supports people in poverty. Through in-depth interviews with long-term volunteers, we seek to assess if tradition-based 'calling' can be evidenced in unpaid work for the lack of pay and career progression opportunities strongly suggest the presence of 'calling.' This study demonstrates that even in the context of work that exhibits duty and altruism associated with expressivist accounts of 'calling,' these workers' understanding of the relationships between themselves, their clients and Jesus Christ dominate their work choices. It is the meaning derived from a divine caller, understood in terms of Christian tradition, that accounts for their decision to begin and to continue this work.

Keywords Calling · Tradition · Expressivism · MacIntyre

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Introduction

Research evidencing the consequences of the experience of 'calling' have multiplied in recent years. At the same time, concerns have been expressed about the conceptual coherence of the notion (Bunderson & Thompson, 2019) and empirical studies have found a wide variety of senses in which workers understand what it means to be called, what they are called to do and who is doing the 'calling.' Guillen et al. (2015, p. 803) argue that "spiritual motivations" are "neglected" within this discourse and literature on business ethics more broadly. This paper seeks to address this gap by contributing to the literature on spiritually motivated 'calling.'

We report a study of the experience of spiritual 'calling' in unpaid work by providing empirical evidence from an

'extreme case' featuring volunteers working for a Christian charity where there are strong theoretical reasons suggesting that volunteers may be motivated by 'calling'. The workers attested to a relational account of being called to work with people in poverty by a divine caller. Interviews with long-term volunteers demonstrate that even in the context of work that exhibits the features of pro-social impact, challenge and duty, which have been associated with 'calling,' their understanding of the relationships between themselves, their clients and Jesus Christ dominate their work choices. It is the meaning derived from a divine call that accounts for their decision to begin and to continue this work.

In addition to novel empirics, this paper makes a conceptual contribution to aid analysis of the research literature itself. Bellah et al.'s (1996) foundational conceptualization held that those with a 'calling' participated in some version of tradition-constituted rationality (MacIntyre, 1988; Reames, 1998). Despite adopting Bellah et al.'s (1996) work orientation framework which distinguishes the 'calling' orientation from job and career orientations, contemporary usage has substituted an expressivist for a tradition-based for 'calling,' requiring only that those called find their work to be "a deep and meaningful necessity" (Cinque et al., 2020, p. 9). Expressivists understand 'calling' (alongside other normative and evaluative terms) as combining "descriptive and emotional meaning" (MacIntyre, 2016, p. 17) which requires no "authoritative standard, external to and independent of an agent's feelings, concerns, commitments and attitudes" (MacIntyre, 2016, p. 23). As recent research has demonstrated however, employees who understand themselves as participants in a tradition account for their 'calling' in terms provided by the rationality internal to that tradition e.g. Buddhist managers (Burton & Vu, 2020) and Quaker businesses (Burton & Sinnicks, 2021), whereas for the expressivist, deeply felt meaning is the only ground for such a claim. These conceptualizations cannot but be in radical tension with one another.

We proceed as follows. 'Calling—The Recent History of a Concept', outlines a series of transformations through which Bellah et al.'s (1996) precisive conceptualization of 'calling' has become the name of a minimally defined expressivist category. In 'Called to Combat Poverty', we present evidence of the centrality of a divine call that is believed to have been received by workers in a Christian organization in the United Kingdom. In 'Discussion', we argue that the contrast between conceptualizing 'calling' in expressivist terms and as a divine call can be understood through MacIntyre's notion of 'tradition-constituted rationality. The 'Conclusion' presents the paper's key theses and recommendations for future research.

Calling—The Recent History of a Concept

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, "usage frequency [of 'work as a calling' in the academic literature] nearly doubled" and the "the steepest rise appears to be in just the past decade" from 2009 to 2019, with usage frequency quadrupling (Bunderson & Thompson, 2019, p. 422). By 2011, Wrzesniewski (2011) had already claimed that "callings have stolen center stage in our imaginations as offering some sort of special gateway to fulfillment and meaning in work" (p. 45). Recent empirical work on 'calling' has been undertaken in diverse occupational settings including firefighters (Jo et al., 2018), school principals (Swen, 2020), hotel employees (Lee, 2016), theatrical artists (Cinque et al., 2020), chefs (Cain et al., 2018) and many others (Bunderson & Thompson, 2019).

The conceptual origin of this work goes back to 1985, with the publication of '*Habits of the Heart*', by Robert Bellah and his colleagues. Bellah et al.'s (1996) definition of 'work as a calling' "subsumes the self into a community of disciplined practice and sound judgment whose activity has meaning and value in itself, not just in the output or profit that results from it"[1] (p. 66). Such a definition is distinguished from "work as a job," whereby work merely becomes "a way of making money and making a living," (ibid) as well as "work as a career" whereby "work traces one's progress through life by achievement and advancement in an occupation" (ibid).

It is important at this point to note that Bellah et al. (1996) explicitly indicate that their framework for understanding 'calling' entails a MacIntyrean theory of practices and traditions that is not fully unpacked within *Habits of the Heart.* Instead, readers of Bellah et al.'s work who arrive at their account of 'calling' will find that they are directed to turn to MacIntyre's landmark work, *After Virtue.* Those familiar with that work will not miss the MacIntyrean terminology that Bellah et al. refer to in their paradigmatic example of the ballet dancer who embraces a 'calling' (ibid, p. 66).

This conceptualization rules out subjective accounts that do not meet its requirements for internal goods, disciplined practice, community, and intensity that "makes a person's work morally inseparable from his or her life" (ibid). Critical here is what Bellah et al. take to be the normative legislator of the moral objectives that are associated with one's 'calling.' Bellah et al.'s ballet dancer illustrates a tradition-based 'calling' which entails "habits and practices" that must be "handed down in a community based on a still-living tradition" (ibid). As Bellah et al. remind us, "the stories that make up a tradition contain conceptions of character, of what

[1] This paper is citing the second, 1996, edition of *Habits of the Heart*.

a good person is like, and of the virtues that define such character" (ibid, p. 153). Importantly, the habits, practices, and identity of the ballet dancer and her community are all linked to the living tradition of ballet and the ongoing narrative that it extends. In this way, the ballet dancer's reasoning about her 'calling' is tradition-based. She cannot understand her 'calling' (or even herself) apart from these resources that a key living tradition in her life provides because, as Bellah et al. say, "what we do often translates to what we are" (ibid, p. 66).

While Bellah et al.'s (1996) ballet dancer appears to be formed in light of the ongoing tradition of ballet, it also seems clear that her understanding of ballet as a 'calling' is shaped by the broader tradition of civic republicanism. This is evident in the way that Bellah et al. recount the dancer's motive to remain "devoted to an ill-paid art…so that the lives of the public may be enriched" through her performance (ibid, p. 66). The performance itself, then, appears to be motivated by the civic ideal of service to the community. This ideal, we should note, is inseparable from Bellah et al.'s argument that ballet, or any other 'calling' for that matter, "can never be merely private" (ibid). It always marks "a crucial link between the individual and the public world" (ibid).

Bellah et al. distinguish their precisive notion from other types of 'calling' attributions that make it "more difficult to see work as a contribution to the whole" (ibid). They argued that the widespread and misplaced attribution of 'calling' to explain work choices was epiphenomenal of "expressive" and "utilitarian" rationalities (ibid). Expressivist claims are described by Bellah et al. as centering around the "psychic rewards" (ibid) of being called while utilitarian claims involved a "segmental, self-interested" (ibid) commitment to "material rewards" (ibid).[2]

By contrast, Bellah et al. (1996) understood 'calling' to require allegiance to the moral and deliberative resources of a specific tradition for their justification, a condition which rules out expressivist accounts which deny any special status to such resources. On the expressivist account, we are called inasmuch as we strongly believe ourselves to have been (Cinque et al., 2020). The distinction between the expressivist teacher or doctor who believes themselves to be called to their practice and the adherent to a religious or civic tradition who believes themselves to be called to teaching or medicine by God or the nation is the type of justification that is required to attribute the term 'call' and its cognates.

In considering the American late twentieth century context, Bellah et al. (1996) identify two traditions that contribute to contemporary moral language—civic republicanism, which we have already seen applied, and the biblical tradition. Both traditions provide resources for and ongoing discourse about the nature of the 'caller' and what it means to be called. The biblical tradition considers normative demands as appropriate responses to God's goodness and the civic republican tradition vests normative demands in allegiance to the goods of community. The former attests to the "widely shared" element of "belief in God"—perceived as a divine caller who may call believers to particular forms of work or service (ibid, p. 333). The latter operates as a call from the community for "public participation as a form of moral education and sees its purposes as the attainment of *justice* and the *public good*" (ibid, p. 335).

In both cases, traditions supply resources that enable argument as to why we might be called to particular, good work and to deliberate with others about its requirements. In the case of the ballet dancer, the requirements of public service that are integral to civic republicanism justify a commitment to an art form that enriches "the lives of the public" (ibid, p. 66). This type of justification requires a framework within which practitioners can evaluate and debate the merit of particular projects. Cinque et al.'s (2020) study of Italian actors in poorly paid, marginal environments distinguishes those whose 'calling' involves what they describe as therapeutic identity work and those who emphasize religious and political commitments. Whilst the therapeutic self-understanding involves authenticity and self-knowledge, something that only they can determine, those with a political or religious orientation spoke in terms of responsibility to ongoing projects of political emancipation or service. This illustrates an important distinction, that adherents of a tradition can use its resources to deliberate in an action–guiding way about particular projects in a way that expressivists cannot.

Just over a decade following the publication of '*Habits of the Heart,*' empirical support for the differentiating effects of 'job', 'career' and 'calling' began with Wrzesniewski et al.,'s (1997) study, "Jobs, Careers, and Callings: People's Relations to Their Work." For this project, Wrzesniewski led a research team that set out to:

> present evidence suggesting that most people see their work as either a Job (focus on financial rewards and necessity rather than pleasure or fulfillment; not a major positive part of life), a Career (focus on advancement), or a Calling (focus on enjoyment of fulfilling, socially useful work). (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997, p. 21)

The familiarity of these names for work is intentional. After all, as Wrzesniewski acknowledges, "the inspiration

[2] Bellah et al. (1996) part from Bentham and Mill's conceptualization of utilitarianism in an interesting way. While these earlier thinkers developed a utilitarian philosophy against the background of promoting 'the greater good' of the *community*, Bellah et al. saw how the prosocial component of utilitarianism had collapsed, which resulted in a newly evolved utilitarian calculus that centered around the *individual's* greatest good.

for our approach came from *Habits of the Heart"* (ibid, p. 22). Being so inspired, her team developed three hypothetical 'work orientations': A, B, and C. Narratives about each hypothetical person's motivations for working accompanied their title and research participants were instructed to indicate which of the three narratives they most identified with. Wrzesniewski et al. designed A to align with the 'Job' orientation, B the 'Career' orientation, and C the 'Calling' orientation. Conclusions from the study have been widely cited and indicated that research participants have no problem identifying which of the three hypothetical workers best describes their own workplace motivations (ibid).

Wrzesniewski has maintained that her understanding of the 'calling' orientation, as distinct from a 'job' or a 'career,' is aligned with Bellah et al.'s account of 'calling,' and that, like the work orientation of Messrs. A, B, and C, these "three categories represent three different work orientations, which guide individuals' basic goals for working, capture beliefs about the role of work in life, and are reflected in work-related feelings and behaviors" (Wrzesniewski, 2011, p. 47). The problem is, Wrzesniewski changes Bellah et al.'s definition of 'work as a calling' within her seminal 1997 study to construe 'calling' primarily on the basis of an individual's perceived rewards, which Bellah et al. explicitly warn against. She does so while still claiming to remain faithful to Bellah et al.'s account of 'calling.' This is problematic precisely because the 1997 study often serves as an introduction to Bellah et al.'s three accounts of work for many who contribute to or read the interdisciplinary literature. Readers frequently understand Bellah et al.'s account of 'work as a calling' self-referentially, failing to see the concept in light of a combination of more prosocial rationalities advanced by Bellah et al.'s dependence on the biblical and civic traditions.

Wrzesniewski and her colleagues have thus created some confusion as to what the normative legislator of the moral objectives are for Bellah et al.'s account of 'calling.' After all, we find that Mr. C appears to be detached from either biblical or civic traditions and rather engages in a project of finding personally fulfilling and meaningful work, which appears to be nothing like the goal of Bellah et al.'s account of 'calling' that we find within *Habits of the Heart*. Wrzesniewski et al. describe Mr. C's 'calling' as follows:

> Mr. C's work is one of the most important parts of his life. He is very pleased that he is in this line of work. Because what he does for a living is a vital part of who he is, it is one of the first things he tells people about himself. He tends to take his work home with him and on vacations, too. The majority of his friends are from his place of employment, and he belongs to several organizations and clubs relating to his work. Mr. C feels good about his work because he loves it, and because he thinks it makes the world a better place. He would encourage his friends and children to enter his line of work. Mr. C would be pretty upset if he were forced to stop working, and he is not particularly looking forward to retirement. (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997, p. 24)

Mr. C understands his 'calling' in reference to his 'personal interests' and not in reference to tradition-based norms that mark his primary values or goals, as the ballet dancer does in Bellah et al.'s illustration. Mr. C's 'calling' is understood subjectively rather than communally and exhibits no clear relationship to a caller.[3] Furthermore, Mr. C's meaningful relationships do not appear to involve relationships with other adherents of a tradition—another point of departure from Bellah et al.'s example of the ballet dancer who is bound together in meaningful relation with others by a mutual adherence to the living tradition of ballet, construed pro-socially in light of the broader civic tradition. Instead, Mr. C appears to merely be pleased by his relationships with other agreeable persons in the office. In other areas of her research, Wrzesniewski admits that more work is needed to understand how ideas about 'work as a calling' exhibit the competing priorities of "helping others" versus "helping oneself," but what seems clear here is that Wrzesniewski maintains at least some shell of Bellah et al.'s (1996) view of 'calling' still remains apart from any civic aims resembling something like those which inform the ballet dancer and her community. So, what is perfectly clear within Bellah et al.'s account becomes mysterious on Wrzesniewski's, precisely the opposite of what we would want the development of a concept to achieve. Wrzesniewski et al.'s (1997) account obscures the idea that one's 'calling' can never merely be motivated by private interests. Rather, it must always link the individual's good with the common good under Bellah et al.'s (1996) view.[4]

Nonetheless, Wrzesniewski's work continues to provoke more research and further case studies on Bellah et al.'s concept of 'work as a calling.' The growth in publications and interest in the concept of 'calling' required other researchers to take up Wrzesniewski et al.'s (1997) call for further research. Vocational psychologists Dik and Duffy are the most regularly cited scholars within the interdisciplinary discourse on 'calling' with citations exceeding 7000 per a recent Google Scholar report. They formally define 'calling' as "[a] a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, [b] to approach a particular life role in a

[3] We would like to thank Dr. Christopher Lutz for his insight regarding the absence of any clear relationship to a caller in Wrzesniewski's paradigmatic example.

[4] We would like to thank Dr. Matthew Sinnicks for helping us to formulate what has become mysterious on Wrzesniewski's account.

manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that [c] holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation" (Dik & Duffy, 2012, p. 11). Unlike Wrzesniewski et al. (1997), Dik and Duffy's (2012) notion of 'summons' requires a relationship to an authoritative caller to whom recipients must respond; this also implies both that not all are summoned and that the summons may come at any time. Both of these conditions indicate that our own identity be understood in relation to what the summoner is and what they may require of us. To acknowledge that we may be summoned makes sense only to those whose self-understanding includes this relationship, not as an incidental or possible feature of our lives, but as a permanent and definitive feature of it.

Unlike Wrzesniewski's secular definition, Dik and Duffy's inclusion of 'transcendent summons' more closely resembles Bellah et al.'s understanding. However, their argument that this definition "intentionally leaves open the content of the perceived source or sources of callings, which may range from God to the needs of society to serendipitous fate" (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 427) contrasts markedly with Bellah et al.'s (1996) precisive definition. To base a claim for 'calling' on serendipity represents a variety of that very expressivism that Bellah et al.'s (1996) definition excludes. Serendipity requires a degree of reflexivity but does not require the acceptance of normative demands originating beyond the self. In a more recent paper, Dik and Duffy again emphasize that "identifying the source of a summons externally is often now thought of as the exception rather than the rule" (Duffy et al., 2014, p. 564).

It is notable that when writing for a Christian audience, Dik adheres to the Biblical notion of 'transcendent summons' and makes no mention of serendipity. In his '*Redeeming Work: A Guide to Discovering God's Calling for Your Career*' Dik much more narrowly speaks of a 'transcendent summons' as a divine call from God to particular work, arguing that the book itself "walks you through how you can discern and live God's calling within your career path" (2020, p. 24). In work drawing on the resources of a specific tradition, concepts need not be expanded to enable application beyond that tradition, for example to a notion of serendipity that has no place in the Biblical worldview. Bellah et al.'s (1996) insistence that the attribution of 'calling' requires the resources of a specific tradition for its justification finds further support in Bunderson and Thompson's highly cited research.

Bunderson and Thompson join Dik and Duffy in their critique of the modern, predominantly self-seeking notions of 'work as a calling.' They argue:

> Whereas classical views of 'calling' may have emphasized destiny, duty, and discovery, modern conceptualizations - in line with our modern emphasis on expressive individualism - reflect an emphasis on self-expression and self-fulfillment. Under this view, 'callings' are expressions of internal passions and interests and are pursued for the enjoyment and fulfillment they can bring and not out of any sense of societal duty or obligation. (Bunderson & Thompson, 2019, p. 430)

Bunderson and Thompson suggest that the increasingly popular 'work as a calling' literature grounds the meaning of one's 'calling' in one's passions and interests, or in one's preferences. When 'callings' are reduced to 'internal' passions, then there is no 'external' moral source to point to, which implies a divorce between the caller and the called. Consequently, meaning is not understood in light of some 'transcendent summons' to a specific 'calling' that contributes to the good of individual lives and communities, but rather in light of what pleases workers—or in light of what workers think will make them happy.

To resolve this conundrum, Bunderson and Thompson propose that one's 'calling' "is a conviction—often felt as a sense of destiny or fit—that a particular domain of work leverages one's particular gifts and consuming passions in service of a cause or purpose beyond self-interest" (2019, p. 432), a description which "integrates outer requiredness (as per neoclassical definitions) with inner requiredness (as per modern definitions)" (ibid) in the hope of reaching a "solution to the definitional stalemate in the calling literature" (ibid). The very possibility of such a definition sets them at odds with Bellah et al.'s (1996) understanding of the tradition dependence of attempts to justify any claim that an agent may make to have responded to a 'calling.' Insofar as modern notions of passion root a sense of meaning in the therapeutic fulfillment of one's preferences, these notions are antithetical to Bunderson and Thompson's vision. This becomes evident when, alongside Dik, we note that Bunderson and Thompson's work on 'calling' presupposes distinctly Biblical premises when addressing a Christian audience. Their latest book '*The Zookeeper's Secret: Finding Your Calling In Life*' (Bunderson & Thompson, 2018) is thoroughly contextualized within the Mormon tradition. They argue here that their understanding is:

> a product of our study of scriptural teachings and gospel principles as they relate to work and its place in a disciple's life. We have found that the restored gospel of Jesus Christ has a great deal to teach about finding your calling in life. In fact, just as we believe that the greatest wellsprings of family happiness flow through those who center their lives on the Savior's teachings, we testify that the greatest fulfillment from work is only available when you build your career path on Jesus Christ's gospel. (Bunderson & Thompson, 2018, p. 127)

Unlike their 2019 argument for a definition of 'calling' that reconciles neoclassical and modern understandings, their 2018 work sits firmly within the former. The worker responds to a divine caller not because their call stimulates a response to inner passions but rather because the identification of the call with a divine caller requires no other response.

Bellah et al. (1996) presented a precisive account of 'calling' which explicitly excluded expressivist and utilitarian notions. With rare exceptions such as McPherson (2012), Burton and Vu (2020), and Vu (2020) who contextualized 'calling' and meaningful work within specific moral and religious traditions, most subsequent researchers have extended their understandings so that it requires only the experience of being called (Cinque et al., 2020), and thereby include expressivist interpretations. By contrast, Bellah et al. (1996) argued that only a precisive definition could be coherent with distinct traditions that both inform the notion of 'calling' and require their adherents to respond. Once the caller is identified—God in the Biblical tradition, the Nation in civic republicanism—then the call requires a response. It is the relationship between the caller and the called that is necessary. This relational notion is conceptually and theoretically distinct from the expressivist understanding in which 'calling' describes an experience, for an experience—whether of serendipity or of inner passion—does not carry with it the moral urgency of responding to a call from God or the nation, nor is it available for the type of dialogue that adherents to a tradition might engage in to evaluate projects in light of their 'calling.' Such was Bellah et al.'s (1996) argument and conceptualization.

This literature review argues for the first time that later scholars have misconstrued Bellah et al.'s (1996) 'calling' framework, showing that there is dissonance between the modern, expressivist conceptions of 'calling', such as that proposed by Wrzesniewski et al. (1997), and what Bellah et al. (1996) originally meant by the notion. The expressivist understanding detaches 'calling' from tradition and is evident in countless studies, even in those which speak of a call from God such as the work of Dik and Duffy or Bunderson and Thompson as we have shown. In order to illustrate the distinctiveness of 'calling,' understood as Bellah and his colleagues understood it, Sect. 2 demonstrates what the tradition-based notion of 'calling' can look like in practice by providing evidence from a context in which work that combines many of the elements commonly found to be associated with 'calling'—autonomy, challenge, prosocial outcomes and feedback—is undertaken by research participants who are practicing Christians. If we wish to better grasp the experience of a divine call for the person of faith, we should especially consider those cases where it seems clear that the integral relationship between the divine caller and the called has not been broken. It is toward the establishment of a method for carrying out research on this experience and its deeply motivating and meaningful nature that we now turn.

Called to Combat Poverty

As mentioned, this research demonstrates what the tradition-based notion of 'calling', as understood by Bellah et al. (1996), can look like in practice by investigating if spiritual 'calling', that is to be called by God, can be evidenced in the context of unpaid work. We therefore provide contributions towards two gaps in the 'work as a calling' literature. Firstly, we present evidence of spiritual 'calling' from the context of a specific tradition, as Bellah et al. intended. Secondly, our research focuses on unpaid rather than paid workers, which most of the empirical work surrounding 'work as a calling' concerns.

If Bellah et al.'s (1996) argument that moral justification employing the resources of some distinct tradition is an ineliminable feature of 'calling,' its examination requires both an appropriate context and an interpretivist (Pulla & Carter, 2018) approach to the analysis of qualitative data. Our data collection involved four semi-structured interviews with long-standing volunteers in the context of a Christian charity combatting poverty in the United Kingdom.[5] Rather than producing generalizable findings it is important to provide a rich account for which a small number of key informants is sufficient (Saunders & Townsend, 2016), for the purpose of this paper is to provide an example of where workers' sense of 'calling' is clearly tradition-based to illustrate our theoretical arguments, not to form arguments based on the empirical data alone. The first-named author, who had worked in the organization though not with the research participants in this study, supplemented a consistent set of interview questions with active listening to prompt participants when she judged necessary and to elicit their rationales for joining and continuing to serve. In particular, she sought to explore the relationship between faith and their directedness towards work.

At the time of data collection (February 2018), the participants had occupied their roles for between two and eight years. All volunteers were by chance female, two were aged 65+, one was in the 51–64 category and the fourth 41–50. Participants were chosen on the basis that they were Debt Help Managers, Debt Help Coaches or Group Work Managers (for these positions involve greater responsibility than Group Work Coaches), had conducted their role for a minimum of one year thus demonstrating long-term commitment to the work, and worked voluntarily.

[5] We have masked the organization's identity at its request.

Table 1 Semi-structured interview questions

Why did you initially join the organization?
Why do you continue to work for the organization?
What does the work involve?
What do you like about the work?
What do you find challenging about the work?
If you could change anything about the work, what would it be?
How long do you expect to be in the role?
What would cause you to stop volunteering?

Identifying participants for these semi-structured interviews required assistance from a gatekeeper known to the first-named author. Participants were initially approached via email and interviews took place for around one hour in a location of the participant's choice to encourage receptivity. Interviews were recorded for accuracy and then later transcribed, facilitating analysis.

Semi-structured interviews boast flexibility, permitting the interview to follow the natural flow of conversation, while also allowing for detailed responses that help to develop a holistic picture (O'Leary, 2017). While initial questions are intended to frame the conversation, this opportunity to probe also allows researchers to deepen the most relevant responses (Fisher & Kirby, 2014; Rowley, 2012). Semi-structured interviews help to develop a rich picture of the workers' structures of consciousness, beliefs, and intentions.

Interview questions (see Table 1) were crafted based on ideas from the relevant literature. For example, the question of what the participants would change about their work relates to Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) theory of job crafting, and questioning what would cause the volunteers to leave their role emulates Bunderson and Thompson's (2009) findings that the zoo-keepers who viewed their work as a 'calling' would continue their work unpaid if the situation dictates, signifying low intentions to resign. The interviewer avoided asking direct questions relating to meaningfulness and 'calling,' instead opting for open, non-leading questions allowing the participants to share from their own perspective (Hennink et al., 2020). Additional probes were given where the interviewer sought further detail or clarification on specific topics which arose in the participant's response (ibid) such as evangelism or the influence of God in their decisions, eliciting an enhanced rationale for their choices to enable the researcher to assess the tradition-dependence of the participant's account.

This paper was produced using research from the dissertations of two of the authors. The data was analyzed using King's (2012) template analysis which provides a flexible approach to hierarchical coding, allowing templates to be adapted to the needs of a particular study (Brooks et al., 2015). Template analysis is popular in various disciplines including organizational studies and has also been used in recent articles on meaningful work (e.g. Vu & Burton, 2021). Two rounds of analysis were undertaken on each interview transcript, allowing themes to emerge. This analysis revealed that the workers found meaning in their work from several sources and for various reasons (such as the workers' previous experience and the opportunity to lead other team members), these formed the initial themes, all of which were connected to the volunteers' relationship with Jesus Christ and their experience of 'calling'. This paper largely makes use of power quotes (Pratt, 2009) for the purpose of space.

In addition to our research subjects experience of receiving a divine call, we should also note one other crucial way that our research differs from the existent literature on 'work as a calling.' While the interdisciplinary literature tends to examine the experience of 'calling' amongst paid employees, there is much less literature focusing on volunteers. We find this surprising, especially considering that unpaid work clearly fell into Bellah et al.'s (1996, p. 88 and elsewhere) notion of 'calling.' Subsequently, Tipton (2018), who originally drafted the section on 'calling' within *Habits of the Heart* has continued to write about the applicability of this orientation to volunteer contexts, particularly in his discussion of those who extend, or "re-create" their true 'callings' in retirement. He argues that, whether for pay or not, there is "no release from such a call" as that which the civic and biblical traditions outlined to continually "learn to serve the good…through deliberation and discipline, and to come to rule oneself in order to rule and be ruled justly" (Tipton, 2018, p. 182). Before or during retirement, Tipton claims that volunteer work construed as a 'calling' provides a morally meaningful way for individuals to have a hand in "enlivening the common good" (Tipton, 2018, p. 65). As we intend to show in what follows, doing work "that matters" in this way, so Tipton also states, "abounds in religious and civic groups" (Tipton, 2018, pp. 64–65). Our analysis of voluntary staff members, all of whom align with some denomination of Christianity, addresses this gap.[6]

In previous centuries, theorists have largely distinguished between paid employment and domestic work, believing that paid employment exists in the public sphere and domestic work in the private (Taylor, 2004). This is thought to be because this dichotomy aligns with the perceived gender stereotypes of that time (ibid), yet this distinction fails to address volunteering and other new forms of work such as zero-hours contracts and unpaid internships (Kelemen et al., 2017). Other scholars have perceived volunteering to be a

[6] We would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers who suggested the need to expand our argument here.

leisure activity rather than work because it is something individuals *choose* to do rather than *must* do, though Overgaard (2019) highlights that this view has lost ground. Implicit in arguments against conceptualizing volunteering as work is the view that work is reducible to employment, which is certainly not the case (Taylor, 2004).

More recently, Overgaard (2019, p. 129) and others have argued that volunteering should come to be understood as unpaid work, for it is "in fact and before all else, unpaid labour." By this, Overgaard is not saying that all volunteering should be considered work for we need to refrain from thinking of volunteering as one form of activity, instead we should focus on the content. She claims, "when the same tasks take place under highly structured terms, in the same physical settings and alongside paid staff, under similar managements, and with economic and service-level gains for the organizations, we *must* recognize it as work" (ibid, p. 133).

The charity featured in this study does not employ any of its frontline staff members. It operates its services in partnership with local churches who pay a fee to the organization in exchange for the resources provided by the head office team. The services are largely led by members of the church funding the service. Frontline staff members are approved and managed by head office employees and whilst no frontline workers are paid by the organization, many, though not all, are paid by the church. Both paid and unpaid individuals conduct the same work, furthermore the organization provides the same support and has the same expectations of all frontline staff members. It cannot then be the case that for paid frontline staff members, the work can indeed be labelled as work, but not for unpaid members when their roles are identical.

Why then focus on volunteers rather than paid employees? Whilst paid workers can and do indeed view their work as a 'calling', volunteer work has been labelled "exceptionally meaningful" (Florian et al., 2019, p. 595) and so such an extreme case makes a novel contribution to this literature. Extreme cases have been argued to provide greater insights than a typical case, as in extreme cases the phenomenon in question is more intensely visible (Buchanan, 2012; Flyvbjerg, 2006). It is in populations of working volunteers that we have theoretical reasons to anticipate the presence of those who, unmotivated by money, might have experienced a 'calling.'

Our participants turned out to be particularly articulate about understanding their work as a 'calling' and experiencing a call from a divine caller. Each of them attested to the experience of a divine 'calling' and attributed their decisions to join, remain and continue working for the charity to this call. Neither the benefits that their work generated for clients who routinely suffered from poverty nor the autonomy and challenge that their work presented daily provided sufficient reason for them to continue to volunteer. Only their relationship with Jesus Christ provided the rationale for their continued commitment. We shall present responses from each of these four study participants, but first, it is necessary to describe the organizational setting, its clients, and the typical work that volunteers undertake.

The organization is a multinational charity that tackles debt, poverty, and their causes. It also works with clients on emotional and mental health issues, features that are not often found in debt-counselling charities and agencies more broadly. Established in the 1990s, the organization spans several countries, our research was undertaken in the United Kingdom. The organization offers four services: debt counseling, employment support, addiction relief, and life skills.[7]

As previously mentioned, the organization works in partnership with local churches, running hundreds of centers across the country. Client-facing work is undertaken by highly trained frontline staff members and the role of such workers is to aid clients in debt-relief, lead them in finding freedom from addiction, assist them in finding work, and help them to develop important life skills. With neither pay nor the possibility of career progression, it is clear this falls outside Bellah et al.'s (1996) understanding of 'work as a job' and 'work as a career.'

For each participant, the experience of a divine 'calling' did not involve hearing a message from God, but rather a belief that only God could have brought about the opportunity to volunteer with the charity, and that God had been spiritually and practically preparing them for the role. This resulted in a strong conviction to undertake the work.

Volunteer 1 describes this first-hand experience of receiving a call from God in the following way. She recounts, with a sense of God's providence, that the new church she was visiting close to her home was hosting an event to introduce the work of the charity. She believed her experience as a teacher and a career guidance counselor prepared her for the frontline volunteer role—specifically that of Employment Support Manager. "It just sort of seemed as if everything from my past and my experience came together," she said. Volunteer 1 went on to discuss how "it really did feel that God was using opportunities or experiences that I had had and all the training I'd had to open it up so that we could still be doing something useful in our old age." Hence when the question was posed as to whether she felt that God created the opportunity for her, she responded with a resounding, "Oh yes."

Similarly, Volunteer 2 recounted how the experiences she had earlier in his career prepared her for what God needed her to do as a Debt Help Manager for the charity. She explains how her past prepared her in the following way:

[7] Service names and job titles have also been anonymised to prevent organization identification.

> I used to be an occupational therapist, so I'm used to dealing with visiting people in their own homes, often in absolutely dire circumstances, and I'm pretty good at any sort of people, I'm good at working with disadvantaged people and I can relate to sort of service providers and I worked for a charity that supports people who care for someone at home for ten years, and so that was meeting people in crisis, dealing with service providers, and doing that sort of thing.

Volunteer 2 went on to discuss that, while reading through the book of Philippians, she began to sense a divine call to give back in a way that her career had been preparing her for, and so when the opportunity opened up, she said it seemed as if "it kind of fell into place and I kind of feel now, and this just came out the other day, that it's almost like what I do with [name of organization] is like a combination of everything else I've ever done, as if everything has been leading me to that." So, when asked whether she believed that God played a part in her initial engagement with the charity, she responded with assurance, "Absolutely."

Volunteer 3 also recounted a divine call and the belief that God had been preparing her for this work. Serving in the capacity of an Addiction Relief Manager, she recalled how through her experience with addicts as a health professional, God had prepared her for this role. Believing that the important healing component of spirituality was largely missing from her work in the British National Health Service, she wanted to serve an organization with a similar set of objectives, but that took "God's healing touch" seriously. Volunteer 3 recalled that her initial interest in the charity "was something God initiated!" "It was something He very much put on my heart and I took to the leaders to tell them about it, and we went forward together," she said. Volunteer 3 spoke with enthusiasm about the sense of emotional 'calling' from God that drew her "heart" to the work of the charity.

Similar to the emotional experience of a call from God recounted by Volunteer 3, Volunteer 4 also spoke of a call to serve in the capacity of a Debt Help Coach. She described this as both an "emotional" and "faith-based decision," implying that the emotions that came up for her were connected to the faith-based nature of the decision she realized she needed to make. Much like the other volunteers, Volunteer 4 also strongly emphasized her belief that, while persons without faith in God might very well be able to "do the financial bit" of her role and also "emotionally connect" with individuals served by the charity, it was the relationship that she and others had with God that allowed them to "bring an extra dimension" to the lives of those that they felt strongly called to serve. She stated that this vertical dimension of volunteers' work enables them to "fill a space," or a spiritual void, for people—a void that only God was capable of filling in the lives of those she felt called to help, too. Volunteer 4 explains this in the following way:

> I think as people of faith we can give them hope for the future. It [faith in God] gives [those being served] a wider sense of living, that their lives can change, not just on the outside but on the inside, and I think, yeah, people [without faith in God] could do it, but I don't think they could do it where they could see that [similar] sort of change [as people with faith in God have seen].

Providing individuals with a wider sense of living and connecting on matters of spiritual importance enables Volunteer 4 to foster deep connections with those whom she serves. These deeper connections that she attributes to her faith gives her relationships a kind of long-lasting "momentum." "I've got clients who I still connect with from eight years ago who I have coffee with," she said. It's this belief in the spiritual transformation of a life through an encounter with God that inspires her and others to say, when they come alongside those they serve, "We are a Christian charity. We believe that God can change things for you." Clearly, Volunteer 4, much like the other three volunteers, attributes the personal transformation stories that she partakes in to the same God that called her to serve.

Each of these four volunteers described a divine call to their work, believing that it is God who drew them to the work, prepared them for the work, and continues to sustain them in the work that they do, allowing them to provide the fullest possible support to those whom they serve. It is clear that their accounts explicitly entail a preservation of the important connection between the divine caller and the called.

Each of the volunteers attested to the belief that they would not be able to deliver the same quality of service apart from a strength they exhibit as a result of their divine call to serve. What we shall go on to see is that these volunteers derive a great amount of both stamina and meaning from their enduring call to serve in the unique ways that they believe God has, by His grace, both practically prepared them and naturally gifted them. Even when the work gets difficult, these volunteers are reminded of and highly motivated by the higher spiritual purpose of their work, believing that God graces them with an endurance they would not otherwise naturally possess. This provision stems from their divine call to serve and gives them the strength to carry out their responsibilities, even when they are tempted to give up.[8] In this sense, the motivation appears to derive not so

[8] On this view, a divine 'calling' is not a one-off event but a continual outpouring of God's grace that allows the volunteers to continue to persist through the challenges they are faced with over time. The notion of grace is not at home in secular traditions which again notes

much from the 'calling' as the caller. The prominence of God is a consistent theme within theistic traditions such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam, even to the extent of martyrdom. Johnson and Zurlo (2014, p. 683) claim "the motivations of the killed" are a defining factor of martyrdom, it is a martyr's refusal to deny their beliefs that often leads to their death.

Volunteer 1 described her enduring commitment to the charity by telling a story intended to illustrate the ways in which God has worked through her prayers to both enrich others' lives and keep her motivated when the going gets tough:

> We've just had a really good encouraging twelve months with what we're doing. The [employment support service], part of it has been a bit up and down for various reasons which we might come onto later, but we've seen people coming into work, finding work, we've seen God answering prayers, I just remember one lady who was a bit iffy about the whole thing and when I was doing a session, a one-to-one session talking about her particular situation and I said well you know, would you like me to pray for you for anything specific and she said 'oh yeah … I want a job and it's got to have this, this and this.' Very, very specific. There were about four or five different things. So, we prayed, and she sort of waltzed up the next week and said, 'I've got a job, and it's got this. Do you remember we prayed it had to have this, this, and this?' And I couldn't even remember all the criteria that she put there, but it was just phenomenal the way God had answered that prayer… It's made a big difference in her life and so, you know, little incidents like that are what keep you going and you think yeah, this is it.

Herein, Volunteer 1 explains that the circumstances over the last 12 months of service had "been a bit up and down," but that God gave her the determination to stick with the work during moments of despondency. She later went on to describe a primary source of her despondency, saying "because of me and the way I operate, I do find some of the contacts with external agencies quite challenging because it can be difficult … getting the message [of the charity] across." At times, Volunteer 1 admits, the boredom expressed by members of these external agencies wears on her, leaving her feeling downtrodden. This is especially the case when she all-too-often encounters external agency workers who don't exhibit a sense of 'calling' to their work, but rather seem to have an "I've just got to get through this" look on their face when it comes to the services that they are instructed to provide by their organization.

Nonetheless, seeing the ways that God has answered Volunteer 1's detailed prayers for those whom she serves gives her the stamina to "keep going." Despite the fact that not everyone with whom the charity partners always believes in its mission and values, Volunteer 1 exhibits a belief that God regularly shows her the way her 'calling' for her life as an Employment Support Manager is making a difference. It is the revealed "aspects of actually seeing people's lives change and seeing people blossom", particularly when she sees God answering prayer and moving in the client's life through her work, that causes Volunteer 1 to remain motivated in her role and derive a great amount of meaning from it.

For Volunteer 1, it is "the opportunity to spend a lot more time with people, it's not just ticking boxes and getting through [the journey out of debt], it's spending time with them, sharing your story and being able to share the gospel if it's appropriate and when it's appropriate" that makes the greatest difference for the client. For this reason, she holds the role could not be occupied by someone outside of the Christian faith or indeed, it could be said, who will not respond to Christ's call to "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16 v 15, English Standard Version).

Volunteer 2 believes that it is her clear and personal experience of a 'calling' to this work that marks the key difference in her commitment during seemingly impossible situations. Volunteer 2 spoke with some astonishment about the fact that she has even remained committed to the charity for this long. For example, recounting "such a huge uphill struggle" when she almost resigned for good "twice over Christmas, because of a most horrendous first client," Volunteer 2 remembers thinking to herself, "I'll never be able to do this, I can't do it, I just cannot do it." In past workplace environments, Volunteer 2 remembers feeling similarly and actually leaving these other roles to find new work. "I've never really enjoyed my jobs, you know. When I was working as an occupational therapist, I never really felt that it was a 'calling' in that sense." But this work has been different for Volunteer 2 because she derives a great amount of meaning from seeing people's lives change, mostly by "seeing people's lives completely transformed by giving their lives to Jesus" and being able to equip other volunteers to help bring about this life change. In particular, she highlights the enjoyment of "empowering other people and putting them on a pedestal" by providing fellow volunteers with the opportunity to evangelize, allowing them to disciple a client new to faith or be "the eyes and the ears…to pick up whether God wants to say something to this client" during a visit.

Both a recognition of her 'calling' to the work and her belief "in the ethos of what [the organization] does" gives Volunteer 2 a kind of stamina that she finds unusual based

Footnote 8 (continued)

how 'calling' is understood differently by Biblical and secular traditions. We thank Dr. Chris Lutz for highlighting this.

on her recent difficulties settling into previous job roles. In her current role with the organization, she remembers thinking, "I didn't want to let this girl and these clients down, and I suppose as well I didn't want to let it beat me." Having left several "bit jobs" and other volunteer posts in the past towards which she did not sense any real 'calling,' she now finds within herself a desire "to work really hard at the budget visits" and other aspects of her role that challenge her. Because of these challenges, Volunteer 2 says that "every six months or so I just think I can't do this anymore, really can't do it anymore," but then *six more months* of volunteering with the charity seem to pass right by, surprisingly. Whilst she appears to still be conscious of the fact that this 'calling' may not last forever, she exhibits a great degree of stamina and derives meaning from "seeing people's lives completely transformed by giving their lives to Jesus…and seeing people grow in confidence and also go debt free." Much like Volunteer 1, the workings of what Volunteer 2 attributes to God's grace in her life and the lives of those she both serves and volunteers with keeps her motivated each time she feels she is at the end of her wit.

This theme of struggle with clients who exhibit a certain degree of dysfunction appears to be common to all of the volunteers who were interviewed, but answering the caller and seeing "God working," seeing people "become Christians," seeing "people walking free from gambling and alcohol and becoming part of the community by starting to serve within the church" are all recurring and deeply meaningful experiences that keep Volunteer 3 motivated, too. Due to these signs of transformation, Volunteer 3 endures the difficulties because, "when it's tough, I know God's called me to do it," she says. Volunteer 3 also derives a great amount of meaning from her encouraging community of fellow volunteers and Christian believers. She recounted that "there's been some quite clear words spoken over me over the years about that ['calling' to serve with the charity], so, yeah, that's always something to fall back on when it's tough." Because of the difficulties that she believes she couldn't face within her role apart from God's grace, she believes that although the course itself could be run by "anybody of any faith and no faith" to attend, "to really make it effective you need that extra spiritual dynamic."

To be clear, Volunteer 3 does not embrace just any general view of reliance upon some abstract idea of higher power, which might merely be thought to create some sort of positive placebo effect in her life and others. Rather, she says that "Jesus is that higher power and he's the one that keeps us going and can do that inner healing we can't actually do, or we could maybe trick ourselves into thinking we can do, but I don't think that lasts really." Her meaning and motivation clearly stems from the ways that she sees God, rather than something like serendipity, speaking into her life through other believers and using her as a vessel for positive change.

Like the other volunteers, Volunteer 4 also said that aspects of her work pushed her "completely out of [her] comfort zone." However, seeing her work as a 'calling' and remaining conscious of the ways that God is using her, too, Volunteer 4 is willing to stretch herself. While this personal and spiritual growth can be challenging at times, she derives a great degree of meaning from her work as a Debt Help Coach. As she said, "I just like being with other people and I like seeing them change, you know. I like seeing people who once would only speak to me through a letterbox now out and about in the community on their bikes." That being said, Volunteer 4 was very transparent about the despondency that still sneaks up on her, and she particularly dislikes "having to go backwards and forwards" with clients on paperwork which makes work/life balance difficult. "If you don't switch your [organization name] phone off, people do start speaking to you all day every day," she says. "There's always the challenge of margins in your life, you know—how much margin have you got for your family, how much margin have you got for yourself?" Still, her divine 'calling' to the work has kept her motivated for eight years, and as a result, she believes that she may be able to go until "70, but who knows!" Like the other volunteers, Volunteer 4 observes the ways that the same faith which gives her an uncanny degree of stamina also transforms the lives of those whom she serves. It is the experience of sticking beside people that God has called her to serve for the sometimes-slow process of change, and being a witness to it, that Volunteer 4 finds to be the most meaningful aspects of her work. "You see some really interesting people, there's real, interesting, and difficult circumstances that change," she says.

Findings from the semi-structured interviews furnish us with a deeper understanding of how the experience of a divine 'calling' can motivate volunteers working for this charity to persevere through the challenges such work brings. While they can derive self-realization and provide a service to others partly without this call, participants' perception of the role's difficulty suggests that personal fulfilment and a desire to help others are insufficient sources of motivation by themselves. Despite short or sometimes long periods of despondency, each volunteer seems conscious of an endurance that they are graced with by God, and carrying out this work that He would have them do for the common good is the most meaningful aspect of each volunteers' 'calling' and their lives more broadly.

Discussion

Volunteers for the charity present clear examples of responding to a divine 'calling.' Each of them interpreted circumstances in terms of divine planning and once it became

clear to them that God had prepared them for the task, they (albeit sometimes reluctantly) obliged. It is evident that the workers' conception of 'calling' does not align with the expressivist view, including Dik and Duffy's 'transcendent summons' and Bunderson and Thompson's 'classical view,' rather it draws on the resources, the language and beliefs, of the (broadly understood) Christian tradition. Note immediately the contrast between the volunteers' accounts and discussions of serendipity in the extant literature. The characterization of circumstances as being serendipitous provides the secular agent with an account of the conflation of circumstances that the believer not only can but must interpret as divine plan. Even at the level of the characterization of circumstances the tradition-dependence of interpretation is clear, as Bellah et al. (1996) argued.

It should be remembered that Bellah et al. (1996) were strongly influenced by and regularly met with the moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre during the writing of *Habits of the Heart*. MacIntyre's influence is referenced within the preface and multiple footnotes of *Habits of the Heart.* It remains most evident in Bellah et al.'s employment of terminology from his corpus, such as 'practices,' 'narratives,' 'traditions,' 'moral communities,' and so on (ibid). Furthermore, in a public address promoting the release of *Habits of the Heart,* Bellah (1986) made it clear that this connection was not intended to be a secret when he reflected on "one of the principal arguments of *Habits* as a whole, namely, some of the thinking of Alasdair MacIntyre, particularly as it's expressed in his book, *After Virtue*" (p. 5).

MacIntyre was present for many "research meetings" where he provided "suggestions" that went on to become the normative framework for Bellah et al.'s definition of 'calling' (Bellah et al., 1996, p. xlvi). It is within their account of 'work as a calling', in Chapter 3 of *Habits of the Heart,* that all the aforementioned terminology from MacIntyre's corpus appears. This happens alongside the tenth footnote of the chapter, which points readers to Chapter 10 of *After Virtue,* wherein MacIntyre states that morality "is always to some degree tied to the socially local" (MacIntyre 1981, p. 130). Bellah et al. (1996) presented the traditions of utilitarian and expressivist individualism, of civic republicanism, and the biblical tradition in just this sense within the history of the United States.

During the period while Bellah et al. were drafting their first edition of *Habits of the Heart*, MacIntyre was working on the sequel to *After Virtue* (1981), the text that was to become *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988). With this text, a concept of tradition that was predominantly deployed as a sociological category in *After Virtue* (1981) became epistemological but it was no less consistent with Bellah et al.'s (1996) *Habits of the Heart* for that. The central argument of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988) was that there was no independent rationality that could enable reasoners to make definitive judgments between the claims of rival traditions. What appears rational in one tradition may and often does conflict with the rationality of another, for example attributing a patterned confluence of circumstances to pure chance appears to another, such as our participants, to involve a denial of God's active participation in their lives. The resources of traditions provide us not only with a stock of characterizations—for action, time, circumstances—as we have seen, but also for our evaluative procedures, those that require us to respond if we believe God has called us to do so or those that require us to undertake an investment appraisal or a risk analysis. On MacIntyre's (1988) account, such procedures depend for their coherence on wider sets of connected beliefs that justify the decision procedures and thereby the decisions that result.

Although MacIntyre has not engaged explicitly with the traditions that were highlighted in *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al., 1996), he has illustrated debates and personal conversions between traditions in a variety of contexts including the Catholic tradition (MacIntyre, 2009), the Scottish Enlightenment (MacIntyre, 1988), phenomenology (MacIntyre, 2006) and Modern Morality (MacIntyre, 2016). In the latter text he engaged with the concept of 'vocation', which parallels that of 'calling' (McPherson, 2012), in narratives about Vasily Grossman and Denis Faul's quest to flourish as independent practical reasoners (MacIntyre, 2016, pp. 264 and 298). Much like Bellah et al., MacIntyre describes how tradition-based "practical reasoning" is learned via one's 'vocation' and how it sustains human lives, such as Grossman's "ruthlessly truthful self-questioning" (ibid, p. 264). His "vocation as a writer…directed his actions toward the ends mandated by this task" (ibid). The pursuit of those ends associated with his 'vocation,' so MacIntyre says, "gave finality to his life" in ways that the "modern sense" of happiness fails to recognize "but in fact *eudaimon"* captures quite well (ibid). Despite Grossman dying an unhappy man by all modern standards, "what was crucial was his now unwavering commitment to a task that gave point and purpose to everything in his life" (ibid).

Like Grossman, MacIntyre also describes Faul as someone who exhibited a clear sense of calling. "Faul was only nine years old when he decided that he had a vocation for the priesthood, and in this intention, he never wavered" (ibid, p. 298). He submitted himself fully to this practice, and "the reasoning that found expression in his everyday life took its beginning from premises about what both natural and divine law prescribed and permitted for someone such as himself" (ibid). MacIntyre earlier featured the relationship between divine calling and particular types of work in noting Edith Stein's discovery that God can be worshipped through scholarship (MacIntyre, 2006, p. 177). In introducing a chapter on conversions, he argues further that it is a misconception that "to be converted to some particular form of belief in

the God of the great theistic religions is necessarily to move beyond reason and perhaps against reason" (MacIntyre, 2006, p. 143).

Rather, on MacIntyre's account, to deploy any language of decision is to draw on the resources of traditions, more or less coherently. Those who have attempted to develop a tradition-independent definition of 'calling' (e.g. Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), one that could accommodate both God and serendipity (Dik & Duffy, 2009), or both outer and inner requiredness (Bunderson & Thompson, 2019) are at a greater distance from Bellah et al.'s (1996) conceptualization of 'calling' than they may perceive. On MacIntyre's account:

> There is no standing ground, no place for enquiry, no way to engage in the practices of advancing evaluating, accepting and rejecting reasoned argument apart from that which is provided by some tradition or other. (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 350)

In light of the notion of tradition-constituted rationality, it is no surprise then that both Dik (2020) and Bunderson and Thompson (2018) provide evidence of writing in such different terms about 'calling' for Christian and secular readers. Our participants demonstrate adherence to Biblical rationality by characterizing their decision to work for the charity as the result of divine 'calling,' by their belief in the power of prayer to explain client outcomes, and of the practical verifications of this call that both keep them motivated to endure the difficult aspects of their work and allow them to find deep meaning in work that brings themselves and others closer to Jesus Christ.

How does the argument and evidence of this paper in respect of a divine call and its connection to the experience of workers who find their roles deeply meaningful, differ from the self-understanding exhibited in widely cited secular accounts of 'calling?' There are three main implications. The first is that the radical tension between secular and religious accounts of 'calling' is ineliminable. Whilst we have overwhelming evidence that the work choices of both secular and religious agents are profoundly influenced by the experience of something they both refer to as being 'called,' the meaning of this term and its implications differ widely. In the former case, were I to fail to respond positively to such a call, I may experience psychological distress (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010) but in the latter I would be placing my relation to the divine, the ultimate source of meaning in my life, in jeopardy.

Second, scholars who seek to grasp the tradition-based notion of 'work as a calling' must not bend the concept to the point where the integral relationship between a caller and the called is broken. Only when this relationship remains is the tradition-based concept of 'calling' coherent and distinguishable from the expressivist notion. These volunteers' experience of a divine call endures beyond an initial draw to their work as a result of some abstract reference to serendipity, which Dik and Duffy (2009, p. 427) include in their analysis of 'transcendent summons.' It also differs from Dik and Duffy's (ibid), Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2009, p. 3), as well as Bunderson and Thompson's (2019, p. 421) notion of 'moral obligation' to others that frequently receive attention in the literature, as indicated by Potts (2019, pp. 28–54). Instead, all four of the volunteers exhibit the perception of a lasting call from God, unless or until God calls them elsewhere.

Third, when describing the 'calling' of believers, researchers' terminology needs to be true to the relevant faith tradition if it is to capture its distinctiveness. Terms such as "traditional" or "neoclassical" as opposed to or in addition to "modern" accounts still mostly speak of the phenomenon of 'transcendent summons' in vague or impersonal terms, such as "destiny or prosocial duty" (Bunderson & Thompson, 2019, p. 429), which is of very little, if any, relevance to the experience of a divine 'calling' from God.

None of this is to deny that there are rival traditions within Christianity, whose interpretations of the faith have differed, sometimes to the point of organizational schism. The Preface to the 1996 edition of *Habits of the Heart* highlights that "ascetic Protestantism" (Bellah et al., 1996, p. x), the Biblical tradition central to the early history of the United States, is in many ways at odds with the Catholic tradition that subsequently grew in importance. These traditions have their own debates around the concepts of work and 'calling.' For example, whilst the notion that work can be the vehicle through which a Christian 'calling' is lived out is relatively uncontroversial amongst Protestants, including the participants in our research, no such agreement is to be found in the Catholic intellectual tradition. Perhaps the most extreme example of its denial[9] is the twentieth century Catholic philosopher, Josef Peiper, who distinguished the world of wonder from the world of work in which moderns were trapped:

> the inhumanity of the total world of work: the final binding of man to the process of production, which is itself understood and proclaimed to the intrinsically meaningful realization of human existence (Pieper 1998 [1948], pp. 44-45)

This view is as far as can be imagined from the notion of achieving a distinctly Christian 'calling' through work for which both Dik (2020) and Bunderson and Thompson (2018) have argued when writing for Christian readers. Living traditions comprise precisely these kinds of ongoing internal debates in addition to debates with other traditions (MacIntyre, 1988) in which concepts are both subjects of dispute and resources to be deployed. This paper has argued that

[9] We are grateful to a Reviewer for highlighting this to us.

'calling' should be understood as a concept whose definition differs profoundly between adherents of different traditions and that therefore the search for a tradition-independent definition, one that has characterized recent debate, is in vain.

Conclusions

This paper has presented arguments and evidence for three theses. First, despite claiming adherence to the seminal definition of 'calling' by Bellah et al. (1996), researchers' subsequent conceptualizations have differed markedly from the original precisive account. This is especially ironic because these developments towards an expressivist account of 'calling' were precisely those that Bellah et al. (1996) warned against. Using Bellah et al.'s (1996) framework as it was intended can provide conceptual clarity in a way that Wrzesniewski et al.'s (1997) interpretation cannot.

Consequently, the second thesis our study proposes is that 'calling' should be considered a relationship, a call and response between the caller and the called, as suggested in Bellah et al.'s (1996) analysis of the Biblical tradition and civic republicanism. Yet this understanding is absent from Wrzesniewski et al.'s (1997) reading and many who follow. Even Dik and Duffy's (2012) 'transcendent summons' and Bunderson and Thompson's (2009) 'neoclassical calling', both attempts to integrate modern and divine accounts, neglect that to be 'summoned' requires a summoner, and to have 'gifts' requires a giver. For the volunteers we interviewed, this relationship appeared to be the primary source of their 'calling', other bases, including the pro-social impact of their work on beneficiaries, the challenge of work and its autonomy, play a secondary role in their work-based deliberations.

Thirdly, Bellah et al.'s (1996) account is precisive because it deployed a notion of tradition that bears striking resemblance to that of MacIntyre's (1988) tradition-constituted rationality. The argument that rationalities are themselves constituted by traditions places firm limits on the kinds of ideas and resources that form coherent concepts. A combination of divine and expressivist accounts of 'calling,' as have been developed in the literature, does not meet the standards of coherence internal to distinctly tradition-based accounts of rationality. They must be treated and defined separately.

We recognize that these findings have only been supported by our small-scale study and should be supplemented by further empirical research before they can be regarded as anything but suggestive. Studies of the experience of divine 'calling' would obviate the neglect of "spiritual motivations" within this discourse and the literature on business ethics more broadly (Guillen et al., 2015, p. 803), as noted in the Introduction. Regardless of audience, and whether researchers share the faith commitments of research participants, further studies will illuminate the distinctive implications that the experience of divine 'calling' has for the workplace. Informed by MacIntyre's notion of tradition-dependence, we would argue that this work should ensure that participants' accounts are rendered as they are articulated, without diluting their spiritual components. Only when interdisciplinary research stands ready to engage with these spiritual experiences more explicitly, without translating them into secular terms, will a more accurate picture emerge regarding the implications of workers' experience of divine 'calling.' Such persons exhibit a belief in a higher power that they personally relate to in ways that the language of serendipity does not capture.

For the volunteers that we studied, just as Dorothy Sayers (1949, p. 54) states in her famous essay, their occupation marks "the full expression of the worker's faculties, the thing in which he [or she] finds spiritual, mental, and bodily satisfaction, and the medium in which he [or she] offers himself [or herself] to God." Without pay or promise of promotion, it is safe to say that, like Sayers, such individuals possess the view that "work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do" (ibid). In fact, one could go even further, arguing that, for the volunteers we interviewed, the practices they participate in as a part of their 'calling' function not simply as a service to others, but also to God who called them to this work.

Our participants' understanding their work as akin to worship reflects a Calvinist Christian tradition and is evidently deeply meaningful and motivating to these frontline volunteers in addition to the ways that their work betters them as persons and makes a tangible contribution to the good of others and their communities. We suspect that similar studies of other individuals who similarly regard their spiritual life as highly important would reflect these results, too. Perhaps, then, in addition to studying similar experiences of a divine call, future studies could benefit from more narrowly examining the connection that may exist between 'work as a calling' and work, as the Calvinist tradition understands it, as a form of worship.

Funding No funding was received for conducting this study.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

Ethical approval The data featured in this article was collected in keeping with Northumbria University ethical standards, following approval from the institution. Informed consent was gained from both the organization and the participants.

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