

2-1-2019

My Daily Labor to Pursue: A Wesleyan Perspective on the Integration of Faith and Work

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Recommended Citation

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

MY DAILY LABOR TO PURSUE:
A WESLEYAN PERSPECTIVE ON
THE INTEGRATION OF FAITH AND WORK

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2019

Portland Seminary
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 14, 2019
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to Scioto Ridge United Methodist Church in Hilliard, OH and all who have experienced the transformational love of Jesus within the broad stream of Wesleyanism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the congregation, Leadership Board, and staff of Scioto Ridge United Methodist Church, thank you for your constant support, encouragement, and prayers. You have sustained me along this journey.

To the faculty of Portland Seminary, thank you for your guidance, prodding, and shaping me as a pastoral leader. Especially, thank you to Dr. MaryKate Morse for being a guide on my journey. Thank you to Rev. Dr. Kurtley Knight for your constant encouragement, and for reading, re-reading, and reading again of all my work. You have been a constant cheerleader.

Thank you to the Leadership and Spiritual Formation Cohort for the remarkable journey. It's been more formative than I could ever imagine. Especially, thank you to Chris Fillingham, Ken Van Vliet, and Mike Larson. You have become my *anam caras*.

Thank you to Rochelle Dean and Susan Nash for your editing work. You have made me sound much smarter than I am.

Thank you to Jim Heilman and Rev. Todd Richards for helping me think through the reflective questions and capturing the heart of our Wesleyan theology.

Lastly, and most importantly, thank you to my family. To my wife, Sarah, I could not have completed this journey without your love, support, and willingness to tackle the demands of our family in my absence. I love you beyond words. To my kids, I missed some baseball games, school activities, a trick-or-treat, and many bedtimes. And yet, you always encouraged me and pushed me to keep going. Being called your father is the greatest title I have.

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ABSTRACT

Work is a central part of being human. Yet, in the Church, few discuss how one's faith impacts his/her work. Laity struggle with discerning how their faith should be integrated with their career. While this is a problem in many churches and denominations, it is prevalent in churches from the Wesleyan theological tradition. This dissertation lays the groundwork for developing a Wesleyan perspective on the integration of faith and work.

Chapter one addresses the problem many experience in the Wesleyan tradition to find any substantive literature that provides a uniquely Wesleyan perspective on work and faith. This chapter looks at the problem of integration as a historical problem that, until recently, has not garnished as much theological reflection as other doctrinal issues.

Chapter two addresses work from a biblical perspective. It addresses the struggle with providing a theology of work, as well as viewing work through four theological movements—creation, the Fall, redemption, and the Kingdom of God.

Chapter three begins to lay the foundation of a Wesleyan perspective of faith and work by highlighting the practical implications of Wesley's understanding of the image of God.

Chapter four addresses in more detail the practical implications of the renewal of the image of God and its impact on work. It looks at the teleology of work not as a means of financial growth, but as an act of stewardship.

Chapter five addresses the Wesleyan emphasis on the integration of faith into all spheres of one's life through meaningful group formation, namely through the class

meeting. It begins to reveal how the class meeting assisted early Methodists to resist compartmentalization by living more integrated lives.

Chapter six provides an adapted class meeting to be held in the workplace as a model to assist laity to integrate faith and work.

CHAPTER ONE:
RECAPTURING THE VOCATION OF THE LAITY:
THE SACRED VS. SECULAR DEBATE

A Story

Parker Palmer writes that there are two fundamental questions every human being asks—“What am I meant to do?” and “Who am I meant to be?”¹ Susan, an up and coming attorney at a large firm in Columbus, Ohio, has known since she was a little girl she was called to be an attorney. She’s always been fascinated by the legal system. As a teenager, she wasn’t sure what type of law she wanted to practice, but she knew that she wanted to practice a form of law that made a difference in people’s lives. During law school, she was surprised how much she connected with corporate acquisitions. She admits it’s not a glamorous form of law, but an important one. She loves the challenge of working with CEOs and company boards dealing with the complexities of merging two corporations.

Susan works hard. She puts in long hours and works tirelessly to ensure that her clients are satisfied. Her work ethic has caught the attention of her superiors, and she has caught wind of conversations about potentially making partner. At her age, partner is unheard of, but she knows she has the track record to justify such a decision. While she has a long career ahead of her, she can’t shake a feeling of deep dissatisfaction. It’s not so

¹ Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 2.

much with her career choice. She believes being an attorney was a calling from God. However, she feels a strong disconnect between her faith and her career.

Susan has been a Christian for as long as she can remember. Baptized as a baby in the United Methodist Church, she worships regularly with a local Methodist congregation. She loves her church and finds every opportunity to serve. She has traveled on several mission trips. During these trips, Susan has seen the tangible difference she has made in people's lives. She has built homes in Mexico, ministered to sick children in China, and led a Vacation Bible School in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Every time she returns from a mission trip, she feels closer to God. That feeling quickly dissipates, however, when she returns to work. Work feels mundane and of no significance in God's Kingdom. She often wonders if maybe she should quit her job to join some sort of full-time ministry.

Susan recently opened up to her small group about her feelings and struggles to integrate her work and faith. Susan's small group consists of other young adults who are also establishing themselves in their careers. She was surprised that every single person in her group shared the same sentiment. They, too, struggle to bridge the divide between what is often labeled as sacred work with their secular jobs. After some discussion, the small group requested that Susan speak with their pastor to see if any curriculum or bible study might help them live a more integrated life.

Susan set up a meeting with her pastor. Pastor Karen is beloved by the congregation and is a gifted preacher. Before entering ministry, Karen was a successful small business owner. Susan thought because of Pastor Karen's business background, she would be able to help connect faith with the business world. However, after Susan shared

her inner struggle with Pastor Karen, Pastor Karen was at a loss. She admitted that she, too, struggled with integrating her spiritual life with her business. This was partly why Pastor Karen chose to go into ministry. However, she noted that this was an area of interest for her, and she was excited to discover resources that would help.

Pastor Karen noted that she had read several articles that were seeking to bridge this divide, but what she had read seemed to come out of the Reformed tradition and were not Wesleyan in nature.² Pastor Karen told Susan that she would do some research to see if there were resources or curriculum within the Wesleyan stream of theology that might help Susan's small group.

After several weeks, Pastor Karen came up empty-handed. While she found a plethora of Reformed and Lutheran resources, she only found a handful of authors and blogs within the Wesleyan tradition writing about faith and work. A well-developed Wesleyan theology of work was largely absent. Sadly, she didn't know how to help Susan other than to refer her to the Reformed and Lutheran resources. She knew, however, that while the resources would be helpful to Susan, they lacked any emphasis on formation, and she didn't know how Susan's small group could effectively incorporate the content.

The Problem

Unlike Reformed and Lutheran traditions, churches in the Wesleyan tradition have not developed a theology of work, and therefore have failed to help laypeople live a

² Throughout the dissertation, Wesleyan or Wesleyanism refers to all denominations that share a theological heritage with John Wesley and early Methodists. It does not refer to the Wesleyan Church, a specific denomination.

more integrated life. A developed Wesleyan theology of work is needed to help laypeople bridge what David Miller calls “the Sunday-Monday gap.”³ Americans spend more time per week working than in any other activity.⁴ Yet Wesleyan churches have not helped laity live a more integrated life. Laity are often forced to separate their faith development from their work life. This creates a false dichotomy between what is often labeled as sacred work and that which is labeled secular. Week after week, laity sit in the pews struggling to apply what they hear from the pulpit to their workplace. Joshua Sweeden notes that “Wesley offers little by way of a constructive or comprehensive theological understanding of work,”⁵ yet he also notes that there is a need for “a full exploration of Wesley’s understanding of good work.”⁶

While Wesley did not specifically develop a theology of work, much can be gathered from his theological writings, sermons, and letters to develop this theology for the contemporary Christian attending a Wesleyan church. Darrell Cosden notes the challenge of developing a work-based theology is due to the broad nature of theology itself. He writes,

A theology of work then, is not merely a discussion of how one should carry out work, or a discussion of how to resolve specific difficulties and problems faced in the working world. This would essentially be an ethics of work. Nor is a theology of work satisfied with only making theological comments about work as they arise within a discussion of some other broader point of doctrine. This would constitute a theological reflection on work. A theology of work is a much broader

³ David Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith and Work Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9.

⁴ “Average Hours per Day Spent in Selected Activities on Days Worked by Employment Status and Sex,” BLS, accessed June 21, 2018, <https://www.bls.gov/charts/american-time-use/activity-by-work.htm>.

⁵ Joshua R. Sweeden, *The Church and Good Work: The Ecclesiological Grounding of Good Work* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 12.

⁶ Sweeden, *The Church and Good Work*, 12.

concept. It is a recent theological methodology developed for comprehensively exploring the phenomenon of work itself as a part of created reality.⁷

While this is true, the scope of this dissertation will begin to develop a needed Wesleyan theology of work.

The void of a Wesleyan theology of work has forced pastors who desire to help laity live a more integrated life to look outside the Wesleyan tradition for guidance. In some ways, this is good because it exposes Wesleyans to other streams of thought. However, as this dissertation will lay out, there are areas in other theological traditions that should cause Wesleyans pause and concern. There are aspects of Lutheran and Calvinistic traditions that simply do not translate into Wesleyan theology.

While Sweeden is right to note that there is not a comprehensive theology of work within Wesleyanism, there is enough practical theology within the broad scope of Wesleyan thought to begin to develop an understanding of how work fits into one's spiritual life. John Wesley (1703-1791) has been called a "practical theologian"⁸ because he was focused more on "doing theology"⁹ than establishing a systematic set of beliefs. It is from this *doing* of theology that Wesleyans can begin to piece together a theology of work.

This dissertation will explore the practical nature of Wesleyan theology, specifically through the lens of the renewing of the image of God and how that renewal impacts one's everyday activities. It will also unpack how Wesley's emphasis on

⁷ Darrell Cosden, *A Theology of Work: Work and the New Creation*, Paternoster Theological Monographs (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 5.

⁸ Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 1.

⁹ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 3.

formation as a means of renewal, namely through class meetings, influenced a social ethic for early Methodists and helped them live more integrated lives. Finally, this dissertation will develop a model for a modern class meeting that will help laity integrate their spiritual life with their work.

The Sacred vs. Secular Debate Throughout Church History

In order to lay the foundation for a Wesleyan theology of work, one must first identify how the divide between sacred and secular work began. Paul Steven notes the danger in which the Church finds itself today, stating,

The Christian faith, which arose as an extraordinary experience of the in-breaking of God's reign in history through Jesus Christ, was meant to be lived out in the midst of the world. Yet through the merging of many different intellectual and cultural currents, the call to being God's life and justice to this world became relegated to the religious sphere of life and the rituals of the church. The extraordinary dualism between the spiritual and the secular that has so divided the Christian life for many people has had a devastating impact on those who try to live "in Christ" in every dimension of life.¹⁰

Historically, there have been ebbs and flows between sacred and secular work. Throughout its history, the Church has debated who is called and to what type of work they are called. Calling has often been defined by the Church as a *vocation*, which is often differentiated into sacred and secular vocations.¹¹

The debate has generally revolved around the understanding of, and subsequent distinction between, clergy and laity. In most of today's churches, clergy are those called to full or part-time, sacred, ministerial work, while the laity are seen as simply the object

¹⁰ R. Paul Stevens, *Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), vii.

¹¹ R. Paul Stevens, *Playing Heaven: Rediscovering Our Purpose as Participants in the Mission of God* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2006), 13.

of ministry.¹² While clergy are called to holy and spiritual tasks, the laity work in the ordinary, secular world. Adopting the mindset of sacred work for clergy and secular work for the laity has resulted in “something very strange indeed: God has called a chosen few to serve by focusing on eternal, lasting matters, while he has called others to serve by focusing on earthly, less ultimately important, matters.”¹³ This has resulted in creating what Cosden calls “second-class Christians.”¹⁴

There is little evidence in the New Testament that a special calling for clergy is greater than a calling for laity to fulfill the Great Commission. All Christians are seen as active participants in revealing the Kingdom of God, no matter where they work. Paul Stevens writes, “There is no authority in the Bible for a special, secondary call from God as a prerequisite to enter the professional ministry... There is no status difference between leaders and people, so-called clergy and so-called laity, and there is only a functional distinction in some areas.”¹⁵ While not trying to diminish the role of clergy, Cosden notes the call for clergy has been elevated as superior, and laity are often left wondering if their work really matters to God.¹⁶

¹² R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 3.

¹³ Darrell Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 18.

¹⁴ Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*, 17.

¹⁵ Stevens, *Playing Heaven*, 16. Stevens does not identify if there is a functional difference in the Old Testament between priests and the people. Stevens’ focus is on the New Testament, and he alludes to, especially in light of passages like 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19, the temple as being a people. Therefore, the distinctive roles of priest and laity are not as differentiated. 1 Peter 2:9 seems to also remove the barrier between priest and people. All are priests and belong to a new priesthood.

¹⁶ Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*, 15.

Church history is expansive, but there are crucial moments that have either added to the divide between sacred and secular work or sought to remedy the divide. Dividing Church history into four periods will provide clarity on the challenges the modern Church has in reclaiming a sacred vocation for laity. The four historical sections that will be explored are as follows:

- Early Church and Middle Ages (100-1500)
- Reformation (1500-1800)
- Modernity (1800-1900)
- Post-Modernity/Contemporary (1900-Present)

Early Church and Middle Ages (100-1500)

The New Testament does not advocate for a dualism between sacred and secular work. This is largely due to the Old Testament understanding of work carrying over into the New Testament. The Hebrew people held a high regard for work and saw work as participating in God's ongoing creation.¹⁷ Many Jewish people who converted to Christianity in the early days of the Church maintained a positive view of work. The Apostle Paul "commands Christians to continue in their work and to work well (Colossians 3:23-24; 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12)."¹⁸ Paul himself was a tentmaker (Acts 18:13). The early Church, however, became heavily influenced by the dominant Greek philosophy of work. Slowly, the cultural identity and ethos of the Church shifted away

¹⁷ Hugh Whelchel, *How Then Should We Work? Rediscovering the Biblical Doctrine of Work* (Bloomington, IN: West Bow Press, 2012), 58.

¹⁸ Whelchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, 59.

from Jerusalem (which held an Old Testament view of work) and toward Athens and Rome (which adopted a Greek view of work).¹⁹

The Greeks regarded work as demoralizing.²⁰ Work was a “curse and nothing else.”²¹ The Greeks associated work with “that endless cycle of activity forced upon us by embodied existence....to spend our lives working is to sweat and toil and eventually die like animals, passing into oblivion without having left a mark or made a difference in this world.”²² Such a bleak view of work isolated it to a necessary evil and subsidiary to the greater work of contemplation. Aristotle even argued that unemployment was a good endeavor because it created more time for contemplation, and contemplation would ultimately lead to a happy life.²³

The adoption of Greek philosophy within the early Church is perhaps most apparent in the writings and work of Eusebius of Caesarea and Augustine. Eusebius of Caesarea (AD 260-340) distinguished between what he called *vita contemplativa* (the contemplative life) and *vita activa* (the active life).²⁴ Eusebius believed that the contemplative life was a more perfect form of life, while the normal, mundane life of work was simply permitted, but of lesser importance. This view eventually led to the

¹⁹ Welchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, 61.

²⁰ Welchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, 57.

²¹ Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of This World: Inquiries into Calling, Career Choice, and the Design for Human Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 5.

²² Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 7.

²³ Welchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, 58.

²⁴ Welchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, 61.

rapid growth of the monastic movement, as monks were believed to have received a greater calling than those who participated in secular work.

Augustine (AD 354-430) echoed Eusebius's view of the contemplative life. Augustine said, "the contemplation of God is promised us as the goal of all our actions and the eternal perfection of happiness."²⁵ Augustine sought to find a balance between the contemplative life and secular life. He praised the work of farmers, merchants, and craftsmen, and he believed that at times it would be necessary to pursue the active life. However, he encouraged people to pursue the life of contemplation above all work because it was of greater importance in the pursuit of a deeper connection with God.²⁶ The monastic life became the more preferable means of spirituality, which, in turn, ostracized the laity from faith and began to diminish their work.²⁷

Ecclesiastically, the Church began to distinguish between clergy and laity early in its history. With the rise of heretical teachings, the compilation of scripture, and the move toward formal church structures, the need for theologically educated clergy and bishops became vital. The early Church Fathers began to emphasize the role of the priest as separate from and superior to the role of the laity. Paul Stevens notes several crucial shifts that moved the Church from the New Testament understanding that all Christians are called to be priests (1 Peter 2:5) to a professional, educated priestly class. He notes these historical markers as follows:

²⁵ Hardy, *The Fabric of This World*, 17.

²⁶ Whelchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, 61.

²⁷ Edward P. Hahnenberg, *Awakening Vocation: A Theology of Christian Call* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 6–7.

- Ignatius of Antioch (AD 50-110) appealed to the necessity of having a single bishop for unity purposes.²⁸
- Tertullian (AD 160-200) gave structure to the Church, distinguishing between the *plebs* (ordinary people) and the priestly orders (including bishops).²⁹
- In Clement of Alexandria's (AD 150-215) writings, he often used the word *laikos* (laity) to distinguish ordinary people from clergy and bishops.³⁰
- The third-century Syrian document *Didascalia Apostolorum* elevated bishops as “priests and prophets, and princes and leaders and kings, and mediators between God and his faithful, and receivers of the word, and preachers and proclaimers thereof, and knowers of Scriptures and of the utterance of God, and witnesses of his will, who bears the sins of all, and are to give answers for all.”³¹
- The sacrament of communion became a mysterious meal administered only by sanctioned priests.³²
- Emperor Constantine appointed bishops as civil magistrates, and organized the empire into dioceses, and began to distinguish clerics as a privileged class.³³

While this list is not exhaustive, it is apparent that within the first few hundred years of the Church, the Church Fathers began to create a distinct functional role between clergy and laity. With the distinction also came a priority of focus and attention. The

²⁸ Stevens, *Playing Heaven*, 40.

²⁹ Stevens, *Playing Heaven*, 40.

³⁰ Stevens, *Playing Heaven*, 40.

³¹ Stevens, *The Other Six Days*, 41.

³² Stevens, *The Other Six Days*, 43.

³³ Stevens, *The Other Six Days*, 44-45.

predominant writings and teachings of the early Church were geared toward those in ecclesiastical positions and, through the Middle Ages, they primarily came out of monastic communities. The laity were simply neglected.

It should be noted, however, that while monastic growth dominated a theological atmosphere up until the Reformation, there were attempts to elevate the role of work. Within Benedictine spirituality, Benedict ordered monks to physical labor, as he believed “idleness is the enemy of the soul.”³⁴ Benedict required that monks spend a few hours each day in manual labor, though the first duty was always to observe the Divine Hours.³⁵ The Benedictine monk Columba Carey-Elwes notes that while historically manual labor was seen as the least esteemed work, Benedict “raised [work] to a godly occupation as Christ had done.”³⁶ Placing a high value on work, many Benedictine monasteries became places of economic innovations, especially in the field of agricultural technology.³⁷ While Benedict’s view of work is commendable and was revolutionary in his day, the nature of Benedictine communities as being primarily composed of monks meant that it had little bearing on the work of laity throughout Christendom.

³⁴ Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 382.

³⁵ Richard John Neuhaus, ed., *The Second One Thousand Years: Ten People Who Defined a Millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 71.

³⁶ Columba Cary-Elwes, *Work and Prayer: The Rule of St. Benedict for Lay People*, trans. Catherine Wybourne (Kent, TN: Burns and Oats, 1992), 124.

³⁷ Charlie Self, *Flourishing Churches and Communities: A Pentecostal Primer on Faith, Work, and Economics for Spirit-Empowered Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Library Press, 2013), 86.

The Reformation (1500-1800)

The political and hierarchal dysfunction within the Church, and the proliferation of the monastic life as being separated from and elevated above ordinary work, led to a cataclysmic shift in Church history known as the Reformation. While the Reformation brought about many changes in theology, Church ecclesiology, and even governmental politics, through the work of Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564), and Puritan theologian William Perkins (1558-1602), the dualism between clergy and laity began to diminish. The Reformers' views of work and vocation were the catalysts that began to bridge the sacred/secular divide.

Similar to the Hebrew understanding of work, Martin Luther believed that vocation was grounded in creation and was a central part of God's continuing work in creation.³⁸ Luther believed that "all of life, including daily work, can be understood as a calling from God."³⁹ In Luther's letter "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," he writes,

Therefore I advise no one to enter any religious order or the priesthood, indeed, I advise everyone against it—unless he is forearmed with this knowledge and understands that the works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous that may be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone.⁴⁰

³⁸ Marc Kolden, "Luther on Vocation," *Word & World* 3, no. 4 (September 1983): 382.

³⁹ Welchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, 63.

⁴⁰ Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," in *Selected Writings of Martin Luther*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 430.

This is a remarkable shift in the understanding of what is sacred and what is secular, as well as how the laity ought to view their work as a means of spirituality and faith development.

Luther's view of work is further developed in "An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate," in which he writes, "It is pure invention that pope, bishops, priests, and monks are to be called the 'spiritual estate'; princes, lords, artisans, and farmers the 'temporal estate.' That is indeed a fine bit of lying and hypocrisy."⁴¹ Luther extends his definition of what is sacred to include marriage, child rearing, honoring parents, and governmental work, as well as almost all forms of ordinary life.⁴²

Luther also elevated the language of calling in his German bible translation. Luther broke from a traditional interpretation of the word *klesis* (calling), found for example in 1 Corinthians 7:20, as a word limited to only clergy. He translated *klesis* as the German word *Beruft*—translated to English as an ordinary "station of life."⁴³ Luther believed that every human had a specific, God-ordained station which was to be discerned and faithfully practiced. This made all work a sacred vocation.

John Calvin built upon Luther's understanding of work and vocation and provided extensive practical applications.⁴⁴ Calvin agreed with Luther that all work, as long as it

⁴¹ Williams C. Placher, ed., *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 211.

⁴² Haunenberg, *Awakening Vocation*, 14.

⁴³ Haunenberg, *Awakening Vocation*, 14.

⁴⁴ One of the biggest differences between Luther's and Calvin's views of work is that Luther believed that the "station of life" was a fixed station and could not be changed. This led to a pseudo-caste system as people in poverty (farmers, merchants, etc.) could not change their state by changing their work. Calvin believed that work could be changed. As will be further developed in this dissertation, the ability to

was not immoral, was sacred work. Calvin believed that work was to contribute to the common good of all humanity.⁴⁵ In Calvin's *Institutes of Christian Religion*, he writes, "God has appointed duties for every man in his particular way of life. And that no one may thoughtlessly transgress his limits, he has named these various kinds of living 'callings.'"⁴⁶ For Calvin, living out a call should be done in the world, as opposed to the separatist monks who lived out their call in isolation.

Calvin also believed that one's call was a demonstration of their commitment to God. Alister McGrath writes that for Calvin, "activity within the world, motivated, informed, and sanctioned by the Christian faith, was the supreme means by which the believer could demonstrate his or her commitment and thankfulness to God."⁴⁷ This stems from Calvin's view of predestination. Being part of *the elect* resulted in thanksgiving. Faithful, hard work that contributed to the common good of the world was celebrated as a means to show one's devotion to God.

Largely influenced by Reformed theology, Puritans began to create a robust theology of work. Puritan theologian William Perkins further developed Calvin's teachings in his *Treatise of the Vocations*. Perkins's *Treatise* was the first Reformation document solely devoted to the development of a theology of calling.⁴⁸ Perkins writes, "the order and manner of living in this world is called a *Vocation*; because every man is

change jobs for greater economic outcomes was the base for Max Weber's theory that Calvinistic and Puritan Protestantism led to capitalism. Weber called this the *Protestant work ethic*.

⁴⁵ Haunenberg, *Awakening Vocation*, 14.

⁴⁶ Platcher, *Callings*, 237.

⁴⁷ Alister E McGrath, "Calvin and the Christian Calling," *First Things* 94 (June 1999): 31–35.

⁴⁸ Stevens, *The Other Six Days*, 77.

to live as he is called of God.”⁴⁹ Perkins believed that God gives a *general calling*, which was the “calling of Christians, which is common to all that live in the Church of God.”⁵⁰ God also gives a *personal call*, which is “the execution of some particular office, arising of that distinction which God makes between man and man in every society.”⁵¹ Like their Calvinist counterparts, Puritans believed their work was evidence that they were a part of *the elect*. This resulted in a resilient work ethic among Puritan communities and a strong sense of vocation for the laity.⁵²

Modernity (1800-1900)

Luther’s, Calvin’s, and Perkins’s emphasis on vocation as belonging to clergy and laity revolutionized work, especially in the Western world. This led to German sociologist Max Weber’s seminal work, *The Protestant Work Ethic*. Weber believes that the Calvinistic branches that dominated Western theology influenced and created capitalism.⁵³ He writes that Calvinists and Puritans “forcefully placed work and material success in the middle of their lives; little else seemed to matter greatly to them, not even

⁴⁹ Platcher, *Callings*, 263. Italics original.

⁵⁰ Platcher, *Callings*, 264-265.

⁵¹ Platcher, *Callings*, 265.

⁵² M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and the Political Economy* ([Minneapolis]: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 140.

⁵³ Weber’s work continues to be assessed and contested by historians and ethicists. Peter Sedgwick, for example, believes that the Puritan influence in the Industrial Revolution is not as dominant as Weber concludes. Rather, Sedgwick believes that the Protestant work ethic is a result of the Arminian reaction to Calvinism, which eventually led to Romanticism. See Peter Sedgwick, *The Market Economy and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 85.

family, friendships, leisure, or hobbies.”⁵⁴ With the emphasis on wealth, economic advances, and the connection of one’s faith as a sign of God’s favor, capital became a religion in and of itself.⁵⁵

Echoing this sentiment, Paul Stevens argues that “the Protestant work ethic could be more accurately described as the post-Protestant work ethic.”⁵⁶ He writes,

Among the nominally religious and early post-Protestants, people moved away from the dependence on the sufficiency of Christ’s work for salvation and, during the industrial revolution, invested work with more religious significance as a means of proving one’s acceptance of God. The vocation of rest, which was given proper emphasis by Calvin and the early Puritans, was lost.⁵⁷

Work became a religion. The connection between work as a means to deepen one’s faith in God was replaced with self-sufficiency. Work and economic stability became paramount to happiness. The separation of faith and work began to spread once again.

⁵⁴ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Stephen Kalberg, 3rd Roxberry Edition (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company, 2002), xi.

⁵⁵ John Wesley had strong reservations and criticisms against Calvinistic theology, specifically what has been referred to as antinomianism. Part of Wesley’s strongest arguments against Calvinism was what he believed was an excess of celebrating worldly pleasures. While not directly referencing Calvinism, in Wesley’s “Sermon No. 28: Sermon on the Mount,” Wesley spoke sternly about excessive wealth and the accumulation of goods. Referencing Matthew 6:19-21, which speaks of earthly treasure, Wesley wrote, “We may now clearly discern (unless we are unwilling to discern it) what that is which is forbidden here. It is the designedly procuring more of this world’s goods than will answer the foregoing purposes; the labouring after a larger measure of worldly substance, a larger increase of gold and silver, -- the laying up any more than these ends require, -- is what is here expressly and absolutely forbidden. If the words have any meaning at all, it must be this; for they are capable of no other. Consequently, whoever he is that, owing no man anything, and having food and raiment for himself and his household, together with a sufficiency to carry on his worldly business so far as answers these reasonable purposes; whosoever, I say, being already in these circumstances, seeks a still larger portion on earth; he lives in an open habitual denial of the Lord that bought him. He hath practically denied the faith, and is worse than an ... ‘infidel.’” Placher, *Callings*, 321-322.

⁵⁶ Weber, *The Protestant Work Ethic*, 73.

⁵⁷ Weber, *The Protestant Work Ethic*, 73.

There are several historical developments during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that furthered the divide between faith and work. During the late 1700s, the philosopher Immanuel Kant began to emphasize the Enlightenment thought of distinguishing between what he called the *phenomenal* and *noumenal*. The phenomenal could be empirically proven and culturally and was of greater importance than things of a more spiritual nature. While this led to the Industrial Revolution, which resulted in great advances in technology, it also devalued religion and faith.⁵⁸

As an opposition to Enlightenment thinking, Christian revivalism began to emerge in North America during the Second Great Awakening. Revivalism “emphasized the ‘spiritual’ nature of life, over and against the ‘secular.’”⁵⁹ Revivalism also perpetuated an escapist eschatology that put little value on worldly matters, but rather emphasized Christ coming to rapture Christians out of a sinful world. Earthly matters like work were of little value to ensure that one’s spiritual life was in line with God.

With the devaluing of religion on one side and the elevation of spirituality and eschatology on the other, work once again became separated from faith. Those who had no faith, or at least a nominal faith, began to view their work as careerism—a means to advance their own personal economics—while people of deep faith began to focus away from their work because work was viewed as an earthly endeavor and of little value to eternal matters.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Welchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, 66-67.

⁵⁹ Welchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, 67.

⁶⁰ Welchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, 67.

The rise of Marxism also greatly influenced the way people viewed work. While the Reformers emphasized the connection between work and their relationship with God, Marxism promoted that through “free productive activity...we can find true fulfillment as human beings. Ultimate satisfaction is found in surveying the freely creative works of our hands.”⁶¹ Satisfaction, meaning, worth, and value were no longer associated with one’s faith. Ultimately, Marx believed that work was a “specifically human creative activity through which we realize ourselves and contribute to our own evolution, and, through which we create a human world.”⁶²

While Marxism and capitalism are opposites, Hugh Welchel concludes that “both see the pursuit of vocation as an end of itself. Both encourage workers to look for personal fulfillment through the labor of their own hands. Where the medieval Church threatened to divorce faith from work, now work has become an idol to which we look for our identity.”⁶³ Or, as Paul Stevens puts it, “The unhappy divorce of church/religion and business has left business on its own, and has left Christians (and other people of faith) living schizophrenic lives: God on Sunday, Mammon on Monday.”⁶⁴ By the end of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, a line between the sacred and secular had been drawn.

⁶¹ Hardy, *The Fabric of this World*, 30.

⁶² Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 14.

⁶³ Welchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, 67-68.

⁶⁴ Stevens, *Playing Heaven*, 75.

Post-Modernity/Contemporary (1900 to Present)

While the line between the sacred and secular continues in many places, Paul Stevens sees a “cultural paradigm shift”⁶⁵ happening as a rejection of modernity. Part of the shift is a surge in what he calls a “new business spirituality.”⁶⁶ The *new business spirituality* is void of any particular religion. Rather, it seeks to address “the God-sized vacuum in the soul of people in the workplace, a gap that has unfortunately been left unattended by the religiously occupied church and the secular humanism of Western culture.”⁶⁷ Many people are seeking to find greater value in what they do. They desire their work to have a lasting impact on the world, and they simply want to belong to something larger than themselves.

Within Christianity, there is a resurgence of literature and resources to help address the divide between sacred and secular work. Even the Roman Catholic tradition, which still holds a strict distinction between clergy and laity, is beginning to turn toward helping laity connect their faith and work. In 1959, Pope John XXII declared a new Vatican Council known as Vatican II to address a broad range of topics, which included the role of the laity. “After centuries of neglect, the laity were brought to the center of the church’s consciousness and placed at the heart of its most official pronouncements.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Stevens, *Playing Heaven*, 75.

⁶⁶ Stevens, *Playing Heaven*, 75.

⁶⁷ Stevens, *Playing Heaven*, 77.

⁶⁸ Hahnenberg, *Awakening Vocation*, 37.

In 1981, Pope John Paul II released a papal encyclical called *Laborem Exercens* that evaluated the connection between faith and work.⁶⁹ While the encyclical establishes many things, one important contribution is the connection between work and creation, and that through the activity of work, one is connected to God by fulfilling what it means to be God's image-bearer.⁷⁰ For Roman Catholics, *Laborem Exercens* provided a theological reflection on work that was long overdue.⁷¹

Roman Catholics are not alone in experiencing a surge in faith and work resources. The Protestant church is also rediscovering a theology of vocation. Within the last decade, new organizations and coaching networks have emerged to help seminaries, pastors, and laity bridge the gap between the sacred and secular. The organizations are different, but the goals are similar. While not exhaustive, below is a list a few national organizations that seek to elevate all work as vocation:

- Made to Flourish Network⁷²
- Center for Faith and Work⁷³
- Denver Institute for Faith and Work⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 24.

⁷⁰ Christopher Mukidi Acaali, "A Study of John Paul II's Theology of Work in 'Laborem Exercens' with Special Reference to Julius Nyerbere's Philosophy of Work" (Dissertation, Duquesne University, 1997), 156-158.

⁷¹ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 25.

⁷² "About," Made to Flourish, accessed December 3, 2016, <https://www.madetoflourish.org/about/>.

⁷³ Center for Faith and Work, accessed December 4, 2016, <https://www.faithandwork.com/>.

⁷⁴ Denver Institute for Faith & Work, accessed December 4, 2016, <http://denverinstitute.org/>.

- Center for Faith and Work at LaTourneau University⁷⁵
- Institute for Faith, Work and Economics⁷⁶

Alistair McKenzie believes that the Church finds itself at a period of history when a new reformation is on the horizon.⁷⁷ This reformation will once again lead the Church into a place of bridging the gap between faith and work. Continuing to articulate and celebrate a theology of work that values all work as sacred will assist the laity in viewing their work as a vocation. Paul Stevens paints a picture of what the Church should be in order to fulfill the Great Commission. He writes,

The church as a whole is the true ministerium, a community of prophets, priests, princes/princesses serving God through Jesus in the power of the Spirit seven days a week. All are clergy in the sense of being appointed by God to service and dignified as God's inheritance. All are laity in the sense of having their identity rooted in the people of God. All give ministry. All receive ministry. That is the constitution of the church.⁷⁸

The sooner the Church can recapture this identity, the greater the impact it will have on the common good of all people.

Summary

The Church has long debated what constitutes sacred work and secular work. This has led to many laypeople struggling to integrate their faith with their work. Within the ebbs and flows of the sacred and secular debate, there have been reformers who have

⁷⁵ Center for Faith and Work at LeTourneau University, accessed December 4, 2016, <http://centerforfaithandwork.com/>.

⁷⁶ Institute for Faith, Work & Economics, accessed December 4, 2016, <https://tifwe.org/>.

⁷⁷ Alistair McKenzie, "Faith and Work from the Puritans to the Present," Latimer Occasional Paper No. 13, March 2001, <http://www.latimer.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/Alistair-McKenzie-Faith-and-Work-From-the-Puritans-to-the-Present.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Stevens, *Playing Heaven*, 155.

sought to bridge the divide. During certain historical periods, especially during the early Reformation, the divide seemed to be closing. However, with the rise of the Industrial Revolution and the ensuing battle between capitalism and Marxism and continuing into contemporary times, the divide seems ever more present. Laity once again find themselves caught in a gap between their faith and their work.

Within the long expanse of Church history, a Wesleyan voice has been largely absent in the conversation of faith and work. Sweeden notes that Wesley had an “eclectic spirit” that engaged multiple theological voices as he developed his own theological contributions.⁷⁹ Wesley was a student of Church history and valued the traditions of the Church universal. However, a more robust theology of work through a Wesleyan lens has a unique contribution to add to the overall faith and work conversation happening in Western theology. In order to develop a unique Wesleyan perspective of work, one must not only engage Church history, but also must explore scripture’s presentation and development of work.

The next chapter will highlight the ongoing development of a theology of work. As a relatively new endeavor, there are many theological voices seeking to establish a theology of work. The next chapter will look at the broad theological scope in which work is often presented. It will also highlight the ways in which scripture presents work through four crucial theological events.

⁷⁹ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 12.

CHAPTER TWO: WORK FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Overview

The previous chapter revealed the problem many laity have in connecting their faith with their work. The problem is not new. Throughout the centuries of the Church, Christians have struggled to integrate what they know about God with how they experience God in the workplace. This is largely due to the creation of a dichotomy between what constitutes sacred work compared to secular work. Throughout Church history, this dichotomy has created a gap in theological integration for lay people.

While this problem seems to be experienced within the broad spectrum of theological traditions, within the Wesleyan tradition, the gap between what happens on Sunday morning and Monday morning for the laity is increasingly apparent. The lack of resources and writing about work by Wesley himself, as well as the lack of resources from contemporary Wesleyan theologians and practitioners, has left many Wesleyan Christians struggling to live a more integrated life. A Wesleyan perspective on work is needed.

In order to begin to lay the foundation for a uniquely Wesleyan perspective on work, one must begin to discover what the bible says about work. Seeing the broad presentation of work through the lens of scripture will not only assist in establishing a biblical theology of work, but it will also lay the foundation for how Wesleyan Christians should engage with the scriptural presentations of work. This chapter will address the challenges of establishing a theology of work, as well as presenting work through four

major biblical presentations of work—Creation, the Fall, Redemption, and the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God.

Before looking at work through the narrative of scripture, this chapter will first highlight the difficulty in establishing a theological definition of work. While scripture provides numerous references to the nature of work and humanity’s experience with it, the bible does not provide a stated definition of work. Theologians have sought to use the biblical presentation of work to create such a definition, but, as will be established, within the broad spectrum of theology, there is still no uniform understanding of what is and is not work.

Difficulties in Establishing a Theological Definition of Work

The Importance of Work in Theological Development

Americans spend more time per week working than any other activity.¹ Yet, as previously noted, for many Christians the Church has not helped them integrate their faith with their work because pastors have not articulated a theology of work. A theology of work not only elevates the importance of work itself, but it establishes what it means to be human and helps laity understand their place in God’s created order. Miroslav Volf notes how central work is to the human experience. He writes,

The significance of human work ... goes far beyond providing human beings with the necessary means of sustenance. We not only live from what we do, but to a large extent, we also are what we do. Although there is an important sense in which this statement is not true, one can hardly deny that we cannot understand ourselves anthropologically (i.e. who we are as human beings) and sociologically

¹ “Charts from the American Time Use Survey,” United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed April 13, 2017, <https://www.bls.gov/tus/charts/>.

(how our societies are structured and how they function) without taking into account the ways in which we go about doing our daily work.²

In Pope John Paul II's theological treatise, *Laborem Exercens*, he states, "the key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question is to be found in the phenomenon that we call work."³ The Pope's high view of work is significant because it builds upon the foundation for what it means to be human. Darrel Cosden says, "since [work] is grounded in human existence, the activity we call work becomes central to the life and mission of the Church."⁴ To understand humanity's relationship to work is to understand their relationship to God and to others. Work, through the lens of faith, becomes something far more sacred, and worthy of theological reflection.

Problems with Defining Work

Establishing a theology of work is not as easy as one might assume. While work is very much a part of the normalcy of life, to actually define what does or does not constitute as work is difficult. David Jensen notes that work is as basic to life as "eating, sexuality, communication, and reproduction."⁵ Yet, as Joshua Sweeden rightly points out, the ambiguous nature of work "resists definition. ... [and] it is elusive, constantly escaping the grasp of rigid description or classification."⁶ Some seek to relegate work to

² Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1991), 26.

³ John Paul II, "Laborem Exercens," September 14, 1981, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html.

⁴ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 3.

⁵ David H. Jensen, *Responsive Labor: A Theology of Work* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 2006), 1.

⁶ Sweeden, *The Church and Good Work*, 3.

hours at a paid job. This, however, limits work to employment and fails to recognize other aspects of life as work, such as raising children, household duties, and any other task that is performed without compensation.⁷

So what actually is work?

Some theologians have defined work in broad terms in order to expand what might be considered work. For example, Pope John Paul II provides a seemingly simplistic definition of work, stating it is “any activity by man, whether manual or intellectual, whatever its nature or circumstance.”⁸ Volf finds this to be an inadequate definition, as it fails to separate work from any other human activity.⁹ Volf presents a more restrictive definition of work, stating it as an “honest, purposeful, and methodologically specified social activity whose primary goal is the creation of products or states of affairs that can satisfy the needs of working individuals or their co-creatures, or (if primarily an end of itself) an activity that is necessary in order for acting individuals to satisfy their needs apart from the need for the activity itself.”¹⁰ Volf’s definition is far more helpful, as it separates work from other leisurely activities, as well as connects work to humanity’s relationships with each other. However, it is limited in that it seems to relegate work to production and focuses on the end result of the activity itself.

Ben Witherington provides one of the most helpful definitions of work.

Witherington finds limitations in definitions that are too broad, while also critiquing

⁷ Jensen, *Responsive Labor*, 2.

⁸ John Paul II, “Laborem Exercens,” 3.

⁹ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 7.

¹⁰ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 10-11.

Volf's definition as too much about "work as the means to an end, namely, the meeting of human needs."¹¹ Witherington, rather, anchors his definition of work as something originating from God and for God's glory, as well as a means to serve others. He defines work as, "any necessary and meaningful task that God calls and gifts a person to do and which can be undertaken to the glory of God and for the edification and aid of human beings, being inspired by the Spirit and foreshadowing the realities of the new creation."¹² Witherington's definition not only establishes the origins and purpose of work, but it also gives work an eschatological purpose, which expands it beyond a means to a temporal goal.¹³

A significant contribution to the faith and work conversation is Joshua Sweeden's book, *The Church and Work*. Sweeden does not provide a definition of work as a stand-alone concept, but rather seeks to define what constitutes *good work*. Partnering with various theological traditions, Sweeden's contribution is important because it gives work more depth and purpose. His use of the term *good work* "signifies what work should be in order to best benefit persons, communities, and the environment."¹⁴ Perhaps most importantly, Sweeden emphasizes the role of the church community in shaping a theological and ethical understanding of what is good work. The church community

¹¹ Ben Witherington, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), x-xi.

¹² Witherington, *Work*, xii.

¹³ Witherington is an ordained pastor in the United Methodist tradition. His views of work may be influenced by his Wesleyan theological training. As will be developed in later chapters, a uniquely Wesleyan perspective on work sees work as a means of stewardship, namely a means to glorify God. Witherington's definition of work fits nicely into this idea of work being stewarded.

¹⁴ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 4.

serves as the “hermeneutical community through which work can be evaluated and the tenets of good work understood.”¹⁵

Another unique challenge in establishing a theology of work is the fact that it is a relatively new endeavor. It wasn’t until the 1950s that Roman Catholic theologian M. D. Chenu began to establish a comprehensive theology of work.¹⁶ For centuries, the Church debated vocation, seeking to determine what is a calling and to what type of work is one called by God. The Church has also entered into theological conversations about the morality of work, namely regarding acts of justice and equality. While these are important conversations, for many years the Church neglected to establish what God’s intentions were for work in the first place. The Church ignored how work relates to one’s relationship with God, others, and one’s own identity, as well as the ways in which work is or is not a part of God’s own ongoing creative work in the world. In the opening of Chenu’s groundbreaking book, he highlights the absence of a deeper theological reflection on work, stating,

... up to the present, Christian teachers did not consider these human realities except as amorphous matter, capable of being explained only in a moral sense and sanctified under the heading of “duties of one’s state of life.” They commented, naturally, on the passage of Genesis dealing with the punitive aspect of work, but gave no direct attention to its objective content. They made no attempt to discern its economic and human potentialities, or to consider its possible relationship with the divine ordering of the world.¹⁷

¹⁵ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 7.

¹⁶ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 71.

¹⁷ M.D. Chenu, *The Theology of Work: An Exploration*, trans. Lillian Soiron (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1966), 4.

Volf notes that Chenu's work marks an "important shift in the theological approach to the problem of work."¹⁸ For the first time, a theology of work became an equal contender with other theological fields like atonement theories, pneumatology, or eschatology.

A theology of work is also complex because it requires thoughtful interactions with various other theological fields. Cosden describes a theology of work as a genitive theology because it explores work in reference and relationship to various established doctrines within a systematic theology and seeks to study work as a created reality and a central part of God's universe.¹⁹ The interdisciplinary nature of a theology of work draws upon various doctrines in order to establish work as a unique theological entity worthy of continued study and scholarship. Yet, work cannot stand alone, as it is largely dependent upon other theological scholarship.

Developing a theology of work must also include humanity's experiences with work. To be human is to work. Human experiences with work, whether good or bad, add depth to the theological underpinning of a theology of work. It's impossible to write about work from a theological perspective without addressing the anthropological realities of work.²⁰ Work is both a divine and human experience and humanity's personal encounter with work contributes the theological development of work in important ways.

For example, an anthropological experience of work can be witnessed in the increase of women in the work place. This has led to a growing number of feminist

¹⁸ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 71.

¹⁹ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 5.

²⁰ Cosden, *A Theology of Work*, 17.

theologians establishing an important connection between gender and work.²¹ Feminist theology's contributions to other doctrines like the *Imago Dei* have impacted a theology of work. Larive writes, "much of the fruit of [feminist theologians'] efforts originate in the debates about sameness and difference regarding gender and sexual identity and the way labor management has evolved—or failed to evolve—at work both inside and outside the home."²² One cannot discuss the fallen nature of work without also discussing inequalities in the work place based on gender. Nor can one speak about the redemptive and eschatological nature of work without addressing the remedy to these inequalities.

The sheer number of voices contributing to the theological conversation adds to the complexity of establishing a uniform theology of work. Since Chenu's work, an array of pastors and theologians from a variety of theological traditions have sought to develop a more robust theology of work. As Sweeden notes, "multiple conversations [are] taking place"²³ in theological circles around faith and work. While on the one hand this is promising because it has elevated the importance of work in theology, the volume of literature has also muddied the waters. Describing work in theological terms remains "an elusive task"²⁴ due to the varying presentations of and perspectives on work.

²¹ Armand Larive, *After Sunday: A Theology of Work* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2004), 14.

²² Larive, *After Sunday*, 14.

²³ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 54.

²⁴ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 17.

The Dominant Presentations of Work: Protology, Ontology, and Pneumatology

There are some common streams among theologians, however. Within the diverse presentations of work, Sweeden notes there are three dominant lenses in which work is often presented—protology, ontology, and pneumatology.²⁵ Protology seeks to re-connect work with God’s created order of the world. While differing in their final conclusions, Pope John Paul II’s *Laborem Exercens* and Dorothee Söelle’s *To Work and To Love* root work in the created order, namely as seen in Genesis. Protological presentations of work seek to “return work to its proper order.”²⁶ Humanity is a co-creator with God and actively participates in the ongoing creation in the world.

An ontological presentation of work explores it “as it relates to both God’s and humans’ *being*, describing the nature and purpose of work as seen in God’s triune personhood, the redemptive act of Jesus Christ, and the human participation in the new creation.”²⁷ Theologians like David Jensen, Armand Larive, and Darrel Cosden root work in the Triune God and as a responsive act to God’s ongoing work in the world.²⁸ An ontological perspective of work incorporates eschatology, as work leads toward the full consummation of the new creation. Perhaps one of the most significant contributions of an ontological view of work is an understanding that work is also glorified in the new creation and does not cease.²⁹

²⁵ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 56-69.

²⁶ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 56.

²⁷ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 65. Italics original.

²⁸ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 65-66.

²⁹ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 67.

A newer perspective on work is the pneumatological perspective. Miroslav Volf has anchored work not only in the Genesis mandate to work, nor only as a responsiveness to God and God's relationship to humanity, but rather as a result of the work of the Spirit in human beings. Blending eschatology and pneumatology, Volf believes that "work in the Spirit follows God's intentions for work and allows for human flourishing and creativity."³⁰ Volf connects the Spirit's work and human *charisma* with the transformation of the world leading toward the new creation. Volf believes all work, Christian and non-Christian, as long as it is good work, participates with the Spirit in the transformation of the world.³¹

The scope of this dissertation cannot critique each of these theological lenses. It is important, however, to become familiar with the broad scope of theological definitions of work, as it shows not only the scope of various interpretations, but also the growing efforts in theology to better understand the phenomenon of work. Each perspective has uniquely contributed to the ongoing theological development of faith and work. Each has drawn from a variety of scriptural references to work, as well as provided contemporary applications for the modern worker. As the field of work changes, especially with the growing use of and dependence upon technology, more theological conversations drawing from a wide variety of perspectives and experiences will need to continue in order to help lay people discern how their faith impacts and is influenced by their work. The goal of this body of work is to contribute to the ongoing theological development of work itself by contributing a uniquely Wesleyan perspective of faith and work.

³⁰ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 67.

³¹ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 69.

Now that the difficulties in defining a theology of work have been established, the remainder of this chapter will highlight various scriptural references to work as it fits into four theological themes of the bible. When exegeting a biblical presentation of work, Volf states that the work of the student is to “consciously place biblical statements about work in the context of a reading of the bible as a whole and to apply both these individual statements and the overarching reading of the bible to the contemporary world of work.”³² Scriptural references to work are numerous. On a macro level, the bible presents work through four theological movements—creation, the Fall of humanity, the redemption of the world, and the in-breaking of God’s kingdom.

Creation

In the opening verse of Genesis, God is at work. “In the beginning, *God created* the heavens and the earth.”³³ Work is not a by-product of creation, nor is it something forced upon humanity.³⁴ Work, rather, is part of God’s own nature. Paul Stevens notes that the image of God as a worker is found throughout scripture, especially in the Old Testament:

The Old Testament is rich in metaphors to describe God as worker (Gen. 1-2, Job 10:3-12; Psa. 139:13-16), as builder/architect (Prov. 8:27-31), teacher (Mt. 7:28-9), composer and performer (Deut. 31:19), metalworker (Is. 1:24-6), garment maker and dresser (Job 29:14), potter (Is. 31:9), farmer (Hos. 10:11), shepherd (Ps. 23:1-14), tentmaker and camper (Job 9:8). These metaphors, while limited, offer a correspondence of meanings between the work of God and the work of

³² Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 78.

³³ Genesis 1:1. Italics mine.

³⁴ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 21.

humankind. They suggest that our work is a point of real connection with God and therefore a source of meaning and spirituality.³⁵

The writers of scripture are emphatic that God is active in the world, rejecting the notion of God sitting idly by as human history unfolds.

This view of God contrasts many ancient religions. The Babylonian view of creation notes that the world was created as the aftermath of a cosmic battle between two gods. Creation was accidental and not purposeful.³⁶ The Hebrew texts also contrast with the Greco-Roman religious systems one finds later in scripture. Theologian David Jenson notes how radical a working God was in ancient times. “God does not sit enthroned in heaven removed from work, willing things into existence by divine fiat. Unlike the gods of the Greco-Roman mythologies, who absolve themselves of work—dining on nectar and ambrosia in heavenly rest and contemplation—the biblical God works.”³⁷ The Hebrew understanding of God’s work and activity in the world stems from his love of and care for his good creation.³⁸

Of all of God’s work, however, humankind is the “crown of creation.”³⁹ God created humanity in God’s own image.⁴⁰ To be an image-bearer is to be infused with the nature and characteristics of God—thus God as a worker means humans are to be

³⁵ Stevens, *The Other Six Days*, 113.

³⁶ Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work* (New York: Dutton Publishing, 2012), 34.

³⁷ Jenson, *Responsive Labor*, 22.

³⁸ Gene Edward Veith Jr., *God at Work* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 26.

³⁹ Tom Nelson, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 20.

⁴⁰ Genesis 1:26.

workers.⁴¹ Genesis 1:26-28 notes that part of the human experience is to fulfill God's commandment to have dominion over all of creation and to subdue it.⁴²

Humanity is also invited to co-create with God, as they are instructed to increase their fruit and multiply.⁴³ Scholars call this command *the cultural mandate*.⁴⁴ Art Lindsley notes that this is a mandate “because it shows the place of human beings in creation and calls us to work with the things God has made—ruling over, ordering, classifying, reshaping, developing, and unfolding the potential we have been given.”⁴⁵

Nancy Pearcey describes the relationship between the cultural mandate and work, stating,

The lesson of the Cultural Mandate is that our sense of fulfillment depends on engaging in creative, constructive work. The ideal human existence is not eternal leisure or an endless vacation . . . Our calling is not just to “go to heaven” but also to cultivate the earth, not just to “save souls” but also to serve God through our work. For God himself is engaged not only in the work of salvation but also in the work of preserving and developing his creation. When we obey the Cultural Mandate, we participate in the work of God himself.⁴⁶

Genesis reveals that work has always been a part of the human experience. God placed Adam in the garden “to till it and keep it.”⁴⁷ Stevens notes,

⁴¹ Tom Nelson, *Work Matters*, 22.

⁴² Terence Fretheim, *Creation Untamed: The Bible, God, and Natural Disasters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2010), 152. Fretheim notes that creation has always been wild and in need of taming. Some think that taming, subduing, and having dominion over creation is a result of the Fall. Fretheim believes that while creation *was good* it was never tranquil or tame. This says something remarkable about God. It means that not only was humanity made to work, God created humanity for a specific type of work—taming and subduing God's good creation.

⁴³ Genesis 1:22.

⁴⁴ Whelchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, 14.

⁴⁵ Art Lindsley, “The Call to Creativity,” *Institute for Faith, Work & Economics*, accessed April 19, 2017, <https://tifwe.org/resource/the-call-to-creativity/>.

⁴⁶ Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity From Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 47.

⁴⁷ Genesis 2:15.

The two words used by God in his command for Adam to work are *abad* (work) and *shamar* (take care). Interestingly, these words are also used to mean “service to God” and “keeping of his commandments,” respectively. This implies that we should make no distinction between sacred and secular work. In God’s design there is no dualism—sacred and secular.⁴⁸

Work, then, is not only a continuation of creation; it is also a means by which humanity has been called to serve and worship God.

Humanity’s call to have dominion over the earth was not a call to the subjection of the earth, but a statement about purpose and relationship with the God over all creation. In Elizabeth Ellen Ostring’s work *Be a Blessing: The Theology of Work in the Narratives of Genesis*, she notes that the original intent of work, as seen through the lens of dominion, was to participate in an act of blessing creation as God blessed it in calling it good. She notes that dominion has more to do with relationship to God than having power over something. She writes,

The gift of dominion, the term used to embrace the work lovingly given humanity, depended on, and was restrained by, the human choice for right relationship with their sovereign God. Significantly, it was through his instructions for work that God indicated both his sovereignty and his commitment to a relationship with humanity. These instructions (Gen. 2:15-17) contained the basis for a covenant between God and the human race, and indicate dominion with limits.⁴⁹

Some scholars believe that work only came into being as a result of the Fall, adding to a sense of disillusionment with work.⁵⁰ This does not honor the creation story. Ben Witherington notes, “It is perfectly clear that God’s good plan always included human beings working, or, more specifically, living in the constant cycle of work and

⁴⁸ Stevens, *Work Matters*, 11-12.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Ellen Ostring, *Be a Blessing: The Theology of Work in the Narrative of Genesis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 91.

⁵⁰ Witherington, *Work*, 2.

rest.”⁵¹ Genesis seeks to make clear that humanity’s work is not a result of sin, but rather a continuation of God’s providence in the world.

While work is good and a part of the natural order of life, there are limitations to humanity’s work. Just as God rested on the seventh day, so too is humanity commanded to observe a day of rest.⁵² Rest becomes a central part of work throughout scripture.

Timothy Keller says, “As beings made in his image, then we can assume that rest, and the things you do as you rest, are good and life-giving in and of themselves.”⁵³ Jeff Van Duzer also notes that as image-bearers, while humanity can co-create with God, they are limited in their creation capacities and were never created to be gods themselves.⁵⁴ Work should be celebrated, honored, and respected within the boundaries of work and rest.

The Fall

Genesis 3 is a central text in developing a theology of work. The Fall of humanity resulted in the degradation of four relationships experienced by humanity—relationship with God, relationship to themselves, relationship with others, and relationship to all of creation.⁵⁵ While each of these degradations has had an impact on humanity’s experiences in the world, “alienation from God . . . inevitably causes alienation in all areas

⁵¹ Witherington, *Work*, 3.

⁵² Exodus 20:8-11.

⁵³ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 40.

⁵⁴ Jeff Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God (And What Still Needs to Be Fixed)* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 33-34.

⁵⁵ “The Bible and Work,” Theology of Work, accessed April 19, 2017, <https://www.theologyofwork.org/resources/work-in-the-bible>.

of life.”⁵⁶ As God’s image-bearers, alienation affects the intended purpose of work. As seen in the creation narrative, work was a means of participation in the continuation of creation.

The Fall, however, tainted work as laborious and sometimes destructive. As a result of Adam and Eve’s rebellion, God responded with an indictment about the future nature of work. In Genesis 3:17-19, God says,

Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, “You shall not eat of it,” cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

In this text, the language of work became associated with the language of curse. What was once celebrated as good and a part of God’s own nature and created order became the source of “thorns and thistles.” Work was meant to be a fulfillment of living out God’s image and continual purposes in the world, but because of the Fall it became a yoke humanity was cursed to bear.

Ostring links the laborious nature of work with choice. She notes work after the Fall became something it was not intended to be—a curse.⁵⁷ For Ostring, what is important is not the change in the status of work, but the choice humanity makes in who they work for. She writes, “embedded in the curse pronounced on the serpent is the suggestion that humanity still has a choice about whether to work with the serpent or with God. When there is ‘enmity’ there are two opposing influences, implying the ongoing

⁵⁶ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 167.

⁵⁷ Ostring, *Be a Blessing*, 91.

need for choice.”⁵⁸ Jensen echoes the sentiment of choice, noting, “God’s work is good for all and enough for all, summoning our work to follow its rhythms; yet we reject God’s work, and as a result our labors become toil and drudgery.”⁵⁹ It is clear throughout Genesis that humanity would continually choose to work outside of the relationship with God, which results in not only the curse of work, but the breakdown of humanity’s relationship with God and others.⁶⁰

Throughout the progression of scripture, work is often represented as an idol in place of the worship of God.⁶¹ In Genesis 4, Cain becomes indignant against God and his brother Abel because Cain’s offering to God was haphazard. God’s rejection of Cain’s offering led to Cain murdering his brother, which in turn led to God’s cursing of Cain’s future work of tilling the ground (Gen.4:12). In the story of the tower of Babel, humans used their God-given ability of manual labor to build a tower not for God’s glory, but rather to “make a name for ourselves.”⁶²

The idolatry of work has led to a seemingly insatiable appetite for wealth and the accumulation of goods. Amos’s prophetic words against Israel called out God’s people for their overindulgence, saying, “I will tear down the winter house as well as the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end ... Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the

⁵⁸ Ostring, *Be a Blessing*, 91.

⁵⁹ Jensen, *Responsive Labor*, 23.

⁶⁰ Ostring, *Be a Blessing*, 124.

⁶¹ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 167.

⁶² Genesis 11:12.

poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, ‘Bring something to drink!’”⁶³ Sabbath was replaced with workaholism, and personal identity became associated with one’s work and not God.⁶⁴ Repeatedly throughout scripture, God calls God’s people to return to Sabbath practices. Etched into tablets, Sabbath was a non-negotiable practice of Israel, but over time it had long become neglected.⁶⁵

At creation, work had purpose and meaning, but after the Fall, some biblical writers present it as an endless and a pointless task.⁶⁶ The struggle to find purpose in work is seen vividly in the book of Ecclesiastes. The writer opens and closes the book noting that *all is vanity*, including the toilsome nature of work.⁶⁷ Work through this book is a source of joy as it brings achievement (1:12-16), pleasure (2:1-11), wisdom (2:12-17), and wealth (2:18-26), and yet work is still like chasing after the wind (1:14, 17)—it simply does not satisfy the deeper desires of humanity. The writer laments the nature of work, saying,

So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me; for all is vanity and a chasing after wind. I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun ... So I turned and gave my heart up to despair concerning all the toil of my labors under the sun ... What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun? For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity.⁶⁸

⁶³ Amos 3:15-4:1.

⁶⁴ Nelson, *Work Matters*, 42-45.

⁶⁵ cf. Ex. 20:8, 31:14; Lev. 23:3, 25:1-16; Deut. 5:14; Neh. 13:17-22; Is. 56:1-8, 58:13, Jer. 17:20-27; Ez. 20:12-13, 20.

⁶⁶ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 98.

⁶⁷ Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12:10.

⁶⁸ Ecclesiastes 2:17-23.

The paradox of work after the Fall is that the bible presents work as “both a noble expression of human creation in the image of God and a painful testimony to human estrangement from God.”⁶⁹ The biblical writers seem to say work it is not all it should be, nor what it was created to be. Work, as did humanity, needed redemption.

The Redemption of the World

From Genesis to the Gospels, it is easy to see the result of sin and the broken state of God’s good creation. During this time, “God’s grace continues even in the face of his people’s chronic sin and rebellion ... but [God] promises never to abandon his commitment to full restoration.”⁷⁰ Jesus said, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.”⁷¹ The work of God through Jesus brought salvation to a broken world. Amy Sherman writes:

[Jesus’s] salvation is full-orbed, dealing with every dimension of the Fall. Through his life, death and resurrection, he overcomes *all* the effects of the Fall. He pays the price for our sins and all sin, accepting God’s punishment on the cross. His resurrection brings the renewed possibility of shalom between humans and God, within humans themselves, among humans, and between humans and the created order.⁷²

⁶⁹ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 168.

⁷⁰ Amy L. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 78. Italics original.

⁷¹ John 5:17.

⁷² Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 22. Italics original.

In Jesus, all curses on humanity are reversed.⁷³ Vivian Ligo believes that because of redemption, participation in work becomes one of the unique ways in which humans live into what it means to be fully human again.⁷⁴

Certainly, Jesus's death and resurrection have eternal implications for individuals.⁷⁵ However, the Apostle Paul asserts that the cross and empty grave have cosmic implications as well. In Jesus, God reconciled the entire world to God's self.⁷⁶ In Jesus's preaching and teaching, and in his death and resurrection, he offered a gospel that wasn't just for personal salvation, but one that ushered in a new kingdom—a kingdom set to renew *all* things.⁷⁷ In this light, conversion for an individual means not only eternal salvation, but a participation in solidarity with the purposes of God's Kingdom.

The redemption of all things has profound implications on work itself. Not only does this affect humanity's righteous standing before God, it also redeems the nature of their work. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul notes that Jesus' death and resurrection redeem the nature of what was lost in the Fall, namely the body. However, at the close of the chapter, he notes that because of Christ's resurrection, what one does with their body (i.e. labor) is

⁷³ Cf. Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:22; 2 Cor. 5:18-20, Eph. 1:10, 2:1-6, Col. 1:20-21.

⁷⁴ Vivian Ligo, "Configuring a Christian Spirituality of Work," *Theology Today* 67, no. 4 (January 2011): 444.

⁷⁵ Jesus' death and resurrection results in the eternal salvation of one's soul. Jesus says in John 11:25-26, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." In John 14, he says he goes to prepare a place for those who believe. While this is true and good, far too often presentations of salvation are focused primarily on one's eternal resting place—heaven. However, the dominant presentation of salvation has more to do with how one lives life on earth than with their final state of being. For more on this, see N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008).

⁷⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:19.

⁷⁷ Ephesians 1:10; Revelation 21:5.

no longer in vain. He writes, “Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”⁷⁸ Work is done through one’s body, and therefore, Christ’s resurrection affects the use of one’s body.

The redemption of all things brings about a new way of living. In Colossians 3, Paul speaks about the newness of Christ, saying to “clothe yourself with the new self.”⁷⁹ Every part of a person, including their work life, is to be clothed in the newness of Christ. Throughout the chapter, Paul provides practical ways of doing this—“strip off the old self with its practices.”⁸⁰ Implicit in this passage, then, is to throw away the old way of participating in work. Work under the Fall is driven by ego and materialism. Work done by *the new self* glorifies God. Paul notes this clearly in the close of the chapter, “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”⁸¹ Work, under the new self, is work that is done to the Lord and for the Lord.

With this in mind, Sherman writes extensively on how the righteous understand and experience work. She believes that the work of a Christian is for God’s glory, not self-fulfillment.⁸² It rejects workaholism and seeks balance in Sabbath keeping.⁸³ It sets boundaries on institutional loyalty, especially when institutional work contradicts gospel-

⁷⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:58.

⁷⁹ Colossians 3:10.

⁸⁰ Colossians 3:9.

⁸¹ Colossians 3:17.

⁸² Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 47.

⁸³ Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 47.

living.⁸⁴ A Christian's understanding of work embraces a dependence on the Spirit and, no matter the work, recognizes that God is the primary audience.⁸⁵ Work, once again, becomes a form of worship and an act of service to God.⁸⁶ Work points toward justice in the world, and seeks to reestablish shalom and order.⁸⁷

The In-breaking of the Kingdom

Early in Jesus's public ministry, he preached that the Kingdom of God was at hand.⁸⁸ Understood as the reign of God and "how God's saving work in the world may be understood and experienced,"⁸⁹ the kingdom has practical implications for how people are to experience their work. While speaking to those awaiting the full consummation of God's Kingdom, the Apostle Paul writes that Christians are to "work with their hands."⁹⁰ He also says, "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus... Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters."⁹¹

⁸⁴ Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 48-49.

⁸⁵ Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 49-50.

⁸⁶ Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 50.

⁸⁷ Shalom is an often-misunderstood term. Often presented as peace, shalom is greater than a lack of conflict. Cornelius Plantings Jr. provides one of the most thorough definitions of shalom, stating it is "the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight.... In the Bible shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness and delight." Cornelius Plantings Jr. "Educating for Shalom: Our Calling as a Christian College," accessed October 18, 2018, <https://calvin.edu/about/who-we-are/our-calling.html?dotcmsredirect=1&dotcmsredirect=1>.

⁸⁸ Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:5.

⁸⁹ Howard Snyder, *Models of the Kingdom: Gospel, Culture and Mission in Biblical and Historical Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 11.

⁹⁰ 1 Thessalonians 4:11.

⁹¹ Colossians 3:17, 23-24.

As noted above, in 1 Corinthians 15 the Apostle Paul speaks about the resurrection of the body. Christ not only redeems the soul of a person, but He redeems the whole person—mind, body, and spirit. The resurrection asserts that what is physical, and a part of the human experience matters to God. Scholar N.T. Wright says,

The point of the resurrection... is that *the present bodily life is not valueless just because it will die*. God will raise it to new life. What you do with your body in the present matters because God has a great future in store for it ... What you do in the present—by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself—*will last into God's future*. These activities are not simply ways of making the present life a little less beastly, a little more bearable, until the day when we leave it behind altogether ... They are part of what we may call *building God's kingdom*.⁹²

Because of the cross and the resurrection, one's work has lasting significance and importance in the kingdom.

Work that awaits the full restoration of the world, no matter how mundane, has profound purpose in the kingdom. This is witnessed in the redemptive nature of work itself. Stevens states, "Since the scope of redemption in Christ is the same as the scope of creation, therefore work is done for God's realm ... [bringing about] *shalom*."⁹³ He also notes that "some people are doing the work of God's realm without knowing God and without knowing that they are doing God's work."⁹⁴

Not only does work reveal God's Kingdom, it is a part of how God restores all things. Romans 8:19-23 speaks of creation groaning and awaiting the revealing of God's

⁹² N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 193. Italics original.

⁹³ Stevens, *Work Matters*, 137.

⁹⁴ Stevens, *Work Matters*, 137.

children. The focus is not on the fallen state of the world, but rather on Christ's redemptive work through humanity. Cosden notes,

It is we who are “in Christ” and thus also now the new humanity (the image of God completed), who take on the role, as we justly should, of bringing the non-human creation to its glorification, or “glorious destiny.” ... Since nature co-inheres “in us,” our salvation and glorification become creation's own salvation and glory. That this salvation of the natural world includes our work follows logically. Work, which has further shaped nature, is now just as much a part of nature as what God made originally.... We must conclude from this biblical material that our work experiences salvation along with us.⁹⁵

Human work has a powerful role in the world. There truly is no menial task; rather, human work, albeit slowly and purposefully, is a part of a much grander narrative of the redemption of the world.

The Apostle Paul states that the work of humanity is a co-operating with God.⁹⁶ Volf sees this through two theological lenses—one that looks backward toward the original intent of work, while the other looks forward to God's future purpose for work. He writes, “The one rests on the doctrine of creation and sees work as cooperation with God in *creation continua*, the others rest on the doctrine of the last things and sees work as cooperation with God in the anticipation of God's eschatological *transformation mundi*.”⁹⁷ This means that no work is menial or mundane, but is a part of God's transformation of the world. It is important to note, as Volf does, that humanity is limited in their participation, as ultimately it is God who brings the New Jerusalem to earth.⁹⁸ It does not mean, however, that humanity is idle in their activity. Christians are not just to

⁹⁵ Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*, 71.

⁹⁶ 1 Corinthians 3:9.

⁹⁷ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 98. Italics original.

⁹⁸ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 99-100.

be “a sign and foretaste of ultimate salvation: they are to be part of the means by which God makes this happen in both the present and the future.”⁹⁹

A Definition of Work

As has been noted, defining work in theological terms is not as easy as one might think. This is largely why ongoing theological reflections on work are vital to help lay people understand how to live a more integrated life. While it is difficult to define work, it is important to differentiate what is and is not work. Thus, using scripture’s expansive presentation of work, work can be defined as *an activity created by God to be lived out and experienced by humanity, in partnership with the Spirit, for the purpose of cultivating God’s ongoing creative endeavors in the world, and to reveal the in-breaking of Kingdom of God now, as well as in its coming fullness*. All work is a partnership with God, and by sheer participation in work, one glorifies God, the Creator of work. Therefore, work of any kind matters and work itself is worthy of continued theological reflection.

Summary

Developing a theology of work is an ongoing process. In the scope of history, the infancy of the field has opened up an important theological conversation. Diverse voices and experiences are helping shape the faith and work theological landscape. This is vital, as it helps lay people engage their work with a new set of resources. Since the faith and work conversation is a relatively new contribution to theology, it is highly adaptive in

⁹⁹ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 200.

addressing not only the biblical presentation of work, but also the contemporary issues that arise in the workplace.

The ongoing nature of developing a theology of work is vitally important to helping lay people live a more integrated life. David Miller concludes his book *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith and Work Movement* with a call to continue to engage the development of a work theology. He writes,

Once religious leaders and theologians decide to engage the [Faith and Work Movement]—to get into the Integration Box, so to speak—great possibilities exist for the church writ large and the society it serves. The church and the theological academy have a choice: they can sit on the sidelines, ignore the movement, and let it pass them by, or they can learn from it, engage it, and help shape the theology and practice of faith at work. ... The church and the academy can offer theological resources and practical tools to equip those whose calling is to serve in and through the marketplace. For the church to do anything less is to abandon millions of Christians for five-sevenths of their week, and to abdicate responsibility for and influence over this important sphere of society. Indeed, active participation in the transformation of individual employees, their workplaces, and the overall marketplace may be one of the most powerful means to help feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and welcome the stranger.¹⁰⁰

When seeking to establish a biblical view of work, one discovers that, from Genesis to Revelation, work matters to God. God created work and created humanity to participate in it. In Christ's death and resurrection, God redeemed not only the individual, but what the individual does. Work, as seen through the lens of the in-breaking Kingdom, is not menial and mundane, but rather a vital part in revealing God's Kingdom *on earth, as it is in heaven*.

While humanity's work has its limitations, a biblical presentation of work can help laity discover that what they do is important in revealing the Kingdom of God. The Apostle Paul writes, "let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which

¹⁰⁰ Miller, *God at Work*, 153.

God called you.”¹⁰¹ Understanding that one’s work is not just for personal wealth or gain, but rather a part of God’s Kingdom, reframes Ecclesiastes’ premise that “all is vanity.”¹⁰² Work viewed through the lens of scripture asserts that it is not mundane or ordinary. It is a central part of God’s good world.

The next chapter will begin to engage faith and work from a uniquely Wesleyan perspective, drawing from Wesleyanism as a practical theology concerned with holy living in everyday life. The creation narrative is a dominant theological principal in Wesleyan theology, namely the practical impacts of the *Imago Dei* on practical living. Developing a Wesleyan perspective on work will provide the theological resources and practical tools needed to help lay people within the Wesleyan tradition experience a more integrated life.

¹⁰¹ 1 Corinthians 7:17.

¹⁰² Ecclesiastes 1:2.

CHAPTER THREE:
DEVELOPING A WESLEYAN PERSPECTIVE OF WORK

Overview

In the previous chapter, it was noted that establishing a comprehensive theology of work is a difficult task. The volume of scholarship has diversified the theological conversation and created a variety of theological positions on work. While this is not bad in and of itself, it adds to the complexity of the topic and makes it difficult to come to a uniform understanding of the phenomenon of work. Scripture itself also provides a diverse presentation of work, with some passages elevating work while others speak of its toilsome nature. Work viewed through the broad lens of creation, the Fall, redemption, and the Kingdom of God reveals, however, that work still has a divine purpose in God's created order.

As has been previously noted, there is a void of uniquely Wesleyan perspectives on work in theological literature. Unlike other theologians such as Luther, Calvin, and Perkins, Wesley did not write a theological treatise on work. However, using Wesley's sermons, teachings and the long history of Methodism, one can begin to piece together a unique Wesleyan perspective on work. This chapter will begin to lay the theological groundwork necessary to address work from a Wesleyan perspective by focusing on the integrative approach of Wesleyan theology, as well as focusing on the image of God as a foundational principal in Wesleyan theological development.

Challenges in Wesleyan Theology

Creating a Wesleyan perspective on work comes with its own set of challenges. Like any theological tradition, Wesleyanism is complex and nuanced. Understanding where Wesleyanism generally fits into theology is not an agreed-upon matter. Steven Koskie notes that when it comes to developing a Wesleyan theological hermeneutic, “Wesleyans have struggled with how to read Wesley in the service of constructive theology, either trying to systematize doctrines from his occasional writings or reading ‘through’ his texts to uncover his socio-historical and literary influences.”¹ Koskie goes on to note, “Modern-day Wesleyans live in a different context from Wesley, so even if some of Wesley’s methodological and theological interests can be retained, other interests must be modified or abandoned.”² Applying Wesley’s teachings two hundred years after they were written requires careful and thoughtful interactions with Wesley’s writings for contemporary application.

While Koskie is specifically trying to establish a Wesleyan hermeneutic, his thoughts are applicable to developing a Wesleyan perspective on work. Koskie places most Wesleyan theological presentations into two dominant categories—traditional scholasticism and socio-historical analysis. In traditional scholasticism, “Wesleyan theology has distilled and systematized Wesley’s doctrine, commending it as the baseline for Wesleyan belief.”³ Koskie warns that scholars “adapted Wesley’s thought to the

¹ Steven J. Koskie, “Can We Speak of a Wesleyan Theological Hermeneutic of Scripture Today?” in *Wesley, Wesleyans, and Reading the Bible as Scripture*, ed. Joel B. Green and David F. Watson (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 196.

² Koskie, “Can We Speak of a Wesleyan Theological Hermeneutic of Scripture Today?” 196.

³ Koskie, “Can We Speak of a Wesleyan Theological Hermeneutic of Scripture Today?” 197.

modern academic arena in a way that yields a theological practice quite different from Wesley's, a theological practice more at home among the divisions of the academy—divisions, for example, between biblical exegesis and systematic theology—than what Wesley, writing in the eighteenth century, would have understood.”⁴

Koskie is equally critical of those who isolate Wesley to a purely socio-historical context. Those within this perspective see Wesley's writings as “doorways through which their socio-historical background can be reconstructed, and their various sources catalogued.”⁵ While reading Wesley through his own historical context is helpful in many ways, it limits Wesley's thoughts and practices to eighteenth-century England and neglects the ongoing development of Wesleyanism today.

Koskie provides a third and helpful way to interpret Wesley for contemporary use. Using Alasdair MacIntyre's arguments on developing moral enquiry, Koskie notes that “a tradition exists within a community and extends through time ... Every tradition changes over time, and these changes are the result of needed adaptations to novel situations that often are beyond what could have been envisioned by a tradition's founders.”⁶ MacIntyre provides a helpful analogy for how to apply historical theologies for modern use by using the example of learning a craft.

The authority of a master within a craft is both more and other than a matter of exemplifying the best standards so far. It is also and most importantly a matter of knowing how to go further and especially how to direct others towards going further, using what can be learned from the tradition afforded by the past to move toward the *telos* of fully perfected work. It is thus knowing how to link past and future that those with authority are able to draw upon tradition, to interpret and

⁴ Koskie, “Can We Speak of a Wesleyan Theological Hermeneutic of Scripture Today?” 197.

⁵ Koskie, “Can We Speak of a Wesleyan Theological Hermeneutic of Scripture Today?” 197.

⁶ Koskie, “Can We Speak of a Wesleyan Theological Hermeneutic of Scripture Today?” 199.

reinterpret it, so that its directedness towards the *telos* of that particular craft becomes apparent in new and characteristically unexpected ways.⁷

To develop a Wesleyan theological perspective on work, one must draw upon the tradition of Wesleyanism as a theological community that spans diverse historical contexts while also interpreting and reinterpreting Wesley's own writings in order to draw out practical applications for today's worker. While Wesleyanism has a place in scholasticism, and while it is important to understand the social and historical context in which Wesleyanism was born, for the scope of this text, Wesley's writings must be presented in a new manner that goes further than the *master* himself, by applying his teachings to a topic in which, as has been previously noted, he was largely silent.⁸

Albert Outler, the founder of modern-day Wesleyan theology, echoes MacIntyre's sentiment, noting that Wesley sought to apply ancient theology to modern-day problems.⁹ In Outler's seminal work, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*, he notes, although the theological issues of today are radically different from Wesley's, "it is just exactly the sort of crisis that [Wesley] would have tried heroically to comprehend, confident that the perennial gospel still offers to us in the twentieth century the same eternal truth and hope

⁷ Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 65–66.

⁸ It is not that Wesley was ignorant of the importance of thoughtful engagement with the topic of work. Having lived during the start of the Industrial Revolution, Wesley witnessed great changes in England's economy. The rise of commercialism brought grave concerns for Wesley since it created large inequalities of wealth and access to necessary goods and services for the poor. Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principals*, trans. John E. Steely and W. Stephen Gunter (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 43.

Wesley could never have foreseen the complex nuances of the working environment of today. The rise and use of technology and communications, the role of women and minority communities in the workplace, and the expanding interrelated nature of global economies were simply outside of Wesley's experience. Adapting Wesley's teachings in the manner in which Koskie has outlined is essential to address the growing complexities of work today.

⁹ Albert Cook Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1975), 2.

he himself had proved it had for eighteenth-century Englishmen: not only the lively hope of *heaven*, but also the credible hope for a meaningful life in *this* age (and any age whatever its crises between theology and culture).”¹⁰

Wesley’s teachings still offer a *meaningful life*, not only for Christians writ large, but specifically for today’s worker. In order to establish this aim, four foundational principals of Wesleyan theology must be addressed—Wesleyanism’s orientation toward practical, integrative, and participatory theology; Wesley’s theology of the *Imago Dei*; Wesleyanism’s teleological nature toward the renewal of the image of God; and its emphasis on mutual accountability through group formation as the primary means for renewing the image of God. The latter two principals will be developed in subsequent chapters.

A Practical, Integrative, and Participatory Theology

Wesley used several terms to define his theological developments, but none more than what he called *practical* or sometimes *experimental divinity*. Wesleyan theologian Kenneth Collins provides a thorough and helpful definition of Wesley’s use of practical divinity.

Wesley used the terms “experimental divinity” and “practical divinity” almost interchangeably, suggesting something of the larger role that experience played in his theology. . . . Experimental or practical divinity is participatory and engaging. It entails nothing less than the inward religion (by grace through faith) within the context of the Christian community. That is, for Wesley, practical divinity was the gracious means whereby people could “test the truths of scripture for themselves.” . . . It is the totality of the Christian life, in all its various dimensions, both public and private, heart and mind, personal and social, that attests to the truth of

¹⁰ Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*, 2. Italics original.

Scripture. ... The truth of Scripture must be actualized, [and] operationalized in increasing Christlikeness in both personal life and in the broader community.¹¹

What's important to note is that Wesleyan theology is focused on integrating biblical and theological truths into the practical nature of life. It is not concerned as much with creating new doctrinal statements of an esoteric nature, but rather it establishes what Wesley called "plain old Bible divinity."¹² Faith and personal life are meant to be integrated. What one believes influences all aspects of their life. Thomas Langford notes that Wesleyan theology is "not so much for the purpose of understanding life as for changing life."¹³ While beliefs are important, discovering the applicability of beliefs is central to a Wesleyan ethos.

For Wesleyans, theology is a lived experience. Wesleyanism promotes "whole-life discipleship"¹⁴ by emphasizing the integration of biblical principles in all areas of life, "not just those areas that [many] typically think of as being 'spiritual' in nature."¹⁵ D. Stephen Long asserts that a Wesleyan social ethic "begins by recognizing that theology, the social, and ethics are three distinct spheres that need to be brought together."¹⁶ Wesleyans practice this integrative approach to theology by de-compartmentalizing life through the integration of what is often labeled as the secular

¹¹ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 2.

¹² Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 2.

¹³ Thomas A. Langford, "John Wesley and Theological Method," in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. Randy L Maddox (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 35.

¹⁴ David Wright, *How God Makes the World a Better Place: A Wesleyan Primer on Faith, Work, and Economic Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Library Press, 2012), 13.

¹⁵ Wright, *How God Makes the World a Better Place*, 13.

¹⁶ D. Stephen Long, *John Wesley's Moral Theology: The Quest for God and Goodness* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 209.

into a sacred framework. Wesleyanism “demonstrates the truth that becoming a disciple of Jesus is just as much about what happens in all the other hours of [one’s] life as it is about what happens in the hours [one] invests in personal spiritual disciplines and in attending church.”¹⁷

In 1742, Wesley published a pamphlet called *The Character of a Methodist*.¹⁸ This pamphlet established the distinct practices of Methodists.¹⁹ Wesley is clear that he did not seek to establish a new theological tradition, but rather desired to call all Christians to deeper holiness of heart (*inward religion*) and life (*outward religion*).²⁰ Wesley describes Methodists not as those with differing opinions on matters of doctrine, (although he does note some theological difference from Roman Catholics, Socians, and Arians),²¹ but rather those “who have God’s love poured into their hearts through the Holy Spirit ... [and those who] love the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with their entire mind.”²² While it might not seem radically different than any other Christian, and Wesley notes that it is not,²³ it is the way in which Methodists

¹⁷ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 14.

¹⁸ Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, *John Wesley on Methodism* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2014), 74.

¹⁹ As Wesley notes in the pamphlet, the term *Methodist* was not a celebrated label, but rather used as a derogatory term to describe those who followed Wesley’s teachings. John Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” in *John Wesley on Methodism*, ed. Kenneth Cain Kinghorn (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2014), 79.

²⁰ Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” 82.

²¹ Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” 80-81.

²² Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” 83.

²³ Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” 91.

exercise their faith as an integrated practice that differentiates them from other Christians.²⁴

Methodists, according to Wesley, spend every waking moment seeking not to do “one’s own will, but the will of the him who sent [them] into the world. Always, their holy single intention in everything is not to please themselves, but the God they love.”²⁵

Wesley goes on to say,

As a consequence of this commitment, whatever the Christians do is wholly to the glory of God. In all their works, Christians not only *aim* at glorifying God (which having a single eye implies), and they actually *attain* it. All of this business, occasions of relaxation, and prayers serve this great end. Whether they sit in God’s house, walk, lie down, or rise up, in their speaking and doing they promote the grand business of their lives, which is God’s glory. Whether they dress, work, eat, drink, or rest from tiring labor—everything inclines to the advancement of God’s glory, through peace and goodwill among all people. The Methodists’ one invariable rule is this: Whatever they do in word or deed, they do in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.²⁶

Work, then, through the eyes of Wesley, is not simply to gain wealth, but rather as a means of glorifying God. Faith is not isolated to the religious life, but practically lived through everyday ventures like work, family, and even leisure.²⁷

²⁴ In a sermon titled “The Almost Christian,” Wesley distinguishes between what he calls *an almost Christian* from *an altogether Christian*. This distinction is not between denominations or other Christian traditions, but rather as those who purposefully practice their faith in everyday situations. John Wesley, “The Almost Christian,” in *The Sermons of John Wesley*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins and Jason E. Vickers (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 99.

²⁵ Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” 86-87.

²⁶ Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” 88.

²⁷ On the one hand, this sounds like a Lutheran theology of vocation. However, Ben Witherington provides a thoughtful critique of Luther’s theology of vocation—which he feels is too broad—providing a more Wesleyan understanding of sanctification. Witherington believes that common, everyday activities are not a vocation in the sense of a divine and sacred calling, but rather a means to participate in working out one’s own salvation. The activity is sacred only when it is used as a means to glorify God. For more on a critical analysis of Luther’s understanding of vocation, see Ben Witherington, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 23-36.

While faith is practical and integrative, it is also participatory. Wesleyans believe in a synergistic relationship between God and humanity, in which God and humanity work together to cultivate holiness in one's own life and in the world.²⁸ Wesleyan theologian Theodore Runyon defines synergism as “partnerships with and participation in the divine Spirit, that *synergy* (working together) which is a partnership in which the Creator informs, infuses, and inspires the creature with the original goal of human existence.”²⁹ Through this synergistic relationship, humanity becomes active participants in their own sanctification.³⁰ In Wesley's sermon, “On Working Out Your Own Salvation,” he notes, “If God worketh in you, then work out your own salvation. The original word rendered, work out, implies the doing a thing thoroughly. Your own; for you yourselves must do this, or it will be left undone forever.”³¹ Partnering with God requires intentional effort on humanity's part to cultivate a deep and lifelong relationship with God.³²

²⁸ Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 22.

²⁹ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 22.

³⁰ Collins is quick to point out humanity's limitations in this synergistic relationship, differentiating what is God's sole action (i.e., grace) and what is humanity's response (i.e., faith). Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 12-13.

³¹ John Wesley, “On Working Out Your Own Salvation,” in *The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins and Jason E. Vickers (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 66.

³² Synergism was not a term Wesley used himself. However, the idea of God and humanity partnering in the work of inward and outward holiness does stand in contrast to John Calvin's more monergistic view of divine power. Calvin emphasized God's determinative will and that all things, including human choice, originates from God. Wesley saw the connection between God and humanity in far more relational terms. As has been noted above, scholars are quick to point out the limitations of synergism. It is clear, however, that Wesley believed that a dynamic relationship between God and humanity, and stressed the free choice of humanity to do God's will or to reject God's will. Don Thorsen, *Calvin vs Wesley: Bringing Belief in Line with Practice* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 40-41.

A synergistic relationship with God is not only for the sake of one's own life, but for the renewal of all of creation. One of Wesley's often-used terms was co-laboring with God in order to bring God's intended purposes for the world to fruition.³³ In Ephesians 2:10, the Apostle Paul writes, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Witherington notes that it is not simply that God does God's own work through humanity, as if humans are pawns on a chessboard, but rather that humanity responds to God's grace and willfully chooses to partner with God in doing good work in the world.³⁴

This is an important distinction because it differentiates what is God's work to do and what is humanity's work. As Witherington notes, "the one is not simply the other."³⁵ For example, humanity cannot redeem the world, but God chooses humanity as partners in its restoration. Witherington writes

But in any calling worthy of the name, it is never merely human beings working; it is also God working. The sooner we swallow our humility pills and see ourselves as lowly junior partners and co-laborers with God, rather than the only laborers on the scene, the sooner we will have a real grasp of work, vocation, and calling. . . . While doubtless God could have done it all by himself, instead he has chosen to involve us in his work! As Paul puts it, we are stewards of the mysteries of God, we are co-laborers in the vineyard, we are ministers of the grace of God, and we are neighbors shedding the love of God abroad to the world.³⁶

Synergism is also rooted in the contrast between Wesley and Calvin on grace. For more on the differences between Wesley and Calvin on grace, see Henry H. Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 63.

³³ Randy L Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 91-92.

³⁴ Witherington, *Work*, 28-29.

³⁵ Witherington, *Work*, 29.

³⁶ Witherington, *Work*, 35-36.

Dunning notes that this is what it means to be a part of the elect (Eph. 1:3-14; 1 Thess. 2:13-15). Election is not simply about a heavenly end, but rather one is elected to a task of special responsibility that would “demonstrate to the world the redemptive intention of God.”³⁷ Partnering with God is humanity’s ultimate vocation, or what Witherington calls one’s primary vocation.³⁸ One’s “secondary vocation,”³⁹ being a doctor, lawyer, stay-at-home-parent, teacher, factory worker, etc., provides the unique ways in which one lives out their primary vocation. Both the primary and secondary vocation require an active participation in God’s redemptive purposes in the world.

The practical, integrative, and participatory approach to theology is the groundwork in which to begin to build a Wesleyan theological perspective of work. Runyon states that humanity’s “original vocation... [is] to live as the image of God *in* the world.”⁴⁰ Understanding a Wesleyan theology of the image of God shapes how one lives out their vocation (both primary and secondary) in the world.

Wesley and the Image of God

The image of God is an axial theme in Wesleyanism.⁴¹ Wesleyanism is anchored in the understanding that the love of God is at the heart of all theology.⁴² God’s love is expressed in the nature in which God created humanity—in God’s own image. Humanity

³⁷ H. Ray Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image: Christian Ethics in Wesleyan Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 72.

³⁸ Witherington, *Work*, 46.

³⁹ Witherington, *Work*, 46-47.

⁴⁰ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 12. Italics mine.

⁴¹ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 8.

⁴² Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 20.

was the “apex of divine labor”⁴³ and in its original design was the “incorruptible picture of the God of glory.”⁴⁴ Wesley spoke of the image of God in terms of how one relates to God as opposed to something humans possess.⁴⁵ Inspired by the Eastern Fathers, Wesley spoke of the image of God as a mirror, “not only to mirror God in their own lives but to reflect the grace which they received into the world, and thus to mediate the life of God to the rest of creation.”⁴⁶ As noted above, a Wesleyan understanding of the image can be described as the primary vocation to which human beings are called. The fulfillment of that vocation “constitutes their true destiny.”⁴⁷

Wesley provided a “fuller concept”⁴⁸ of the image of God than his contemporaries. He understood the image of God in three ways—*the natural image*, *the political image*, and *the moral image*. Wesley understood the natural image to be the place of understanding, will, and liberty.⁴⁹ The political image “reveals that human beings are related not simply to one another and to God, but also to nature itself and to other creatures.”⁵⁰ Lastly, the moral image “is the chief mark of the human relationship to

⁴³ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 50.

⁴⁴ John Wesley, “Justification by Faith,” in *The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins and Jason E. Vickers (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 136.

⁴⁵ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 13.

⁴⁶ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 13.

⁴⁷ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 13-14.

⁴⁸ Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image*, 56.

⁴⁹ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 52.

⁵⁰ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 54.

God.”⁵¹ Wesley deemed the moral image as the “principle image”⁵² and “the most easily distorted.”⁵³

Before getting into the nuances of the image of God and establishing the connection between faith and work, it should be noted that tension arose with Wesley’s theology of original sin. Wesley’s understanding of the Fall of humanity and the passing on of original sin put him at odds with his theological contemporaries, especially those in the Reformed tradition.⁵⁴ Wesley believed that the natural and political image were marred and obscured but not totally obliterated in the Fall, but the moral image of God was totally lost.⁵⁵

While the Fall impacted the original design of humanity, the redemption of humanity through Jesus Christ and the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit restores the entire image (natural, political, and moral) and gives purpose and meaning back to humanity. Runyon states that justification and regeneration are

an epistemological event that opens up a new way of knowing. What is involved is not “head-knowledge,” abstract and unrelated to life, nor is it secret, esoteric wisdom available only to the initiated. It is the open invitation to participate in the divine re-creation of the image of God in humanity, namely, that sensitivity which

⁵¹ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 18.

⁵² Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 55.

⁵³ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 18.

⁵⁴ Wesley agreed with John Calvin on many theological points. In a letter to John Newton, Wesley admits that when it came to justification, he was only a “hairs breadth” from Calvinism. Wesley and Calvin also agreed that humanity was made in the image of God. Both believed in original sin, in that people had sinned against God and therefore lost their privileged status endowed to them at creation. Where they disagreed was on the nature and origin of sin. For more on the differences between Wesley and Calvin on original sin, see Don Thorsen, *Calvin vs Wesley: Bringing Belief in Line with Practice* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 30-33.

⁵⁵ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 59-64.

enables us to discern, reflect, and image the divine will and purpose in the world.⁵⁶

Witherington echoes this sentiment, noting, “Work done by those in the image of God should mirror the creative, sustaining, and redeeming work of God; indeed, it should be an attempt to be God’s co-laborers in these enterprises.”⁵⁷ Understanding the design and intent of the natural, political, and moral image of God establishes how one’s work connects with God’s original purpose for humanity.

The Natural Image and Work

Wesley understood the natural image of God to consist of humanity’s ability to use reason. Reason “enables [humanity] to grasp on a finite level how things work together, which makes it possible to discern order and relationships and to make right judgments.”⁵⁸ Reason is precisely what differentiates humanity from any other creature.⁵⁹ Reason gives humanity the ability to understand the “implications of faith for real life.”⁶⁰

Understanding that one is made in the image of God is to understand that God created work not as tedious labor, but as a participation in God’s ongoing creative work in the world. As seen in the creation narrative, God called humanity to mirror God’s work.⁶¹ Being made in the natural image of God is to recognize that work is a central part

⁵⁶ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 80.

⁵⁷ Witherington, *Work*, 163.

⁵⁸ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 14–15.

⁵⁹ Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 68.

⁶⁰ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 15.

⁶¹ Genesis 1:26-28.

of what it means to be human. Wesley spoke strongly against idleness, laziness, and sloth. In his sermon “The More Excellent Way,” he writes, “The generality of Christians, after using some prayer, usually apply themselves to the business of their calling. Every man that has any pretense to be a Christian will not fail to do this; seeing it is impossible that an idle man can be a good man—sloth being inconsistent with religion.”⁶²

Since God created humanity to work, the natural image provides humanity the ability to learn, discern, and use judgment to make right and ethical choices in work. However, as the image became marred through the Fall, humanity’s judgment became flawed. The work of the Spirit in restoring the natural image aligns humanity’s mind with the mind of God. The Apostle Paul calls Christians to “renew your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”⁶³

Wesleyans believe that the renewing of the mind comes through the renewing of God’s image.

While not Wesleyan, Jeff Van Duzer speaks of the power of the Spirit in business discernment. He writes,

the promise of the Holy Spirit does assure us that as we are called to be God’s stewards in business, we are not called to do it on our own. We are not expected to fulfill the creation and redemption mandates in business relying solely on our own wisdom, judgment and perseverance. The same God who calls us to these high standards provides us with access to the discernment and power that enables us to fulfill them.⁶⁴

Historical theologian Leon Hynson echoes this, noting,

⁶² John Wesley, “The More Excellent Way,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 7 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 30.

⁶³ Romans 12:2.

⁶⁴ Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God*, 118.

A distinguishing mark of humanity is its capacity for self-analysis and reflection. We think! We reflect on our actions and shape our subsequent actions. Our response isn't mere response to stimuli, but rather involves a self-extrapolation in order that we may look back at ourselves. More surely, when the Spirit of God lives in us, when we walk in the Spirit, an ecstatic potential is realized.⁶⁵

The ability to self-reflect and discern is an innate ability granted only to humanity precisely because humanity is made in the natural image of God.

Building upon humanity's ability to grow in knowledge and understanding, Wesley believed in a strong and diverse education for both laity and clergy. Wesley believed religion and education should go together because the two influenced each other so well.⁶⁶ He not only established schools, but he also required that his preachers practice "sound judgement," "readiness of thought," and "good memory."⁶⁷ He also added that preachers should become educated in scripture, biblical languages, history, science, logic, the early Church writings, economics, and politics.⁶⁸

Not only is humanity given the ability to formulate thought and process information, they are given a will to decide their response to God's social order. The will is the "constellation of affections, passions, and temper"⁶⁹ that affect humanity's experiences in the world. Humanity is also granted "freedom to choose goods and purposes...[which] bore the possibility of misuse, of its deflection from the truth and

⁶⁵ Leon O Hynson, *To Reform the Nation: Theological Foundations of Wesley's Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1984), 114.

⁶⁶ James Riley Estep Jr., "John Wesley's Philosophy of Formal Childhood Education," *Christian Education Journal* 1, no. 2 (September 1997): 50.

⁶⁷ John Wesley, "An Address to the Clergy," in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 482.

⁶⁸ Wesley, "An Address to the Clergy," 482.

⁶⁹ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 52.

goodness that is the divine being.”⁷⁰ The Fall, of course, is the result of humanity’s misuse of the will. The Fall resulted in humanity becoming inwardly focused and “overrun with a flood of idolatrous desires and affections.”⁷¹ It is no wonder that work can become exploitative and a means to the accumulation of wealth, no matter the human cost.⁷²

In Wesley’s sermon “The More Excellent Way,” he challenged the early Methodists to evaluate the end goal of their work. He writes,

For what end do you undertake and follow your worldly business? “To provide things necessary for myself and my family.” It is a good answer as far as it goes; but it does not go far enough. For a Turk or a Heathen goes so far—does his work for the very same ends. But a Christian may go abundantly farther: His end in all his labour is, to please God; to do, not his own will, but the will of him that sent him into the world—for this very purpose, to do the will of God on earth as angels do in heaven. He works for eternity. He “labours not for the meat that perisheth,” (this is the smallest part of his motive) “but for that which endureth to everlasting life.” And is not this “a more excellent way?”⁷³

Long asserts that to practice one’s calling in the world it must begin with the healing of one’s mind and will and to align the human heart with the heart of God.⁷⁴

The Political Image and Work

The political image of God affects how humanity is to relate to the rest of creation. Runyon writes, “God endowed this creature with faculties for leadership and management, to be ‘vicegerent upon the earth, the prince and governor of this lower

⁷⁰ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 53.

⁷¹ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 62.

⁷² Tom Nelson, *Work Matters*, 42-44.

⁷³ Wesley, “The More Excellent Way,” 31.

⁷⁴ Long, *John Wesley’s Moral Theology*, 180.

world.”⁷⁵ In the creation narrative, God instructs man to “till [the ground] and keep it.”⁷⁶ Humanity is, according to Wesley, a “channel of conveyance between his Creator and the whole brute creation.”⁷⁷ Wesley goes on to say “This does not take away the rule of God, but humanity is imbued with power and influence and called to cultivate God’s creative purposes in the world.”⁷⁸

The Fall distorted this vocation. Work became a means of exploiting the earth of its resources. Humanity shifted from a “joint rule ... [to an] autonomous [and] heedless one.”⁷⁹ The Apostle Paul speaks of the cosmic impact the Fall had on the rest of creation, writing, “creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.”⁸⁰

Wesley affirms Paul’s words, writing,

As all the blessings God in paradise flowed through man to the inferior creatures; as man was the great channel of communication between the Creator and the whole brute creation; so when man made himself incapable of transmitting those blessings, that communication was necessarily cut off. The intercourse between God and the inferior creatures being stopped, those blessings could no longer flow upon them.⁸¹

The restoration of the political image, therefore, has profound ramifications for the restoration of all creation.

⁷⁵ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 16-17.

⁷⁶ Genesis 2:15.

⁷⁷ John Wesley, “The General Deliverance,” in *The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey*, ed. Kenneth J Collins. and Jason E. Vickers (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 628.

⁷⁸ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 54.

⁷⁹ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 54.

⁸⁰ Romans 8:19.

⁸¹ John Wesley, “The General Deliverance,” 629.

Stuart Weir notes that Wesley's understanding of the political image has two important and interrelated aspects for creation—humanity's responsibility toward creation in which humanity is to mirror God's own governance of creation, as well as their stewardship of the care of creation.⁸² Work is a means by which one can steward God's earthly resources. A Wesleyan view of work takes seriously the ecological impact work has on the world. "Humankind's distinctive status as God's special creation includes not only privileges of benefiting from creation but also responsibilities toward God and God's creation and creatures."⁸³ Pentecostal theologian French Arrington speaks of the responsible nature of work as it relates to creation. He writes,

To be human beings in the image of God makes us responsible to God. As His representatives, He requires us to exercise responsible stewardship. That assumes that we have a freedom of will and the capacity for moral choice. We are always responsible to God, even though the image in which He made us has been distorted by sin. This truth reminds us that God has something for us to do in the world. He commands us to live a faithful responsible life in all religious, business, sexual, civic, and social relationships. . . . That is the way to live a responsible life and fulfill our humanity in His image.⁸⁴

The restoration of the political image of God begins the process of restoring God's shalom in creation.⁸⁵ The Edenic ideal is realized when humanity's relationship with creation is restored to the place of blessing and not exploitation.⁸⁶

⁸² Stuart C. Weir, *The Good Work of Non-Christians, Empowerment, and the New Creation: The Efficacy of the Holy Spirit's Empowering for Ordinary Work* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 153.

⁸³ Tony Richie, "Radical and Responsible," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 23, no. 2 (October 2014): 222.

⁸⁴ French L. Arrington, *Christian Doctrine: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway, 1992), 206.

⁸⁵ H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1988), 486.

⁸⁶ Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, 486.

The Moral Image and Work

For Wesley, the restoration of the moral image was crucial to his understanding of salvation. Wesley focused on the moral image for three reasons. First, this image separates humanity from the rest of creation because it highlights the truth that “it was not just any love in which humanity was created but it was holy love.”⁸⁷ Secondly, the moral image is “the context for the very possibility of sin”⁸⁸ because it is an expression of humanity’s relationship to God. Lastly, “the moral image is intimately related to the moral law”⁸⁹ which was written into the hearts of humanity at creation. The Fall resulted in the moral image being lost, leaving humanity eternally separate from God. Not only was this a “relational change ... [it] resulted in a dispositional change.”⁹⁰ Moving away from love, humanity became self-centered, ego-driven, and not only at odds with God, but at odds with one another.

One can easily see this in the fallen nature of work. Workplace conflicts are normative. Employers harm people through sexual exploitations, egregious labor practices, and the drive for wealth and power. The restoration and renewal of the moral image was not only to restore humanity’s relationship with God, but also with one another. This has led to what some have called a Wesleyan social ethic.⁹¹ Faith in God is lived through the expressed love of one’s neighbor.

⁸⁷ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 55.

⁸⁸ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 56.

⁸⁹ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 56.

⁹⁰ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 63.

⁹¹ Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image*, 86.

Humanity's ability to exercise the moral image is solely based on their ability to receive what they cannot give themselves. This creates a relationship where God is the source of all that is good. Wesley spoke of this as an exchange of breath.

God's breathing into the soul, and the soul's breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, and a re-action of the soul upon God; an unceasing presence of God, the loving, pardoning God, manifested to the heart, and perceived by faith; and an unceasing return of love, praise, and prayer, offering up all the thoughts of our hearts, all the words of our tongues, all the *works of our hands*, all our body, soul, and spirit, to be a holy sacrifice, acceptable unto God in Christ Jesus.⁹²

The restoration of the moral image has profound impacts on work. The moral image is the expression of God's love toward humanity. When one opens themselves up to the love of God, the life of a disciple is sustained through an ongoing growth in love. For Wesley, "religion is not humanity's means to escape to a more tolerable heavenly realm but participation in God's own redemptive enterprise, God's new creation, 'faith working by love,' bringing holiness and happiness to all the earth."⁹³ Work is an important way in which love is cultivated in greater ways on earth. Work that is done to the glorification of God must be centered on the love of God and humanity. Work that takes advantage of fellow humans cannot be expressed as godly work. One cannot escape the moral ramifications of work toward other humans, precisely because the moral law of God is manifest through the work of one's hands.⁹⁴

⁹² John Wesley, "The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God," in *The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins and Jason E. Vickers (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 179. Italics mine.

⁹³ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 169.

⁹⁴ Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*, 73-75.

David Wright provides a thoughtful presentation of a Wesleyan work ethic. He writes,

Wesleyans pursue work that does no harm to the environment, the creation at large, to themselves or their neighbors.... Wesleyans pursue work that looks for needs and finds creative ways to meet them.... [Work] promotes personal well-being for those who serve and those who receive service.... Wesleyans pursue work that promotes community well-being ... [and sees] work as one of God's holiest gifts by which [one] celebrates the magnificent richness of God's creation, and through which [one is] invited to create communities marked by beauty, creativity, order, justice, and abundance.⁹⁵

For Wesleyans, loving and serving one's neighbor is to "hallow all of life, in *all its occasions*, great and small."⁹⁶ Work is not a separate compartment of life but a place to practice the love of one's neighbor.

An Analysis of Calvin's Common Grace vs. Wesley's Prevenient Grace

One of the dominant questions within the faith and work conversation is what to do with a non-Christian's work. Can a non-Christian perform godly work even if they are unaware of it? If so, how is this theologically possible? The answers to these questions are important and require attention. The answer, however, is different depending upon the theological tradition in which one is a part. Both Calvinists and Wesleyans seek to answer the question with the locus being on grace.

As has already been noted, Wesley agreed with John Calvin on many issues. However, the two differed strongly on how grace works in the lives of people.⁹⁷ While there is much written about the difference in soteriology between Wesley and Calvin, a

⁹⁵ Wright, *How God Makes the World a Better Place*, 60-61.

⁹⁶ Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*, 86. Italics mine.

⁹⁷ Thorsen, *Calvin vs. Wesley*, 56.

brief analysis needs to be made in regard to how their understanding of grace impacts their presentations of work. While Calvin is far more direct in connecting grace with work, namely through what has been called *common grace*,⁹⁸ Wesley's understanding of *prevenient grace* also has implications for work.

Weir defines common graces as “the empowerment of the beneficent work of the impious.”⁹⁹ Common grace explains how humanity could do good works, even in their state of fallenness. Brian Shelton provides several categories in which common grace is most often discussed:

- the physical realm in which God graciously maintains and sustains life,
- the intellectual realm in which God allows people to know him on some limited and basic scale (Rom. 2:14-15),
- the moral realm in which God restrains people's sinfulness in order to avoid total oblivion of the world,
- the creative realm as people are imbued with natural creative talents for art, music, athletics, etc.,
- the social realm in which God uses institutions like government and marriage for good in the world (Rom. 13),

⁹⁸ Calvin never used the term common grace; rather, he preferred to use the term *peculiar grace*. Common grace, however, was used later by Calvinists to denote God's gracious work in the lives of those who were not Christian. Weir, *The Good Work of Non-Christians, Empowerment, and the New Creation*, 118.

⁹⁹ Weir, *The Good Work of Non-Christians, Empowerment, and the New Creation*, 118.

- the religious world in which God hears the prayers of believers and unbelievers.¹⁰⁰

Calvin and Wesley both anchor their understanding of grace in the image of God.

While Calvin believed that humanity was totally corrupt, he also believed some semblance of the image of God remained in humanity, namely “‘in keenness,’ ‘in judgment,’ or in a ‘readier wit to learn this or that art.’”¹⁰¹ Calvin notes, “in this diversity we can trace some remains of the divine image distinguishing the whole human race from other creatures.”¹⁰² As has been previously noted, Wesley believed that the natural image of God, while marred by sin, remained in humanity, thus enabling humanity to use reason in judgment and thought.

Calvin believed that while humanity was completely corrupt, God restrains the sinfulness of humanity in order to keep it from throwing the world into total oblivion.¹⁰³ God’s gracious restraint of humanity’s total corruption allows humanity to operate within some realm of grace. Therefore, work by non-Christians can be noble. Calvin writes,

In every age there have been persons who, guided by nature, have striven toward virtue throughout life. I have nothing to say against them even if many lapses can be noted in their moral conduct. For they have by the very zeal of their honesty given proof that there was some purity in their nature. . . . These examples, accordingly, seem to warn us against adjudging man’s nature wholly corrupted, because some men have by its prompting not only excelled in remarkable deeds, but conducted themselves most honourably throughout life. But here it ought to occur to us that amid this corruption of nature there is some place for God’s grace; not such grace as to cleanse it, but to restrain it inwardly.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ W. Brian Shelton, *Prevenient Grace: God’s Provision for Fallen Humanity* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, Inc., 2014), chap. 7, Kindle.

¹⁰¹ Shelton, *Prevenient Grace*, chap. 7.

¹⁰² John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, II.2.17.

¹⁰³ Weir, *The Good Work of Non-Christians, Empowerment, and the New Creation*, 120.

¹⁰⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.3.3.

Calvin is clear that while God provides grace to all humanity, common grace is not salvific grace. This is why Calvinists later favored the term common grace over John Calvin's more preferred term, *peculiar grace*, because this was common to all of humanity—the elect and non-elect.¹⁰⁵ What Calvin called *effectual grace* was reserved for only those elected by God to salvation.¹⁰⁶

Wesley also understood that humanity could do good works, but anchored his understanding in what he called *prevenient grace*.¹⁰⁷ In Wesley's sermon, "On Working out Your Own Salvation," he describes prevenient grace.

Salvation begins with what is usually termed (and very properly) preventing grace; including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first light transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply some tendency toward life; some degree of salvation; the beginning of a deliverance from a blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and the things of God.¹⁰⁸

Calvinist theologians often try to synthesize common grace and prevenient grace as if Wesley and Calvin were speaking about the same thing.¹⁰⁹ While there are similarities, prevenient grace is markedly different from Calvin's common grace, in that while prevenient grace is a restraint of sin, it leads to saving grace through justification. Leo Cox mistakenly notes "the difference between the two ... would be in degree and not

¹⁰⁵ Thorsen, *Calvin vs. Wesley*, 52.

¹⁰⁶ Thorsen, *Calvin vs. Wesley*, 46-47.

¹⁰⁷ Wesley used the term *preventing grace* because it "both 'prevents' a person from sinning and it 'prevenes' or goes before the reception of more grace." Robert Rakestraw, "John Wesley as a Theologian of Grace," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 2, no. 27 (June 1984): 197.

¹⁰⁸ Wesley, "On Working Out Your Own Salvation," 66.

¹⁰⁹ Shelton, *Prevenient Grace*, chap. 7.

in kind.”¹¹⁰ In fact, Wesley speaks of prevenient grace as a grace that leads toward salvation and is not simply God’s benevolence toward humanity in a general sense.¹¹¹

Wesley and Calvin, however, seem to agree that humanity, while sinful, still has some sort of grace working in their life. Wesley notes, “there is no man ... that is totally void of the grace of God.”¹¹² Wesley goes on to say “some measure of that light, some faint glimmering ray, which sooner or later, more or less, enlightens every man that cometh into the world. ... So that no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath.”¹¹³ Prevenient grace empowers a person to respond to God’s saving grace in Jesus.

While prevenient grace has far more to do with soteriology, the question still remains—are there implications of prevenient grace on a non-Christian’s work? The answer to this question lies in Wesley’s development of prevenient grace as it relates to his understanding of the image of God. As has been noted, Wesley believed that sin destroyed the moral image of God, while a marred natural and political image remained.¹¹⁴ Dunning notes that is precisely the power of prevenient grace that restores a reflection of the image of God, and that prevenient grace “prevent[s] humanity from lapsing completely into the subhuman.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Leo G. Cox, “Prevenient Grace—a Wesleyan View,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 12, no. 3 (1969): 144.

¹¹¹ Shelton, *Prevenient Grace*, chap. 7.

¹¹² Wesley, “On Working Out Your Own Salvation,” 68.

¹¹³ Wesley, “On Working Out Your Own Salvation,” 68.

¹¹⁴ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 20-21.

¹¹⁵ Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image*, 52.

While unrepented humanity exists in a state of fallenness, they do so with a consciousness, reason, will, and liberty (marks of the natural image of God), and still with the ability to govern and rule (marks of the political image). These are distorted and more often than not “reflect the image of the devil”¹¹⁶—but not always. For example, in Wesley’s sermon, “The Difference Between Walking by Sight, and Walking by Faith,” he writes,

We may likewise reasonably suppose, that some traces of knowledge, both with regard to the invisible and the eternal world, were delivered down from Noah and his children, both to their immediate and remote descendants. And however these were obscured or disguised by the addition of numberless fables, yet something of truth was still mingled with them, and these streaks of light prevented utter darkness. Add to this, that God never, in any age or nation, “left himself” quite “without a witness” in the hearts of men; but while he “gave them rain and fruitful seasons,” imparted some imperfect knowledge of the Giver. “He is the true Light that” still, in some degree, “enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world.”¹¹⁷

Due to prevenient grace, a semblance of truth still exists within humanity that creates the potential for performing good works.

While the natural image of God still bears some ounce of knowledge of truth, the political image in its marred state still has the ability to govern and lead. Weir writes,

The heathen are not excluded from this shared responsibility, and because the political image remains intact despite the savage molestation of sin, the heathen can be included in the participative task of shaping and re-shaping the earth. They, as is common to all men, are political by their commission and constituent nature. However, it is necessary for the fulfillment of the political image that (1) man accepts his responsibility for creation, and that (2) creation is indeed cared for rather than destroyed.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ John Wesley, “The New Birth,” in *The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins and Jason E. Vickers (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 158.

¹¹⁷ John Wesley, “The Difference Between Walking by Faith, and Walking by Sight,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 7 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 258.

¹¹⁸ Weir, *The Good Work of Non-Christians, Empowerment, and the New Creation*, 166-167.

Wesley sadly does not develop the practical implications of the political image more fully. His focus rests almost entirely on the moral image of God.¹¹⁹ However, it is reasonable, as Weir has done, to conclude that there are implications for humanity's work strictly because the ability to lead and govern has not been eliminated by the Fall. Similarly to common grace, humanity can still actively participate in the creation mandate by ruling and creating, even if they are unaware they are doing so. As it is with common grace, this is most readily experienced in governmental systems that are given sovereign authority to rule and reign. Paul states in Romans 13, governmental authorities are divinely instructed to promote good, even if they are unaware of the mandate to do so.

Albert Outler distinguishes between two uses of prevenient grace—narrow grace and broad grace.¹²⁰ In the narrowest sense, prevenient grace is a response to the debate between Calvinists and Arminians. It strictly speaks of the soteriological implications of God's graceful activity in the life of the unrepentant. Prevenient grace in the broader sense "emphasizes the *prior* activity of God as well as human response in every measure of grace."¹²¹ A broad presentation of prevenient grace can be found in Article X of the Anglican Church's *Thirty-nine Articles*, stating,

The condition of Man after the Fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God. Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, *without the grace of God by Christ, preventing us*, that we may have a good will, and working with us, we have this good will.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Weir, *The Good Work of Non-Christians, Empowerment, and the New Creation*, 177.

¹²⁰ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 75.

¹²¹ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 75.

¹²² Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 75. Italics original.

The broad sense of prevenient grace allows room for a cooperation with God—a synergism—in the activity of good works. Like common grace, however, what is clear is that the goodness of the work is rooted in God’s graceful action in humanity, not in the actual doing of the work by humanity.¹²³

Calvin’s common grace and Wesley’s prevenient grace, at least in the broader sense of the word, have similarities. They both restrain the sinfulness of humanity, and they make room for humanity to perform some good works even in an unregenerate state. They both make clear that God is the source of grace and whatever good work humanity does is not good in and of itself, but it is only good because God, the giver of grace, is good. Where they differ, however, is that prevenient grace, in the narrowest sense, is salvific in that it leads humanity toward God. Common grace is simply that—common. It does nothing to enliven the hearts of the unrepentant. Work, through this lens, seems meaningless and of little consequence. Wesley, however, anchors his understanding of prevenient grace more in the activity of God and as a means to awaken the hearts of people. What God does in humanity is for the purpose of restoring the broken relationship with humanity, not just to keep humanity from obliterating one another.

¹²³ As has been previously noted, Wesleyan scholars are not in agreement about synergism and some, like Kenneth Collins, warn that taking the implications of synergism too far would lean more Roman Catholic than Wesleyan. Collins also notes that while there is a scattering of teachings of Wesley on a broader sense of prevenient grace, Wesley primarily spoke of it in the sense of the narrow activity of God leading people toward salvation. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 76.

Reflections on Wesleyan Theology for Integrating Faith and Work

This chapter has addressed key principals to developing a Wesleyan perspective on work. These principals are vital for the development of this dissertation's final proposal.

Contemporary Application: Wesley's writings must be reinterpreted and brought into the modern day to address contemporary issues like work. The absence of a comprehensive theology of work from Wesley does not mean that a theology of work cannot be developed from his writings. On the contrary, Wesley's writings are rich with theological implications for work. One must synthesize his teachings and discern how to apply them for today's worker.

Integration: At the heart of Wesleyanism is the practicality and integration of theology. While Wesley was an astute theologian, and while his teachings contributed to the field of theology, Wesleyanism is not solely about belief, but emphasizes practice, namely through holy living. For example, the foundation of Wesleyan theology is developed around the image of God within humanity. Wesley's understanding of the natural, political, and moral image of God are deeply theological, and the implications for the renewing of the image of God dramatically impacts one's work.

A uniquely Wesleyan theological perspective on work must include these two principals. Wesleyanism must be adapted from Wesley's own historical context to address the modern topic of today's work. Adapting Wesley's writings must also maintain its integrative foundation. As has been noted, Wesley was not a systematic theologian, but rather focused his writings primarily on the integration of theology into

all aspects of life. A theology of work from a Wesleyan perspective must assist contemporary Christians in this integrative process.

Summary

This chapter has begun to lay the groundwork for a uniquely Wesleyan perspective on work. Wesleyanism is a complex theology that has struggled to find its place in mainstream theology. Some have relegated it purely to scholasticism, while others have tied Wesleyanism to the historical Wesley. Steve Koskie has provided a middle-way in which Wesley's teachings can be further developed in order to address contemporary issues.

The ability to draw new conclusions from Wesley's theology is precisely because Wesleyanism is practical and integrative. Wesleyanism is equally as concerned with orthopraxy as it is with orthodoxy. How one integrates Wesleyan theology into everyday situations is where the power of Wesleyanism lies. Wesleyanism as practical, integrative, and participatory opens the door for addressing the common experience of work. The practical, integrative, and participatory nature of Wesleyan can be seen through Wesley's understanding of the image of God. Wesley understood the image of God in three distinct forms—the natural, the political, and the moral. While the moral image dominated Wesley's writings, all three forms of the image have practical implications for work.

Lastly, while there are similarities between John Calvin's peculiar grace and Wesley's prevenient grace, the latter more fully addresses the nature of humanity and God's activity in the life of the non-Christian. Prevenient grace not only makes room for good works by non-Christians, it powerfully speaks of God's wooing the unrepentant person into a relationship.

The next chapter will address the teleological nature of Wesleyanism. Wesleyan theology is focused on the end result of humankind—*holiness of heart and life*—which Wesley described as love of God and love of neighbor. Through the ongoing process of sanctification, Wesleyans participate in an integrative spirituality that results in a unique social ethic. This social ethic impacts what can be defined as God-honoring work. The next chapter will also address work as a means of stewardship and worship of God.

CHAPTER FOUR:
TELEOLOGY, WORK, AND STEWARDSHIP

Overview

Chapter three began to lay the groundwork for developing a Wesleyan perspective on work. Using Koskie's approach to a theological hermeneutic, Wesleyan theology must be adapted and brought into the modern world in order to address contemporary issues like today's work. The foundation of Wesleyan theology is built on the image of God. Wesley understood God's image in three distinct forms—natural, political, and moral image—and each has an impact on humanity's ability to work. The previous chapter began to address those impacts, both in their original intent and in their fallen state. The chapter ended with differentiating between John Calvin's common grace and Wesley's prevenient grace. While both have an effect on humanity's ability to do good work in the world, prevenient grace is intended to lead a person into salvation and restoration.

The renewal of the image of God is one of Wesley's primary concerns. The renewing of the image of God is a lifelong process that impacts every part of a person's life. This chapter will address how the renewing of the divine image affects one's vocation and work, namely by addressing the end goal of work and by viewing work as an act of stewardship and worship.

Wesleyan Teleology

Wesleyanism is a teleological theology. Dunning defines teleology as a “purposeful end.”¹ Wesley “repeatedly points out that the end (*telos*) that God is seeking to produce in our lives is a renewal of the divine image. . . .the essence of the Christian life is the divine activity of renewing human persons in the image of God.”² Wesley would devote most of his attention to the formational life of the Christian, presenting it as a pivotal foundation of his soteriology.³

As an evangelist, Wesley was concerned with the eternal souls of people. However, he believed that salvation was far more inclusive than one’s final resting place. A concern of Wesley was for a person to experience salvation in its fullest sense.⁴ Wesley defined salvation as “not barely (according to the vulgar notion) deliverance from hell, or going to heaven; but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth.”⁵ For Wesley, salvation is the ongoing development of one’s soul on this side of eternity, leading toward the renewed image of God within each person.

¹ Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image*, 34.

² Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image*, 35.

³ Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 1.

⁴ Sondra Higgins Mattheai, *Making Disciples: Faith Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 26.

⁵ John Wesley, “A Farther Appeal to Mean of Reason and Religion,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 8 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 47.

Wesley's soteriology rests on his understanding of grace. Grace is relational.⁶ God created humanity not only in God's own image, but in order to be in relationship with them. Sin separated humanity from God, distorting the natural and political image of God, and eradicating the moral image, which, as noted, constitutes God's relationship with humanity. It is by God's gracious nature that God would initiate and begin the process of restoration of the relationship with humanity, thus beginning the work of renewing the divine image.

A Wesleyan understanding of relational grace, as Henry Knight notes, separates Wesley from other theological perspectives. He writes,

To describe grace as relational is already to place Wesley over and against certain other conceptions of grace. Because a relationship involves the presence of the other, his view of grace resists locating the saving grace of God merely in some "objective" or abstract past or future event. Certainly the past activity of God (e.g., the death and resurrection of Jesus) and future activity (e.g., the coming kingdom) may be foundational to the relationship, and certainly the present relationship is in continuity with past and future divine activity. Wesley insists, however, that salvation is a present experience, a new way of life which is not simply a formal action of God for us in the past, but is most centrally a present action of God in us and with us.⁷

The present reality of grace has a teleological goal in which God, partnered with humanity (i.e., synergism), works toward the "renewal of human lives"⁸ to their original intent and design.

As a present reality, the renewing of the image of God has a major effect on the nature of one's daily life. Wesley took seriously the power of sin and the need for a new life. When a person experiences justifying grace, they experience the regenerative work

⁶ Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 8.

⁷ Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 9.

⁸ Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 9.

of the Spirit in what Wesley calls “the new birth.”⁹ The new birth is the beginning process of sanctifying grace, which “strengthens love for God and for neighbor.”¹⁰

According to Wesley, the new birth is

The great change which God works in the soul when he brings it into life: when he raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. It is the change wrought in the whole soul by the almighty Spirit of God when it is “created anew in Christ Jesus,” when it is “renewed after the image of God,” “in righteousness and true holiness,” *when the love of the world is changed into the love of God*, pride into humility, passion into meekness; hatred, envy, malice into a sincere, tender, disinterested love for all mankind. In a word, it is that change whereby the “earthly, sensual, devilish” mind is turned into “the mind which was in Christ.”¹¹

In the new birth, and subsequently the lifelong participation in sanctifying grace, the whole person is dramatically changed as the divine image is renewed. They move from one world into another. One leaves the old world with its sinful ways and enters into a new world with a new set of values and practices. The old world was rooted in ego, selfish gain, and individualism, while this new world is rooted in love, both of God and of one’s neighbor.

Holy Work—Love of God and Neighbor

Wesley called this transformation (the renewing of the image of God) holiness. Holiness, or “true religion” as Wesley also called it, is both an inward and outward

⁹ John B. Cobb Jr., *Grace and Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 97.

¹⁰ Cobb, *Grace and Responsibility*, 97.

¹¹ John Wesley, “The New Birth,” 160.

change.¹² For Wesley, “vocation is a life of holiness, ‘faith working in love.’”¹³ Love governs the entirety of a person’s being.¹⁴ Wesley understood holiness as fulfilling two loves, the love of God and the love of neighbor, and what he called holiness of heart and holiness of life.¹⁵ In Wesley’s sermon, “The Almost Christian,” he writes, “Such a love of God is this as engrosses the whole heart, as takes up all the affections, as fills the entire capacity of the soul, and employs the utmost extent of all its faculties.”¹⁶ Charles Yrigoyen describes inward holiness as a “total commitment to God, singleness of intention, centering one’s life completely on God. It includes believing in, trusting, loving, worshiping, and obeying God. It consists of reliance on God’s grace and using the gifts God gives us to become what God intends us to be.”¹⁷

Wesley also believed true religion was a matter of loving one’s neighbor. “Faith working in love also means outward evidence of a new relationship with God,”¹⁸ which is expressed in the love of others. Outward holiness involved the fulfilling of the great commandment to love God and one’s neighbor.¹⁹ As did Jesus, Wesley extends the definition of neighbor to include “every [person] in the world; every child of his who is

¹² Joseph William Cunningham, “John Wesley’s Moral Pneumatology: The Fruits of the Spirit as Theological Virtues,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 24, no. 3 (2011): 277.

¹³ Higgins Matthaëi, *Making Disciples*, 25.

¹⁴ Cunningham, “John Wesley’s Moral Pneumatology,” 276.

¹⁵ Higgins Matthaëi, *Making Disciples*, 25.

¹⁶ Wesley, “The Almost Christian.”

¹⁷ Charles Yrigoyen Jr., *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 37.

¹⁸ Higgins Matthaëi, *Making Disciples*, 26.

¹⁹ cf. Mt. 22:39, Mk. 12:31, Lk. 10:27.

‘the Father of the spirits of all flesh.’”²⁰ Thus, the life of a disciple is the continued growth in love of God and the love of one’s neighbor.

As the love of God is “shed abroad [in the] heart”²¹ of humanity, the image of God, with all its nuances and characteristics, is continually renewed by the sanctifying work of the Spirit. As has been discussed already, Wesley understood the divine image to include natural, political, and moral aspects. The natural image consists of humanity’s “understanding, freedom of will, and various affections;” the political image consists of humanity’s ability to act as “governor of this lower world;” and the moral image relates to humanity’s relationship with God and others.²² In chapter three, it was noted how the characteristics of the divine image affect one’s work. Work requires reason and understanding, leadership and governance, and includes one’s relationship to other employees, customers, and the entire human family. As one grows in love, the divine image is renewed. The consequences of this renewal restore one’s relationship with work, both in its very nature and the end goal of work itself.

As was noted in chapter two, in the biblical presentation of work, work was intended to model the character of God as one who also worked. However, after the Fall, work became laborious and burdensome. In a Wesleyan view, this is because the natural and political image in humanity became distorted, and, in the case of the moral image, fully eradicated. Humanity could not function as they were intended to function. Good and creative work as God intended to mirror God’s own image became exploitative and

²⁰ Wesley, “The Almost Christian,” 99.

²¹ Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” 83.

²² Wesley, “The New Birth,” 157.

often for a selfish end. Strictly speaking of the political image, Theodore Weber notes that even after the Fall,

humankind retains its position of dominance over the rest of creation despite this moral and spiritual degradation. A form of dominion remains, which is at least analogical to the divine dominion in the universe. But this dominion is no longer the dominion of responsible stewardship, one characterized by hostility between the human creature and the other animals. It is not a relationship that allows for the conveyance of blessings, because humankind no longer is a channel of communication between God and the nonhuman elements of creation. Perhaps one can characterize the effect of the Fall by saying that the *constitution* of the image has not been lost, but the *representational aspect* of governance of the other creatures, and with it the collective responsibility, but in doing so it now represents human self-interest rather than God's will.²³

Weber paints a grim view of the fallen nature of humanity. However, as the image of God is renewed in humanity, humanity is restored to a place of governance and leadership in the world, and once again given the ability to mirror God's creative work. Work no longer is a laborious task to endure, but rather an additional means to cultivate a deeper reliance on God. Work no longer is burdensome, but rather serves as a means to glorify God and to live out what it means to be humans made in God's own image.

Work as Stewardship

John Calvin and the early Puritans often spoke of work as a means of stewardship. Living into the divine image, as well as fulfilling the creation mandate, they believed the *telos* of work was an act of worship.²⁴ Wesley would agree. Mary Alice Tenney writes, "It is apparent that Wesley adopts the Reformation doctrine of work as a calling, but it is also true that he carefully guards the doctrine from abuse by repeated warnings against

²³ Theodore Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation: Transforming Wesleyan Political Ethics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 395.

²⁴ Whelchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, 65.

the tendency of work to become something other than worship.”²⁵ Work should be pursued with “the same spirit of devotion as characterizes one’s prayers.”²⁶ Wesley writes,

If a man pursues his business, that he may raise himself to a state of figure and riches in the world, he is no longer serving God in his employment, and has no more title to a reward from God, than he who gives alms that he may be seen, or prays that he may be heard, of men. For vain and earthly designs are no more allowable in our employments, than in our alms and devotions. They are not only evil when they mix with our good works, with our religious actions, but they have the same evil nature when they enter into the common business of our employments. If it were allowable to pursue them in our worldly employments, it would be allowable to pursue them in our devotions. But as our alms and devotions are not an acceptable service but when they proceed from a pure intention, so our common employment cannot be reckoned a service to him but when it is performed with the same piety of heart.²⁷

For Wesley, everything, be it tangible or not, was the result of God’s benevolence toward humanity and worthy of stewarding as an act of worship.²⁸ In Wesley’s sermon, “The Good Steward,” he mentions several blessings of God that require stewardship.

Wesley notes

God has entrusted us with our *soul* ... together with all the powers and faculties thereof, ... our *bodies*, ... with all the powers and members thereof, ... excellent talent of *speech* ... *hands and feet*, and all the *members* of the body... *worldly goods* ... *money* ... [and] several talents which do not properly come under any of these heads: such as bodily *strength*, such are *health*, a pleasing *person* and agreeable *address*; such are *learning* and *knowledge* in their various degrees, with all other advantages of *education*. Such is the *influence* which we have over others, whether by their *love* and *esteem* of us, or by *power*—power to do them good or harm. ... Add to these that invaluable talent of *time*. ... Add, lastly, that

²⁵ Mary Alice Tenney, *Blueprint for a Christian World: An Analysis of the Wesleyan Way* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1953), 191.

²⁶ Tenney, *Blueprint for a Christian World*, 191.

²⁷ John Wesley, “Upon the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse VII,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 5 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 361-362.

²⁸ Tenney, *Blueprint for a Christian World*, 123.

on which all the rest depend, and without which they would all be curses, not blessings: namely the *grace* of God.”²⁹

Work serves as an essential place to utilize these blessings; therefore, they must be stewarded as a gift from God and a means to continually glorify God.

One of Wesley’s gravest concerns was that people would enjoy the blessings of God while ignoring or forgetting the source from which these blessings came. Wesley called this forgetfulness “dissipation.”³⁰ In his sermon, “On Dissipation,” Wesley describes the dissipated person as one who

is separated from God; that is disunited from his centre [sic], whether this be occasioned by hurry of business, by seeking honour or preferment, or by fondness for diversions, for silly pleasures, so called, or for any trifle under the sun. . . . it equally belongs to the serious fool who forgets God by a close attention to any worldly employment, suppose it were of the most elegant or the most important kind. . . . Whoever is habitually inattentive to the presence and will of his Creator, he is a dissipated man.³¹

When work becomes separate from God, it is easy to make the benefits of work the source of one’s attention. Work often becomes more about an economic end than an act of worship. When wealth becomes the primary motivator of work, one fails to steward the gift of work in a way that honors God.

As a teleological theology, Wesleyanism is focused on cultivating holiness in all of life—increased love of God and neighbor— not in accumulating wealth or prestige. While work is important, and to work is to live into the divine image, for Wesley, it must

²⁹ John Wesley, “The Good Steward,” in *The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins and Jason E. Vickers (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 327-328. Italics original.

³⁰ Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 32.

³¹ John Wesley, “On Dissipation,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 6 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 447-448.

be stewarded as all gifts must be stewarded. For Wesley, work should not be idolized, but rather utilized as an act of stewardship to glorify the maker of work and the giver of the talents necessary for work.

Wesley's Ethical Standards for Work

Wesley abhorred laziness and called Methodists to practice a strong work ethic.³²

This had an adverse effect, however. Early Methodists began to accumulate vast amounts of wealth. Toward the end of Wesley's life, he lamented that

The Methodists grow more and more self-indulgent, because they grow rich. Although many of them are still deplorably poor ... yet many others, in the space of twenty, thirty, or forty years, are twenty, thirty, or yea a hundred times richer than they were when they first entered the society. And it is an observation which admits of few exceptions, that nine in ten of these decreased in grace in the same proportions as they increased in wealth. Indeed, according to the natural tendency of riches, we cannot expect it to be otherwise.³³

Manfred Marquardt notes that Wesley was not against the accumulation of wealth, as

Wesley often utilized the wealthy to further his missional agenda.³⁴ Marquardt does point

³² John Wesley, "The More Excellent Way."

³³ John Wesley, "An Earnest Address to the Methodists on the Influence and Use of Riches," in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. T. Jackson, 3rd ed., vol. 7, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1958), 289.

³⁴ Marquardt notes that Max Weber listed Methodists as contributing to the what Weber called the *Protestant work ethic*. While Marquardt agrees that "the influence of Methodism undoubtedly contributed to the "spirit of capitalism," he also notes that "this capitalistic 'Methodism' in its essence and nature could no longer properly be called Methodism." A capitalistic Methodism contradicted many of Wesley's teachings on economic justice. Marquardt goes on to state that "the only 'contribution' genuine Methodism, along with other Protestant communions, has made toward advancing 'capitalism' lies in its high praise of diligence and contentedness and in its emphasis on the significance of the Christian ethic for all realms of life. This contribution, however, cannot be counted as especially favoring capitalism as an economic system. On the other hand, the chasm between the 'spirit of capitalism' and Wesley's ethic is immense and, as long as Methodism remains faithful to its origin, indeed unbridgeable: unrestrained striving for profit versus warning against wealth, accumulation of capital versus renunciation of hoarding possessions, exploitation of foreign laborers versus ultimate motivation by love for one's neighbor. To this extent, in spite of many parallels, Wesley's ethic represents an exception among the Protestant ethics of his time." Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics*, 42-43.

out that Wesley's concern was when wealth was the chief focus of a person's life, specifically when a person placed economic gain above their love of God and neighbor.³⁵

“The Use of Money”—A Sermon on Work

In addressing the issue of wealth, Wesley called Methodists to return to the practice of godly stewardship—a stewardship that cultivated a deeper love of God and neighbor. His sermon “The Use of Money” is often presented solely as Wesley's view on the proper use of money. A thorough analysis of this sermon, however, reveals Wesley's view of work itself—a theology of work that is helpful for employees today. Wesley preached this text, based on Luke 16:9, at least two dozen times, and by 1760 it appeared in its present form.³⁶

As Wesley grew increasingly concerned with the wealth of Methodists, he worried that those who became wealthy would “have merely the form of religion without its power, and, as a result, would neglect both the temporal and the spiritual ministries of the poor.”³⁷ This sermon not only serves as a pastoral response to the use of money, it also establishes how the first two General Rules—*do no harm, do good*—should be expressed through one's work.³⁸

³⁵ Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics*, 37-39.

³⁶ Collins and Vickers, *The Sermons of John Wesley*, 302.

³⁷ Collins and Vickers, *The Sermons of John Wesley*, 302.

³⁸ The General Rules will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Gain All You Can

By providing ethical boundaries to the types of work a Methodist should avoid, Wesley provides guidance to how one should use the money they gain through employment. Employment is far more than a means to economic advancement, but rather a tool to increase good in the world. In this sermon, Wesley provides a theology of work that establishes work as a good and necessary endeavor that allows the employee to use the benefits of employment (i.e., money) as a means of Kingdom work. In establishing what Marquardt calls Wesley's "economic ethic,"³⁹ he notes that Wesley did

not establish any scale of values among permissible occupations; neither socially higher positions or religious offices are any more pleasing to God than simple manual labor. Everyone should live seriously and work in accord with [their] calling and responsibility toward God, who will judge not according to wealth and honor but "according to the standard of faith and love" that God has given. The worthy goal of work is not attaining riches, but acting from love for God and one's neighbor.⁴⁰

Through a three-tiered axiom—*gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can*—Wesley elevates the importance of wise stewardship. Stewardship for Wesley is not just about money. It is far more inclusive; he calls people to "give all ye have, *as well as all ye are*, a spiritual sacrifice to him who withheld not from you his Son."⁴¹ For Wesley, stewardship consists of a "high goal: fulfillment of the divine will, consisting specifically in the commandment to love."⁴²

³⁹ Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics*, 35.

⁴⁰ Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics*, 40.

⁴¹ John Wesley, "The Use of Money," in *The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 311. Italics original.

⁴² Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethic*, 39.

When it comes to vocation, “Wesley’s primary criterion for selecting an occupation was not the consideration of one’s abilities and inclinations, but the possibilities of service that is pleasing to God.”⁴³ Tenney notes that for Wesley, “A [person’s] vocation need not take [them] ‘off from religion,’ if pursued moderately and ‘according to the rules of Christian prudence,’ with the proper allowance of ‘time for prayer and retirement.’ But in the midst of employment [they] should practice the presence of God.”⁴⁴ Wesley makes room for a wide variety of choices in occupation.⁴⁵ He questions, however, the purpose for choosing a particular occupation, writing, “Dare any of you, in choosing your calling or situation, eye the things on earth, rather than the things above? In choosing a profession ... do you look at earth or heaven?”⁴⁶ If a person chose a career solely based on the possibility of gaining more money, Wesley questioned whether such a career could honor God.⁴⁷

However, for Wesley, money is amoral. “The fault does not lie in the money, but in them that use it.”⁴⁸ While money could be used for ill, Wesley praises its use when it is received as “an excellent gift of God.”⁴⁹ In the right hands, Wesley states,

... it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, raiment for the naked. It gives to the traveler and the stranger where to lay his head. By it we may supply the place of a husband to the widow, and of a father to the fatherless; we may be a defense for the oppressed, a means of health to the sick, of ease to them that are in pain, It

⁴³ Marquardt, *John Wesley’s Social Ethic*, 39.

⁴⁴ Tenney, *Blueprint for a Christian World*, 140.

⁴⁵ Tenney, *Blueprint for a Christian World*, 194.

⁴⁶ John Wesley, “On a Single Eye,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 7 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 304.

⁴⁷ Tenney, *Blueprint for a Christian World*, 221.

⁴⁸ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 305.

⁴⁹ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 305.

may be as eyes to the blind, as feet to the lame; yea, a lifter up from the gates of death.⁵⁰

Since money has influence, Wesley is deeply concerned that people learn “how to use and employ this valuable talent.”⁵¹ By providing practical instructions, Wesley hopes that Methodists carefully reflect and discern how to properly use money as a means to glorify God and not to feed their fleshly desires.

Wesley’s first axiom—*gain all you can*—serves as an invitation for a strong work ethic. Idleness has no place among the Methodists.⁵² Rather, Wesley instructs them to “use all possible diligence in your calling. . . . [and to] put your whole strength to the work.”⁵³ Work should not be trifled away for “silly, unprofitable diversions.”⁵⁴ Rather, Wesley calls for a strong, focused work ethic, stating, “If you understand your particular calling as you ought, you will have no time that hangs upon your hands.”⁵⁵

A strong work ethic would prove work to be a profitable endeavor resulting in monetary gain. For Wesley, the accumulation of wealth should be celebrated, so long as the means to gaining did not come at the expense of health and life.⁵⁶ As a practical theologian, Wesley continually sought to connect one’s faith with the practical aspects of life. The theological understanding of wealth and stewardship is connected to the everyday practices of physical and emotional health. Money should be gained, so long as

⁵⁰ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 305.

⁵¹ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 305. Italics mine.

⁵² Marquardt, *John Wesley’s Social Ethics*, 40.

⁵³ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 307-308.

⁵⁴ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 308.

⁵⁵ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 308.

⁵⁶ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 305.

labor does not “impair [one’s] constitution.”⁵⁷ Wesley went on to say that workers should not “begin or continue in any business which necessarily deprives us of proper seasons for food and sleep in such proportion as our nature requires.”⁵⁸ Some careers are simply too unhealthy due to its physical ramifications to the body. Wesley encourages careful discernment of whether a change in career is needed.

Wesley provides ethical boundaries for work, stating, “we may not engage or continue in any sinful trade, any that is contrary to the law of God, or of our country.”⁵⁹ If work in a particular field was “not consistent with a good conscience” it should be avoided. Wesley is clear that in gaining all one can, it should never come at the expense of losing one’s own soul. The conscience plays a central role in Wesley’s understanding of employment. What is right and proper for one person may not be so for another. For example, Wesley notes that for himself, “I could not study to any degree of perfection either mathematics, arithmetic, or algebra, without being a deist, if not an atheist.”⁶⁰ Yet for others, this type of work would not prove “any inconvenience.”⁶¹ Wesley believed in the power of human conscious (i.e., the natural image of God). This, of course, is in conjunction with the Spirit’s role in discernment. So, while he provides boundaries to employment, he also says, “every man must judge for himself, and abstain from whatever he in particular finds to be hurtful to his soul.”⁶²

⁵⁷ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 305.

⁵⁸ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 305-306.

⁵⁹ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 306.

⁶⁰ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 306.

⁶¹ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 306.

⁶² Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 306.

Another boundary Wesley establishes for earning all one can is that work cannot harm one's neighbor, specifically in their "substance."⁶³ Work cannot

devour the increase of [a neighbor's] lands, and perhaps the lands and houses themselves, by gaming, by overgrown bills (with on account of physics, or law, or anything else), or by requiring or taking such interests as even the laws of our country forbid. ... We cannot, consistent with brotherly love, sell our goods below market price. We cannot study to ruin our neighbour's trade in order to advance our own. Much less can we entice away or receive any of his servants or workmen he has need of. None can gain by swallowing up his neighbor's substance, without gaining the damnation of hell.⁶⁴

To love one's neighbor as one does oneself is at the heart of the Gospel, and the heart of the Methodist ethos. Work, as long as it does not take advantage of one's neighbor, is honorable and should be perused with excellence.

Wesley goes on to place boundaries on what constitutes healthy and holy work by expanding the definition of harm to include the harm done to a neighbor's physical body, as well as their soul. Methodists were instructed to refrain from selling "drams or spiritous liquor."⁶⁵ Excusing medicinal use of alcohol only, Wesley rejected the idea of a person of faith selling spirits as a profitable business. Instead he emphatically forbids the business as a whole and states that no good could profit a person who would sell such items. With boldness, Wesley states,

But those who sell them in the common way, to any that will buy, are poisoners-general. They murder his Majesty's subjects by wholesale, neither does their eye pity or spare. They drive them to hell like sheep. And what is their gain? Is not the blood of these men? Who then would envy their large estate and sumptuous palaces? A curse is in the midst of them: the curse of God cleaves to the stones, the timber, the furniture of them. The curse of God is in their gardens, their walks, their groves; a fire that burns to the northernmost hell. Blood, blood is there—the foundation, the floor, the walls, the roof are stained with blood! And canst thou

⁶³ Wesley, "The Use of Money," 306.

⁶⁴ Wesley, "The Use of Money," 306-307.

⁶⁵ Wesley, "The Use of Money," 307.

hope, O thou man of blood, though thou art “clothed in scarlet and fine linen, and farest sumptuously every day”, canst thou hope to deliver down thy “fields of blood” to the third generation? Not so; for there is a God in heaven. Therefore thy name shall soon be rooted out. Like as those whom thou hast destroyed, body and soul, “thy memorial shall perish with thee.”⁶⁶

Wesley was not being prudish, but rather he sought to establish clear ethical standards for wealth and work. Alcoholism was prominent in his day and Wesley saw the ravenous nature of businesses that would prey on those who were already vulnerable. Families were destroyed and lives shattered, all while business owners profited by feeding the disease of alcoholism.⁶⁷ Nothing angered Wesley more than unholy practices that would seek to take advantage of the most vulnerable. While Wesley was open to human conscience in discerning one’s own call, he was clear that one’s work cannot take advantage of one’s neighbor. To do so would be to go against the love of God, and, therefore, could not be practiced authentically by a person of faith.

Continuing on the theme of profitable work, Wesley also made clear that harm to a neighbor is not only to one’s substance and body, but also harm to the state of their soul. Any work that would directly or indirectly hurt a neighbor’s soul should be rejected. Wesley names several places in which this most often occurs—“taverns, victualling-houses, opera-houses, play-houses, or any other places of public, fashionable diversions.”⁶⁸ Considering what Wesley said about liquor, it is no surprise that he would include taverns and victualling-houses. Opera-houses and play-houses, might, however, come as a surprise. Wesley did not outright reject opera-houses and play-houses, so long

⁶⁶ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 307.

⁶⁷ Ivan Burnett, “Methodist Origins: John Wesley and Alcohol,” *Methodist History* 13, no. 4 (July 1975): 5.

⁶⁸ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 307.

as they “profit the souls of men.”⁶⁹ Wesley sought to make clear that work should add to the growth of a person’s spiritual life and not hinder them in their own spiritual development.

Before turning his attention to savings, Wesley provides a quick leadership principal for those who are employed. Wesley calls workers to use their God-given ability of reason as a tool for profitable business. He encourages workers to “continually [learn] from the experiences of others or from your own experience, reading, and reflection, to do everything you have to do better today than you did yesterday. And see that you practice whatever you learn, that you make the best of all that is in your hands.”⁷⁰ For Wesley, profitable work should be celebrated within the ethical boundaries he establishes, and Christian workers ought to challenge themselves in their work as a means of glorifying God.

Save All You Can

The use of money becomes the focus of Wesley’s attention in the middle section of his sermon. Gaining money is to be a goal for every employee. Just as the means by which one earns their money, the spending of money was of concern for Wesley. As an eighteenth-century theologian reared in a Puritan worldview, the rejection of lavish living comes as no surprise. Money earned through diligent work should not be wasted on frivolous and superfluous items, but rather should be tempered through thoughtful

⁶⁹ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 307.

⁷⁰ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 308.

discernment on what is necessary to buy and what is “gratifying the desires of the flesh.”⁷¹

Wesley does not reject purchasing items altogether, but rather seeks a more balanced approach to what he calls “elegant epicurism.”⁷² Anything that would lead to a sense of being discontent with what one has should be tempered by seeking to “despise delicacy and variety, [and to be] content with what plain nature requires.”⁷³ This is especially true in the motive of purchasing extravagant items. Wesley warns those who would spend frivolously in order to “gain the admiration or praise of men.”⁷⁴ Honor, he says, does not come from others espousing value on one’s purchase, but rather from God, who is the giver of all gifts.

Wesley recognized the dangerous snare of wealth. He stated that when one indulges the flesh on a regular basis, “daily experience shows, the more they are indulged, they increase the more.”⁷⁵ This creates a cycle of dissatisfaction and discontentment, and ultimately value is placed in an increasing manner on what will ultimately perish. Wesley’s desire for saving is not to be restrictive on what a person should or should not purchase, but rather he challenged the intentions of one’s heart toward a purchase.

Addressing even more personal matters, Wesley turned his attention to estate planning and the future use of unspent money. He challenged the listener to carefully

⁷¹ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 308.

⁷² Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 308.

⁷³ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 308.

⁷⁴ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 308.

⁷⁵ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 309.

discern the disbursement of any unspent money. If a child or heir cannot be trusted as a faithful steward today, they should not be trusted in the future. Wesley instead states, “Have pity on them, and remove out of their way what you may easily foresee would increase their sins, and consequently plunge them deeper into everlasting perdition.”⁷⁶ For Wesley, a mark of mature discipleship can be seen in how one saves and spends their money. To waste God’s money on a child who would spend it without hesitation would be a gross misuse of God’s blessings. Wesley answers a hypothetical question of what he would do if his own child was “ignorant of the true use of money.”⁷⁷ He says, “I ought then (hard saying! Who can hear it?) to give each what would keep him above want, and to bestow all the rest in such a manner as I judged would be most for the glory of God.”⁷⁸ In this regard, Wesley never had to practice his own preaching as he had no children.

Give All You Can

Working within the ethical boundaries laid out and rejecting the lure of consumerism, for Wesley, are marks of a mature Christian. Wesley believes that earning and saving simply did not go far enough, however. At the close of his sermon, Wesley challenges the hearer to reach for the “farther end” of stewardship by giving all they can.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 309.

⁷⁷ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 309.

⁷⁸ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 309.

⁷⁹ Wesley, “The Use of Money,” 310.

Throughout this sermon, Wesley is clear that humanity's response to God's blessings is to be a faithful steward—stewarding one's job, one's time, one's intellect and reason, one's material blessings, etc. Wesley makes clear that one's entire life belongs to God and to steward life is an act of faithfulness:

...when the possessor of heaven and earth brought you into being and placed you in this world, he placed you here not as a proprietor, but a steward. As such he entrusted you for a season with goods of various kinds. But the sole property of these still rests in him, nor can ever be alienated from him. As you yourself are not your own, but his, such is likewise all that you enjoy. Such is your soul, and your body—not your own, but God's. And so is your substance in particular. And he has told you in the most clear and express terms how you are to employ it for him, in such a manner that it may be all in holy sacrifice, acceptable through Christ Jesus. And this light, easy service he has promised to reward with an eternal weight of glory.⁸⁰

The telos of work is not material gain, but rather God's glorification. Wesley notes "If you act in the Spirit of Christ you carry the end you at first proposed through all your work from first to last. You do everything in the spirit of sacrifice, giving up your will to the will of God; and continually aiming, not at ease, pleasure, or riches; not at anything 'this short enduring world can give;' but merely at the glory of God."⁸¹ The role of humanity is to act as a steward of God's blessings and to return back to God that which God has already given.

Wesley is not advocating for life as a pauper. Instead, he encourages the listener to ensure that they provide enough means for their own well-being and the well-being of their family. He also encourages giving to the "household of faith."⁸² If, after giving to

⁸⁰ Wesley, "The Use of Money," 310.

⁸¹ Wesley, "The More Excellent Way," 31.

⁸² Wesley, "The Use of Money," 310.

these, there is a surplus, Wesley encourages the hearer to give the rest away for the sake of others. To do so, Wesley says, is to give directly to God.⁸³

Wesley's desire is that at the end of people's lives, they will actually give more away than they stored up. To be able to give most of one's earnings away, careful decisions throughout one's life must be followed. Wesley provides a series of questions to ask before making a purchase.

In expending this, am I acting according to my character? Am I acting herein, not as a proprietor, but as a steward of my Lord's goods? Am I doing this in obedience to his Word? In what Scripture does he require me so to do? Can I offer up this action, this expense, as a sacrifice to God through Jesus Christ? Have I reason to believe that for this very work I shall have a reward at the resurrection of the just?⁸⁴

If in answering these questions, a person is still unclear about a purchase, Wesley provides a prayer of discernment to the "Searcher of hearts" in order to bring even more clarity.⁸⁵ Wesley encourages the listener to pray,

Lord, thou seest I am going to expend this sum on that food, apparel, furniture. And thou knowest I act herein with a single eye as a steward of thy good, expending this portion of them thus in pursuance of the design thou hadst in entrusting me with them. Thou knowest I do this in obedience to thy Word, as thou commandest, and because thou commandest it. Let this, I beseech thee, be an [sic] holy sacrifice, acceptable through Jesus Christ! And give me a witness in myself that for this labor of love I shall have a recompense when thou rewardest every man according to his work.⁸⁶

⁸³ Wesley, "The Use of Money," 310.

⁸⁴ Wesley, "The Use of Money," 310.

⁸⁵ Wesley, "The Use of Money," 310.

⁸⁶ Wesley, "The Use of Money," 311.

If one's conscience bears witness with the Holy Spirit that the prayer pleases God, then, according to Wesley, the purchase is "right and good, and such as will never make you ashamed."⁸⁷

The thoughtfulness Wesley encourages seems imperious. However, Wesley is not seeking to be dogmatic about the use of one's hard-earned money from their work. Rather, Wesley calls Methodists to view all of life as a means of stewardship. Stewarding one's job means that they will not work in a career that does not value life—one's own life and the life of one's neighbor. To be a steward is an act of worship. It is to honor that which God has given and to refuse to take advantage of God's blessings. To carefully discern purchases is to turn to the source of all gifts and to seek God's guidance in order to honor God with one's purchase.

For Wesley, working is essential. Methodists are to be a discerning people, constantly assessing their role as stewards in the world. Wesley closes the sermon with these final instructions:

I entrust you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, act up to the dignity of your calling. No more sloth! Whatsoever your hand findeth to do, do it with your might. No more waste! Cut off every expense which fashion, caprice, or flesh and blood demand. No more covetousness! But employ whatever God has entrusted you with in doing good, all possible good, in every possible kind and degree, to the household of faith, to all men.⁸⁸

Work from a Wesleyan perspective is not about a means to an end. It is not about earning all one can to build up a certain lavish lifestyle. Work is an act of stewardship. One must work hard, not for one's own gain, but rather to increase one's usefulness in the

⁸⁷ Wesley, "The Use of Money," 311.

⁸⁸ Wesley, "The Use of Money," 311.

world. To gain more money as a result of hard work is to have more money available to do good. To receive a promotion with increased privileges and benefits is to position someone to have a greater capacity to do good. The telos of work is not materialism or consumer power; it is to increase the capacity to faithfully steward one's gifts.

Reflections on the Teleological Nature of Work

This chapter has addressed several key principals to developing a Wesleyan perspective on work. These principals are vital for the development of this dissertation's final proposal.

Teleology of Work: The renewing of the image of God is the telos of Wesleyan theology. The renewal of the natural, political, and moral image leads to holiness—love of God and love of neighbor. The telos of work, then, is to promote holiness by growing in the love of God and the love of neighbor.

Ethics of Work: Wesley's sermon "The Use of Money" provides ethical boundaries for the use of money, as well as the use of employment. Wesleyan Christians must engage in thoughtful discernment about the ethical implications and nature of their employment. Work cannot be experienced as a separate compartment to one's life, but rather it must be integrated into the spiritual development of a person.

Stewardship: One's vocation is to be stewarded as a gift from God. Work is an act of worship when it is thoughtfully engaged as a spiritual endeavor, and not simply as a means for financial gain.

Summary

Wesley was concerned not only about the eternal resting place of a person's soul, but the life they lived on earth. Wesley's teleology was rooted in the lifelong renewal of the image of God. The renewed image impacts all of a person's life, including their work. The renewing process is cultivated through holiness, which Wesley understood as loving God and loving one's neighbor. The implications of holiness of heart and life have dramatic impacts on one's work. This is clearly seen in Wesley's sermon "The Use of Money." In this sermon, Wesley establishes not only a theology of money, but the stewardship of work itself. Work that acts contrary to loving God and loving one's neighbor cannot serve as godly work. Work is an act of stewardship because it serves as a means to glorify God and as a means to love one's neighbor.

As a tradition rooted in holiness, Wesley devised a formational system that allowed the early Methodists to experience the renewal of the divine image. Historically, the society meeting and class meeting were places where Wesley promoted a spirituality that allowed people to integrate their faith with their normal lives. The next chapter will reveal the methods Wesley used in order to help early Methodists live integrated lives through systems of accountability and application.

CHAPTER FIVE:

AN INTEGRATED LIFE: THE GENERAL RULES AND WESLEYAN FORMATION

Overview

In the previous chapter, Wesleyan teleology and soteriology were discussed to establish work as an act of stewardship. Work as stewardship reveals that work is not to be idolized, but rather it is a means of worship. The previous chapter also discussed Wesley's ethical approach to work as a consequence of the renewal of the image of God. The renewal of the image of God, also referred to as holiness, is experienced through both inward devotion to God as well as through outward expressions of mercy and compassion. In Wesley's sermon "The Use of Money," he provides clear ethical boundaries for the type of work in which early Methodists could participate. Any work that inhibited growth in holiness could not constitute as sacred work. The previous chapter also established the chief telos of work not as the accumulation of wealth, but the glorification of God.

This chapter will address Wesley's formational systems that helped early Methodists grow in holiness, which in turn assisted them in living more integrated lives. Not only did Wesley establish a formational system of integration, but he did so around three basic rules that were to govern the lives of those called Methodists. These rules, known as the General Rules, were the primary means by which a Methodist would live their lives in every sphere. This chapter will also address how the General Rules and the formational systems Wesley created have an impact on how one integrates their faith with their work today.

Spiritual Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition

In order to establish Wesley's group models as a place of faith and work integration, one must first unpack a Wesleyan understanding of formation. Michael Henderson notes that as a theologian, "Wesley had little sympathy for what he called 'speechifying' or sermonizing on themes with little practical application."¹ As has been discussed previously, at the heart of Wesley's theology is a desire to integrate one's beliefs with practical actions expressed in daily life. Wesley believed this was experienced through a deep and abiding love of God balanced with love of one's neighbor.² This is not to say that Wesley was not concerned with right beliefs. Rather, he strongly believed that orthodoxy and orthopraxy were interrelated and inseparable.³ Holy living was Wesley's chief goal for Methodists.

For Wesleyans, spiritual formation is rooted in holiness. Chapter four established that Wesleyan holiness is understood as the renewal of the image of God within humanity through the process of sanctification.⁴ Holiness is experienced through a genuine growth in love expressed in two places, holiness of heart and life.⁵ This perhaps is best articulated in Wesley's sermon "On Zeal," written in 1781. He writes,

In a Christian believer love sits upon the throne which is erected in the inmost soul; namely, love of God and man, which fills the whole heart, and reigns without a rival. In a circle near the throne are all holy tempers; longsuffering,

¹ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1997), 89.

² Higgins Matthaei, 25–26.

³ Kevin M. Watson, *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publisher, 2014), 36.

⁴ Kevin Watson, *The Class Meeting*, 49.

⁵ Higgins Matthaei, 21.

gentleness, meekness, fidelity, temperance; and if any other were comprised in “the mind which was in Christ Jesus.” In an exterior circle are all the works of mercy, whether to the souls or bodies of men. By these we exercise all holy tempers—by these we continually improve them, so that all these are real means of grace, although this is not commonly adverted to. Next to these are those that are usually termed works of piety—reading and hearing the word, public, family, private prayer, receiving the Lord’s supper, fasting or abstinence. Lastly, that his followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one body, the church, dispersed all over the earth—a little emblem of which, of the church universal, we have in every particular Christian congregation.⁶

Formation, as Wesleyan theologians Dianne Leclerc and Mark Maddix note, “nurtures Christian identity and vocation in disciples who are called to do God’s work in the world.”⁷ Formation is not just about one’s individualistic growth, but the impact it has on their understanding of how God uses them. David Werner highlights the balance between personal growth with outward action, noting,

...for Wesley, how one was doing internally (in one’s soul) was directly connected to what one did, or how one lived out the Christian life externally (in one’s actions). “A tree,” as the saying goes, “is known by its fruit.” Wesley uses this analogy to explain that true religion “is, properly and strictly, a principle within, seated in the inmost soul, and thence manifesting itself by these outward fruits, on all suitable occasions.” In fact, it must. “But, wherever [true religion] is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation.”⁸

Wesley recognized how imperative formational experiences were in developing mature Christians who were able to integrate faith and action.⁹ He believed communal formation was the primary place in which one grew in holiness. Andrew Thompson notes

⁶ John Wesley, “On Zeal,” General Board of Global Ministries, accessed April 24, 2018, <https://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-92-On-Zeal>.

⁷ Higgins Matthaei, 21.

⁸ David Werner, “John Wesley’s Question: ‘How Is Your Doing?’” *The Asbury Journal* 2, no. 65 (2010): 68.

⁹ Higgins Matthaei, 20.

the quintessential expression of this idea is Wesley's statement that there is "no holiness but social holiness," an oft-misunderstood phrase that is intended to refer to the way in which holiness or sanctification becomes a reality in individuals only insofar as those individuals are located in a community of faith where their practice of discipleship is grounded and carried out in company with fellow believers.¹⁰

The three primary communal spaces that Wesley created for formation were the society meeting, the class meeting, and the Band Meeting.¹¹ These communal gatherings helped form the theological identity of early Methodists as a people growing in love of God and love of neighbor. Through these multi-layered and interlocking groups, Wesley created a system in which people could grow in love and discover ways love could be integrated with their normal lives.

Wesley understood that frequent gatherings were needed to deepen faith beyond what he and other leaders could provide through preaching alone. Wesley wrote in his journal about the limitations of preaching, stating,

I was more convinced than ever that the preaching like an apostle, without joining together those that are awakened and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murderer. How much preaching has there been for these twenty years all over Pembrokehire! But no regular societies, no disciplines, no order or connection. And the consequence is that nine in ten of the once awakened are now faster asleep than ever.¹²

¹⁰ Andrew C. Thompson, "The Practical Theology of the General Rules," *The Asbury Journal* 2, no. 68 (2013): 17.

¹¹ These are not the only formational gatherings Wesley created. For example, the Select Societies were less structured than the general Society, and primarily served above-average members of Band Meetings. For more on select societies, see Henry H. Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 104-106.

While the band meeting was also highly formational, it was predominantly an individualistic endeavor in which a person confessed their sins to the band. Confession serves as an important discipline in the life of a disciple. This paper, however, focuses on the general society and class meetings as the primary places of integration of faith and work due to their specific connection with the General Rules.

¹² Watson, *The Class Meeting*, 51.

Wesley recognized that while preaching was important, it was limited in its ability to form disciples. Something was needed outside of the context of preaching in order to help Methodists grow in holiness.

Adam Clarke, an early Methodist preacher alive during Wesley's lifetime, noted a conversation the great revivalist preacher, George Whitefield, had with John Pool about the success of Wesley. Whitefield admits, "My brother Wesley acted wisely; the souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class, and thus preserved the fruits of his labor. This I neglected, and my people are a rope of sand."¹³ Clarke goes on to note, "The fruit of Mr. Whitefield's labor died with himself. Mr. Wesley's remains and multiplies."¹⁴ Wesley was not only concerned with the state of someone's soul, but also the quality of their faith lived throughout their life. He believed that groups were the best-suited place to help people live integrated lives.

The Society Meeting and the General Rules

As the Methodist movement grew, Wesley quickly discovered that he needed to establish group formational systems in order to nurture new disciples. While Wesley never sought to establish a new church, he nonetheless was tasked with the spiritual care of those who began to identify as Methodist and he designed a formation system to increase their piety.¹⁵ The genius behind Wesley was his ability to methodically organize group systems that would allow him to monitor the spiritual growth of those under his pastoral

¹³ J. W. Etheridge, *The Life of Rev. Adam Clarke* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1859), 189.

¹⁴ Etheridge, 189.

¹⁵ James Kirby, Russell E. Richey, and Kenneth E. Rowe, *The Methodists* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 165.

care, while also encouraging those in groups to take accountability for their own spiritual growth.

The largest formational gatherings were known as society meetings. Societies were like local Methodist congregations.¹⁶ Local societies were “the focal point of group identification” and functioned as “the educational channel by which the tenets of Methodism were presented to the target population.”¹⁷ Wesley provided his own definition of the purpose of a society in “The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies,” published in 1743. Wesley defined societies as “no other than a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their own salvation.”¹⁸ Societies functioned to instill the basic teachings of Wesleyan theology, as well as provide a space for corporate formation.

Societies were governed by three rules. These rules were, in essence, a method for men and women to incorporate Wesley’s teachings of sanctification into their daily lives.¹⁹ The General Rules, here presented in an abbreviated form, are

First: By doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind—especially that which is most generally practiced. . . . Secondly: By doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power, as they have opportunity doing good of every possible

¹⁶ The use of the word congregation is to note the function of the Society as a gathering of Methodists. Wesley did not desire to start a new church, but rather sought to establish gatherings where Methodists could grow in their faith and to learn ways in which faith is to be lived out. Therefore, the term congregation is used as a metaphor and should not be confused with a local church.

¹⁷ Henderson, 84.

¹⁸ John Wesley, “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 8 (Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 269.

¹⁹ Thompson, “The Practical Theology of the General Rules,” 7.

sort and as far as is possible to all men. ... Thirdly: By attending upon the ordinances of God.²⁰

The General Rules also include subsidiary rules that helped Methodists integrate faith and action (see Appendix A). The rules helped Methodists discern ways in which to govern their own lives, as well as provide a guide in which to evaluate their spiritual growth.

In many ways, the General Rules acted as a Wesleyan rule of life, similar to a Benedictine rule, for example.²¹ Marjorie Thompson defines a rule of life as “a pattern for spiritual disciplines that provides structure and growth in holiness. ... [It] is a means to help us establish a rhythm of daily living, a basic order within which new freedom can grow. ... [It] curbs our tendency to wander and supports our frail efforts to grow spiritually.”²² The General Rules helped govern the daily lives of the early Methodists, as they established a way for Methodists to “practice holy living.”²³ They served as the foundational guide by which Methodists were to integrate their faith into every sphere of their lives.

The General Rules also acted as a means of accountability. The General Rules were a mechanism in which Methodists could “watch over one another in love.”²⁴ Cartwright and Kinsey note that the General Rules used within the society meeting as a

²⁰ Wesley, “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies,” 270-271.

²¹ Michael G. Cartwright and Andrew Kinsey, *Watching Over One Another in Love: Reclaiming the Wesleyan Rule of Life for the Church's Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 5-6.

²² Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Introduction to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 1995), 138.

²³ Higgins Matthaei, 161.

²⁴ Wesley, “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies,” 269.

means of accountability were established for the “purpose of mentoring ... and catechesis.”²⁵ They also write

In addition to being given the opportunity to deepen their faith through greater understanding of the Christian life, [early Methodists] who wanted to continue to be “members” of the Methodists societies, bands, and class meetings were required to *show evidence* of their *ongoing desire for salvation*. They did so by being accountable to one another for their behaviors and intentions with other ordinary people, as well as to subject themselves to ongoing conversation about their progress in moving away from disordered desires toward the kind of holy desires that fostered spiritual growth.²⁶

Wesley mostly used the General Rules as accountability for spiritual growth and often measured people’s growth on their ability to maintain the rules. For example, in one case, Wesley removed 64 persons from society membership due to their inability to follow the General Rules. In the same society, another 76 willingly departed the society because the rules were too hard to follow.²⁷

While accountability is a critical part of the rules, Andrew Thompson argues that the General Rules were primarily a means of grace by which Methodists could “reasonably be expected to experience the sanctifying grace of God in the process of their daily discipleship.”²⁸ The General Rules are at the heart of Wesley’s practical theology. They served as a pastoral tool that enabled Christians to experience grace in a formative manner.²⁹ The General Rules were always meant to be applied to one’s daily life

²⁵ Cartwright and Kinsey, 9.

²⁶ Cartwright and Kinsey, 9. Italics original.

²⁷ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 139.

²⁹ Thompson, “The Practical Theology of the General Rules,” 21.

primarily as a means to integrate faith with the normal practices of life. One lived out their faith in their homes, workplaces, and social circles by adhering to the rules.

Society meetings acted more as “schools of holy living”³⁰ than simple gatherings where theological information was exchanged. They helped people integrate what they were learning about Jesus with how to live like him in their normal lives. This can be seen in how Wesley used early morning society gatherings for those who were preparing to go to work. Michael Henderson states that the early morning society gatherings “were intended not only to teach the Bible, but also to encourage the working Methodists who were getting ready for life in a difficult working environment. This early morning school for workers did much to civilize the rough laborers; it was a school that developed social responsibly as well as personal character.”³¹

Wesley loved to preach at these early morning meetings, encouraging workers to avoid laziness, sloth, and idleness. He encouraged workers to labor hard and to be above reproach in all their work.³² This idea of a strong work ethic can be found in one of the earliest Methodist hymn books that most likely would have been used at these early morning society gatherings. The hymn “Before Their Going to Work” provides a rich theology of integrating faith with work.³³

Let us go forth, ‘tis God commands;
Let us make haste away;
Offer to Christ our hearts and hands:
We work for Christ to-day.

³⁰ Henderson, 90.

³¹ Thompson, “The Practical Theology of the General Rules,” 7.

³² Henderson, 91.

³³ Henderson, 91.

When He vouchsafes our hands to use,
 It makes the labour sweet;
 If any now to work refuse,
 Let not the sluggard eat.

Who would not do what God ordains,
 And promises to bless?
 Who would not 'scape the toil and pains
 Of sinful idleness?

In Vain to Christ the slothful pray:
 We have not learn'd Him so;
 No—for he calls Himself the Way,
 And work'd himself below.

Then let us in His footsteps tread,
 And gladly act our part;
 On earth employ our hands and head,
 But give Him all our heart.

Formation Through Class Meeting

As the number of society meetings began to increase, by accident Wesley discovered how lax the General Rules had become in forming those who attended the gatherings. Originally launched as a fundraising campaign, Wesley organized small groups called class meetings to take up a collection for new and existing societies. It was agreed that societies would be divided into “little companies, or classes—about twelve in each class, with one person styled as the leader, to collect the weekly contributions.”³⁴ Class leaders, those tasked with gathering the collection, soon discovered and reported to Wesley moral misbehavior, spiritual apathy, and a general disregard for the General

³⁴ David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1985), 93.

Rules by those in their classes. Wesley saw this as an opportunity to provide pastoral oversight, noting that the class leader should watch over the souls of those in their care.³⁵

What was designed to be a place of financial collection soon became the primary place of spiritual formation for Methodists. Wesley himself encouraged Methodists to “never omit meeting your Class or Band . . . These are the very sinews of our Society, and whatever weakens, or tends to weaken, our regard for these, or our exactness in attending them, strikes at the very root of our community.”³⁶ American Methodist circuit rider and bishop Francis Asbury noted that the class meeting was the pillar of the Methodists’ work and the source of their success in deepening people’s faith.³⁷ Due to its success in helping Methodists integrate faith and their daily life, the class meeting became the primary place of integration for Methodists, and “the heart of the Methodist fellowship.”³⁸

The class meeting was designed to help Methodists learn how to integrate the General Rules into their normal daily practices. Anchored around reflective questions, Methodists gathered for a weekly soul checkup and to discern ways in which they had experienced and grown in grace (or lack thereof) in the previous week.³⁹ Wesleyan historian Kevin Watson notes that the class meeting focused on three tasks. “First, it held people accountable to the General Rules. Second, the class meeting was a place where Methodists were encouraged to give weekly to the relief of the poor. Third, and most

³⁵ David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 93.

³⁶ John Wesley, “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection as Beloved and Taught by the Reverend Mr. John Wesley, From the Year 1725, to the Year 1777,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 433.

³⁷ Kevin Watson, *The Class Meeting*, 29-30.

³⁸ Kirbey, Richie, and Rowe, 166.

³⁹ Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 95–96.

central to the time spent in the weekly meeting, it was a place where every Methodist answered the question, ‘how is it with your soul?’⁴⁰ The class meeting was not a bible study. Rather, it was a weekly gathering for people to reflect on their personal experiences with God’s grace and to name where they were growing in holiness and to confess where they had fallen short.

An early American work on the class meeting notes its essential purpose:

The Leader should confine the meeting to the object for which it is held. The class-meeting is not a prayer-meeting; it is not a love-feast; it is not a meeting for social and literary improvement. It is a meeting which the Church requires shall be held once a week for the purpose of promoting the experience and practice of godliness by means of the relations of the religious state of the members, and the application of the truth in their case by a Leader in the form of advice, admonition, instruction, warning, or encouragement, as their condition may require.⁴¹

The class meeting provided weekly space to give an account of how one was integrating their beliefs into their normal life—*experience and practice of godliness*. Werner states, “Wesley called the class meeting a prudential means of grace. He understood the living out of one’s faith in daily behavior is a means of grace. The way a person acts and lives is a way that person experiences God. It is also a measure of faith. It is a promoter of that faith. It is even part of the overall goal of holiness.”⁴² Surpassing the society meetings, the class meeting became the functional place of faith and life integration—faith expressed through daily interactions and experiences.

⁴⁰ Watson, *The Class Meeting*, 25.

⁴¹ John Atkinson, *The Class Leader: His Work and How to Do It* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1874), 208.

⁴² Werner, 69.

The class meeting was led by a class leader. The class leader, or “sub-pastors,” as noted by one early American Methodist writer,⁴³ were tasked with leading the group, as well as holding one another accountable for spiritual growth. David Lowes Watson states that the role of the class leader,

Important though it was for the members to watch over one another in love, the class leaders were the ones who made it possible to do this. To the extent that they were responsible for convening the classes, for directing the weekly meeting, and for guiding the members in their walk with Christ, they fulfilled a pastoral role that Wesley himself could not possibly have provided.... The leaders kept attendance records of class meetings, on which they evaluated the spiritual maturity of each class member, and ensured the *General Rules* were observed by everyone under their care.⁴⁴

The uniqueness of not only who led the class meeting, but also those who gathered, cannot be overlooked. Class leaders were men and women, of varying backgrounds, employment status, wealth, and experience, who were tasked with leading a diverse group of men and women into deeper spiritual practice. Henderson notes

the class meeting provided a forum, available nowhere else in Hanoverian England, for free expression in an accepting environment by people from widely different social backgrounds....the Wesleyan class meeting seems to have been the first and probably the most powerful leveling agent which helped to break up the rigid British caste system and provided upward social mobility....the class rolls of early societies points out how completely the rich and poor, educated and illiterate, gentlemen and laborers, were united in these classes.⁴⁵

The diversity of the weekly gathering allowed Methodists to learn from one another’s stories and experiences. John Miley notes that the class meeting was

...a means of expression for people who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to speak.... The servant girl would follow her mistress in telling the

⁴³ O. P. Fitzgerald, *The Class Meeting: In Twenty Short Chapters* (Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1888), 37.

⁴⁴ David Lowes Watson, *Class Leaders: Recovering a Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 28-29. Italics original.

⁴⁵ Henderson, 98.

people what God had done for her. The leader of the class might be the manager of the local factory or he might be one of the workingmen engaged there. On the class-leader's book of members to be visited could be found people with every variety of occupation. The social graces were brought to a common level, when each week, the people met together to pray, and praise, and share their experience.⁴⁶

Through an adherence to the General Rules, Wesley sought to provide a place in which people could balance works of piety with works of mercy.⁴⁷ Since the rules are outward and observable, Wesley believed that a person's progress in holiness "could be observed in that person's practical living."⁴⁸ It's important to mention that for Wesleyans works of piety and works of mercy are inseparable. Werner says, "works of piety ... are placed in the same category as those that foster outward holiness. ... Likewise, works of mercy that foster inward holiness ... are categorized with those that foster outward holiness."⁴⁹ Piety and mercy are intertwined and experienced through their integration into one's normal, daily life practices.

Wesley divided works of piety and works of mercy into what constituted a means of grace.⁵⁰ Works of piety, or instituted means of grace, are those specifically instituted by Christ—prayer, scripture reading, receiving the Eucharist, fasting, and Christian conferencing.⁵¹ Works of mercy, or prudential means of grace, constituted specific practices that are acts of compassion born out of a "response of God's mercy and

⁴⁶ John Miley, *A Treatise on Class Meetings* (Cincinnati, OH: Swormstedt and Poe, 1854), 46-47.

⁴⁷ Werner, 70.

⁴⁸ Werner, 73.

⁴⁹ Werner, 79.

⁵⁰ Higgins Matthaiei, 151.

⁵¹ Higgins Matthaiei, 153-157.

grace.”⁵² Prudential acts range from visiting the sick at home or in the hospital, to visiting those in jail. Interestingly, Wesley included adherence to the General Rules as a prudential means of grace.⁵³ This reveals that for Wesley, the General Rules were highly influential in faith formation. The General Rules are a means by which a person experiences the transformative power of God’s grace, and therefore a means by which one is renewed in the image of God.

As has been noted, holiness is to love God and to love one’s neighbor. Loving God and loving neighbor are inseparable. Within the General Rules themselves, one finds an integration of works of piety (love of God) and works of mercy (love of neighbor). The latter rule, *attend the ordinances of God*, is an act of the instituted means of grace (love of God), while the first two rules, *do no harm, do good*, are acts of the prudential means of grace (love of neighbor). This is why Wesley was emphatic that Methodists live by the General Rules. The General Rules established an integrative system in which no part of one’s life could be separated from another.

The class meeting, then, became the primary place of faith integration for Methodists. Each week, those who gathered in class meetings would share how they lived out the General Rules. They named the specific ways they grew in holiness by sharing how they grew in love of God and neighbor in every aspect of their lives.

⁵² Higgins Matthaiei, 157.

⁵³ Higgins Matthaiei, 160.

The Decline of the Class Meeting and Its Dis-Integrative Impact on Contemporary Methodists

Unfortunately, what was once the bedrock of the Methodist movement—*the root of our community*—the class meeting was replaced by an information-driven, piety oriented, Sunday School model of discipleship by the nineteenth century. Practical application to faith was replaced by informational exchanges about faith.⁵⁴ By the beginning of the twentieth century, the class meeting was nearly extinct in American Methodism. Wesleyan historian Kevin Watson laments this, stating, “The class meeting had become an archaeological relic of our better days and *instead of being a way of life*, people began to view their Christian identity as one of a number of hobbies they might develop or work on when it was either convenient or served to make life a little bit easier.”⁵⁵

British Methodism experienced a similar decline in the role and function of the class meeting. Andrew Goodhead notes

The class meeting underwent significant changes in the core functions within a relatively short period of time. Certainly, prior to Wesley’s death in 1791, the class meeting had evolved from the first small group meeting in Bristol. Routinization led the class into a settled and ongoing life without the dynamic drive which initially gave it impetus. Over time, organization replaced charisma. The larger society took precedence over the small class. The society’s aim, to hear preaching and exhortation, to pray and to sing communally, and represent the whole gathering of people called Methodists, became the primary meeting, removing the pre-eminence of the class.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 145.

⁵⁵ Watson, *The Class Meeting*, 59. Italics mine.

⁵⁶ Andrew Goodhead, *A Crown and a Cross: The Rise, Development, and Decline of the Methodist Class Meeting in Eighteenth-Century England* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 243.

As class meetings began to decline, naturally, the importance and practice of the General Rules also began to waiver. As has been noted, the class meeting was the formational place in which the General Rules were integrated into one's experiences. Kevin Watson notes that "without the practice of meeting together in small groups, Methodists have tended to decrease in their zeal and determination to grow in holiness."⁵⁷

Watson notes that the decline of the class meeting, and thereby the practice of the General Rules, has a direct impact on the decline of the Methodist Church.⁵⁸ While this may be true, it has also resulted in the dis-integration of faith with normative experiences like work for contemporary Methodists. In many of today's Methodist churches, church members no longer have a formational system that intentionally aids them in integrating their faith with their lives, nor do they have the guidance of a rule to shape and influence their work lives.⁵⁹ As a result, Wesleyans find themselves as many Christians in other theological traditions: struggling to integrate their faith with other areas of their life, especially with their work.

In *A Blueprint for Discipleship: Wesley's General Rules as a Guide for Christian Living*, Kevin Watson notes the power of the General Rules in aiding contemporary Christians with integrating their faith with their daily lives. He writes

One of the reasons the General Rules have such a prominence for twenty-first-century Christian practice is that they are ideally suited for moving people from nominal faith to holiness. The General Rules proved a helpful blueprint for a stagnant and spiritually dying church to wake up and realize that there is so much more to being Christian than we have often settled for. Thus, one of the most important roles that the General Rules can play in the church today is to

⁵⁷ Kevin M. Watson, *A Blueprint for Discipleship: Wesley's General Rules as a Guide for Christian Living* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2009), 107.

⁵⁸ Watson, *A Blueprint for Discipleship*, 107.

⁵⁹ Higgins Matthaei, 31-32.

help nominal Christians begin to wrestle with how to actually practice their faith.⁶⁰

For contemporary Methodists, a return to the practice of the General Rules offers a “highly resilient, integrative, and promising paradigm”⁶¹ A formational system of accountability that emphasizes an adherence to the General Rules will help Wesleyan Christians begin to integrate their faith with their work.

Key Principals from This Chapter

This chapter has addressed key principals to developing a Wesleyan perspective on work. These principals are vital for the development of this dissertation’s final proposal.

Communal Formation. Wesleyanism is a formational theology. Communal formation groups lay the foundation for assisting people in integrating their faith with all aspects of their lives, including their workplace.

Accountable Discipleship. The General Rules acted as means to hold Methodists accountable for spiritual growth and maturity, as well as practical ways in which to live out their faith in real-life situations.

Summary

Wesleyan theology is rooted in formation, namely communal formation that is focused on growing in holiness. Holiness—love of God and neighbor—results in

⁶⁰ Watson, *A Blueprint for Discipleship*, 52.

⁶¹ Christopher P. Momany, “Wesley’s General Rules: Paradigm for Postmodern Ethics,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 26, no. 1–2 (1993): 17.

integrating faith into daily practices. Wesley used the General Rules to provide a way of life for Methodists. Through the societies and class meetings, Wesley instructed Methodists to watch over one another in love and to hold one another accountable to practice one's faith. Methodism, especially as it was formed in the United States as a denomination, began to focus more on beliefs and neglected how faith influenced daily practices. In short, Methodism began to experience an identity crisis.⁶² This shift in identity affected the laity in monumental ways. What was once the heart of a formational methodology became obsolete.

For early Methodists, the class meeting provided formational space to experience God's grace and to integrate the General Rules into their normal lives. The final chapter will create a new and adapted model of the class meeting anchored in the application of the General Rules for today's workers. This new class meeting, while rooted in Wesleyan formational history, will be adapted in order to help lay people form and implement a class meeting in their place of work. As the next chapter will establish, returning to the General Rules as the foundation for the renewing of the image of God in Wesleyan Christians, and the ways in which this is experienced through a new class meeting model, will help laity integrate their faith with their work.

⁶² Philip F. Hardt, *The Soul of Methodism: The Class Meeting in Early New York City Methodism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), 94–95.

CHAPTER SIX:
A NEW CLASS MEETING FOR TODAY'S WORKER

Overview

What is a uniquely Wesleyan theological perspective of faith and work? This is the fundamental question this dissertation has sought to answer. A newly adapted class meeting for the workplace will attempt to not only address this question, but also to show the practical and integrative emphasis of a Wesleyan perspective on faith and work. This not only gives pastors and laity the theological foundation for a Wesleyan theology of work, but it provides a model to implement in their work context.

Integration is fundamental for proposing a Wesleyan perspective on work. As a formational theology, Wesleyanism is to be experienced in real, practical means, not simply as a set of prescriptive beliefs. This final chapter will present how Wesleyan Christians can integrate their faith and work by providing a practical model that can easily be implemented in the workplace with coworkers. The model itself leads toward natural integration. This will be discussed more thoroughly as the chapter progresses.

Before presenting a model for integration, a summary of the preceding chapters will be helpful. Each chapter provided key insights about a Wesleyan perspective of faith and work. They also provided fundamental principles that form the final model of integration.

Chapter Summary

Chapter one addressed the problem of establishing a uniquely Wesleyan perspective on work. While much is being written about faith and work, little is being

written within the Wesleyan tradition on the topic. This has left many Wesleyan Christians with few resources to help them integrate their faith and work. Chapter one looked at the problem of integration historically as it revealed how the Church has addressed work throughout the centuries.

Chapter two established the theological and biblical foundation for a definition of work. It addressed the challenges of defining work, as well as looked at work through four main theological movements in scripture—creation, the Fall, redemption, and the in-breaking of the Kingdom. This chapter culminated in defining work as *an activity created by God to be lived out and experienced by humanity, in partnership with the Spirit, for the purpose of cultivating God's ongoing creative endeavors in the world, and to reveal the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God now, as well as in its coming fullness.*

Chapter three began to lay the key foundational principals of a Wesleyan perspective of work. Wesleyanism is built on a distinct theology of the *Imago Dei*. Wesley understood the image of God to be manifest in humanity in three distinct ways—the natural, political, and moral images of God. Each distinct characteristic of image of God has practical implications for work. This chapter established that Wesley's teachings must be adapted in order to provide contemporary application. It also emphasized that Wesleyan theology is integrative and impacts all aspects of one's life, including one's work.

Chapter four outlined the practical implications for the renewal of the image of God—holy living. Holiness has consequences for the type of work in which one might participate, as well as the manner in which a person conducts his/her work. Using Wesley's sermon "The Use of Money," the chapter established the teleological

implications of one's work as a means of stewardship and glorification of God, and not primarily as a means for financial gain.

Chapter five emphasized the historical ways early Methodists integrated their faith with all aspects of their life. Wesley's emphasis on communal formation through class meetings, and a system of accountable discipleship called the General Rules, resulted in early Methodists living more integrated lives. The decline of communal formation and the loss of accountability in many Wesleyan churches has resulted in most Wesleyan Christians struggling to live more integrated lives, which can most easily be seen in the struggle to integrate faith and work.

Laying the Foundation for an Adapted Class Meeting

This final chapter will synthesize all that has been discussed by providing an adapted version of a class meeting, governed by the General Rules, and easily implemented in the workplace. This will provide pastors a model to implement in their churches, as they train, equip, and commission laity to repeat the process in their individual workplaces. Before establishing this model, a final aspect of the faith and work movement must be discussed; the lack of formational language in most faith and work literature, how Wesleyanism provides a remedy to this problem through formation systems, and an increased emphasis of the General Rules for accountability.

The Problem with Today's Faith and Work Literature

Chapter one established that many Christians in varying denominational systems struggle to integrate their faith with their work. There is a gap between what is discussed on Sundays and their lived experiences on Monday morning. This is either because

pastoral leaders simply ignore the topic of work, or, as was noted, more dangerously, they intentionally create a dichotomy between what is sacred work (i.e., religious work) with secular work (i.e., every other type of work). The dichotomy between sacred and secular work has a long history. The Church has struggled to find a balance between church life and the lived experiences of the laity. Since the late twentieth century, however, many scholars, theologians, and pastors are seeking ways to remedy this divide.¹

While the problem is experienced in varying denominations and theological traditions, it is exacerbated in the Wesleyan tradition because very few have developed a Wesleyan perspective of work. Pastor Karen admitted her struggle with discovering theological literature from the Wesleyan tradition to help Susan begin to integrate her faith with her work. The literature is sparse, and while there is a growing amount of literature outside the tradition, it is not always helpful for those from the Wesleyan tradition because it lacks crucial formational language.

The phenomenon of work is worthy of continued theological reflection. Scholars like M.D. Jenu, David Jensen, Darrel Cosden, Armand Larive, Miroslav Volf, Ben Witherington, and Joshua Sweeden, to name only a few, have contributed greatly to the merging of faith and work. As was noted in chapter two, “multiple conversations [are] taking place”² in this movement. Their contributions of making work a part of contemporary theology is giving pastors and faith practitioners tools to begin to mend the divide between sacred and secular work. Yet, more must be written to develop the full nuances of the phenomenon of work.

¹ Sweeden, *The Church and Good Work*, 53.

² Sweeden, *The Church and Good Work*, 54.

Sweeden's book has brought an awareness to "the limited attention ecclesiology has received in the theological literature of work."³ He asks important questions like,

Is the lack of explicit ecclesiological attention in theologies of work in danger of discounting the formative role of the church? Can theologies of work fully propose transformations of good work aside from concrete communities of practices? Can the church be understood as generative for both the theology and practice of good work?⁴

Sweeden's use of the word *church* represents the Church universal and not a particular denomination. While this is useful and necessary, this dissertation has sought to answer Sweeden's questions by localizing the formative role of the church to a particular theological expression—Wesleyanism.

Wesleyan Formational Systems

This dissertation has not only exposed the lack of a Wesleyan voice in the theological literature of work, but, to a large degree, it has revealed a need for formational systems to help laity integrate their faith beyond simply providing them with biblical and theological information about work. One need only glance at the table of contents of most literature of faith and work to discover there is a void of formational language about work. Work is often discussed as if it is a theological object and not a lived experience. The lack of formation leaves one asking the question, *Does knowing what the bible or what modern theologians say about work help a lay person integrate their beliefs with their actual work?* If knowledge about work alone was all one needed to

³ Sweeden, *The Church and Good Work*, 6.

⁴ Sweeden, *The Church and Good Work*, 6.

integrate work with faith, the gap between Sunday and Monday would quickly begin to close. The reality is it has not. Many still sit in the pews struggling to bridge the divide.

Wesleyanism as a theological system rooted in formation provides not only a unique perspective on work, but a unique response to work for today's employees. As has been discussed, Wesleyanism is focused on holy living through an integration of faith and life. Integration through formation invites a dialogue of how one's faith ought to impact their work.

While Wesleyanism does not address every aspect of work, namely due to the lack of resources devoted to faith and work from Wesley himself, it does provide a unique approach to how one might begin to integrate faith and work. Through an emphasis on a practical faith (lived and expressed in all aspects of life), and a faith that is developed through group formational systems, Wesleyanism by its nature seeks to remedy any divide that exists between what is falsely labeled sacred and secular.

Holiness within Wesleyanism is not about disengagement from the normal aspects of life; it is a call to engage all of life with the love of God and love of neighbor.⁵ The genius of Wesley is that he recognized that talking about faith, like in preaching and writing for example, was simply not sufficient enough to lead Methodists to holy living. In order for people to integrate their faith with their daily lives, formational systems were essential. As was noted in the previous chapter, for early Methodists, the primary place of integration was the class meeting.

⁵ Rebekah L. Miles, "Holy Heart, Holy Life, Holy Work: Work, Vocation, and Calling in The Wesleyan Tradition," in *Living Tradition: Recovery and Reconstruction of Wesleyan Heritage*, ed. Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, 155–182 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 180.

As a place structured around the practical expressions of faith, namely through adherence to the General Rules and the emphasis on mutual accountability for growth in holiness, the class meeting formed a people who lived their faith and did not compartmentalize it from other aspects of their lives. A return to formation, governed by a contemporary expression of the General Rules, will not only aid today's Methodists in integrating faith and work, it can serve as a system of integration for those outside the Wesleyan tradition.

The General Rules as an Evaluative Tool for Establishing "Good" Work

Chapter five noted that Andrew Thompson's article "The Practical Theology of the General Rules," makes a compelling argument for the contemporary use of the General Rules as a formative tool in the Wesleyan church today. Thompson argues that the General Rules are often presented through a historical lens as a tool of accountability for early Methodists.⁶ Thompson argues that the rules were

Meant to provide a practical framework of spiritual discipline whereby seekers after salvation could reasonably expect to encounter grace. That is, they were a framework for the means of grace. It is in just this sense that we can say that the practical theology of the means of grace inheres in the General Rules. The textual material in which the rules are narrated may not at first glance seem like the stuff of robust theology. But it is certainly the stuff of a robust practical theology, if by that term we mean...a theology aimed at a certain kind of Christian practice, geared toward nurturing faithful Christian character, and expressed in a literary genre most appropriate to the task for which it was intended. That the General Rules were used in a disciplinary manner within Methodist societies there can be no doubt. Viewing them primarily as a regulatory mechanism in this way, however, sells short the full purpose for which they were intended. That purpose was a pastoral one, whereby a theology of the means of grace was communicated to men and women in Methodist societies in an intimately practical manner so that their Christian practice might itself be formed and informed.⁷

⁶ Thompson, "The Practical Theology of the General Rules," 6.

⁷ Thompson, "The Practical Theology of the General Rules," 21.

Thompson's argument is compelling and needed. While not denying the historical use of the General Rules, nor minimizing their use for accountability, Thompson rather places them in the realm of a pastoral concern. The Rules function as an aid in formation as Christians experience the transformative work of God through a practical means of grace. This distinction is important for the ongoing conversation for the faith and work movement. What is lacking in faith and work literature are practical tools to help lay people actually integrate their faith and work. To provide a framework in which to help lay people do this is a pastoral response to their need.

The General Rules can provide a framework for Christian workers to evaluate their own work to discern whether or not it is good work, as well as to evaluate their own character and growth in holiness. In Joshua Sweeden's work *The Church and Work*, he argues that the church is the place of formation and it is the place in which people, knowingly or unknowingly, participate in formational ethics that define good work.⁸ The power of Sweeden's book is not in his definition of what is good work, but in the formational power of ecclesiology in helping lay people discern what is good and what is not.

For Wesleyans, defining good work is established by using the General Rules as an evaluative tool. Asking questions like, *Does my work promote goodness? Or did my work do harm?* helps employees reflect on the nature of their work that goes beyond production. The value of work is not simply in what is produced, but the ethical nature of the product itself.

⁸ Sweeden, *The Church and Work*, 75-80.

Rebekah Miles argues that Wesley was not as concerned about the types of work people choose (this too was argued in chapter four), but rather in whether one's work would cause them to become more holy and to do more good in the world.⁹ While the term *good* is ambiguous to start, using what has been established in the previous chapters, holiness in the Wesleyan tradition might define good as anything that would aid in one's love of God and love of neighbor. If any practice, especially one's work, hinders growth in love of God and neighbor, then it simply cannot be defined as good work.

A Proposal: An Adapted Class Meeting Model

Using the foundational aspects of Wesleyan theology, namely the renewal of the image of God, combined with the emphasis on formational systems to aid in holy living, under the evaluative and accountable tool of the General Rules, one can begin to establish a new model of formation that will allow workers to integrate faith and work. The model presented gives pastors tools to help their lay people begin the necessary journey of living more integrated lives.

Chapter five established that the class meeting sought to move beyond information to more integration. A class meeting, as opposed to a particular bible study in the workplace, can function as a powerful instrument of integration. While scripture, prayer, and learning are important aspects of the class meeting, the power rests in the reflection on how one integrates the General Rules into their normal lives. The class meeting must be adapted in order for it to function in the context of a workplace. However, in the adaptation, the function of integration does not change. Maintaining the

⁹ Miles, "Holy Heart, Holy Life, Holy Work," 165-169.

General Rules as the framework for which to gather in a class meeting will ensure that the focus of the class meeting is on personal reflection and integration.

The Pastor's Role in Training, Equipping, and Commissioning Lay People to Establish an Adapted Class Meeting in the Workplace

Pastors are integral in helping form workplace class meetings, even though they most likely would not participate in the actual groups meeting in the workplace.¹⁰ In order to help lay people form a workplace class meeting, pastors would form a class meeting with ten to twelve people from their congregation that would gather for several months to model the purpose and function of a workplace class meeting. During these gatherings, the pastor would devote time to developing the theology of work through a Wesleyan perspective, as well as modeling what a workplace class meeting would look like in practice. In essence, the participants would be trained, equipped, and commissioned as class leaders to form new class meetings in their workplace.

Throughout the several months of participating in a class meeting with the pastor, each participant would begin to discern ten to twelve people in their workplace that they will invite to a class meeting. Over the course of the several months, participants would pray over the names of those whom they are going to invite and begin to lay the groundwork for implementing a workplace class meeting. These participants would be responsible for inviting, forming, and leading a workplace class meeting after they have completed the pastor's class meeting.

¹⁰ Using much of what has been written in this dissertation, a training book for developing a workplace class meeting will need to be developed to assist pastors in helping their lay people form workplace class meetings. The scope and limitations of this dissertation cannot fully develop this work. It is the intent of the author, however, to develop this book and training material. A general overview of what a workplace class meeting would look like has been provided.

While the class meeting with the pastor would come to an end after several months, the connection to the pastor does not end. Much like John Wesley did with class leaders in the early days of Methodism, the pastor will continue to serve as a spiritual mentor and guide for the laity leading workplace class meetings. Regular check-ins with them will need to be established to help them continue to grow as leaders, as well as to address any particular needs they may have.

A model of an adapted class meeting in the workplace is outlined below.

A Workplace Class Meeting

Establishing a Group

The beauty of a workplace class meeting is that not everyone needs to be a Methodist. The original class meetings were open to anyone seeking to grow in holiness. As has been noted already, Wesley sought to return to primitive Christianity and not to develop a new denomination. In forming a workplace class meeting, people of all denominational backgrounds should be considered for participation in the group. Having varied denominational affiliation would add to the depth of discussion and reflection. Ideally, these groups would consist of ten to twelve people and would be mix-gendered. The class leader who has been trained by their pastor would invite coworkers to participate in the workplace class meeting. Having participated in a class meeting with their pastor, they should share their experiences with the invited coworkers to show the value and need for a such a group.

The class leader would be responsible for organizing the details of the gathering, including the time and place of meeting. As has already been developed in chapter five,

the class leader, while a mentor of sorts, is also on the same journey of growing in holiness. The class leader is not the group's pastor, but a fellow pilgrim seeking to integrate his/her faith with his/her work.

Setting

Ideally, the workplace is the best place to host the actual gathering.¹¹ This is neutral ground for the participants, and since the purpose is to help them integrate their faith with their work, being in their place of employment will naturally allow integration to occur. If it is not possible for the weekly gatherings to occur in the workplace, another location should be determined ahead of time.

All levels of leadership and managerial responsibilities are welcome to attend, and this should be considered when the class leader is discerning whom to invite. One of the unique attributes of the original class meeting was the diversity of those present. The previous chapter highlighted the variety of people in these groups, which included males and females, diverse socio-economic statuses and education levels, and a range of faith experiences (seekers, new Christians, and mature disciples). This diversity adds to the depth of conversation, while also revealing that everyone is on the same journey toward holiness. A workplace class meeting should strive toward this same inclusivity. A group should not only include both genders, but it should also include racial diversity, as well as a diversity of position and responsibility in the workplace. For example, a single workplace class meeting might include both the CEO and a custodian.

¹¹ The class leader will need to discuss the possibility of leading a faith-based gathering in the workplace with their management to ensure that proper protocols are implemented. Participants should also become familiar with federal, state, and local laws pertaining to practicing one's faith in the workplace.

It must be noted that power dynamics are a reality within the workplace. A potential reservation in forming a workplace class meeting with diverse levels of employees would be the potential for the misuse of power, or a fear of sharing something that might be used against an employee in a performance review. This is a legitimate concern, and it must be addressed while forming the group. In an already adapted version of class meetings, what David Lowes Watson calls Covenant Discipleship Groups, he emphasizes the need to establish a covenant of what is and is not accepted by the group.¹² This covenant is created and signed by the group as it establishes the purpose of the group and what practices are essentials.

As a workplace class meeting is formed, power dynamics must be addressed and made a part of the covenant that is created. Confidentiality, mutual respect, and a refusal to use something someone says against them in any form should be established in order to create appropriate boundaries. The covenant also establishes the commitment to faithful and honest conversations and provides the boundaries of what is acceptable practice and expectations. Below is an example of a covenant that can serve as a guide for a new workplace class meeting.

Workplace Class Meeting Covenant

The purpose of the workplace class meeting is to grow in holiness through increasing one's love of God and one's neighbor. It is also a place of formation, where what we believe about God is integrated with our work. We believe we cannot separate

¹² David Lowes Watson, *Covenant Discipleship: Christian Formation through Mutual Accountability* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 113-114.

our beliefs from our work, as the two are intimately related. This group is a group of mutual reflection in which we collectively reflect upon how our work aids us in our love of God and neighbor, as well as a place in which we confess where it has not. This group also serves as a place of formation as we seek to embody the General Rules of *doing no harm, doing good, and attending the ordinances of God* (which we understand as practicing the spiritual disciplines regularly).

Therefore, we commit to the following:

I will bring my whole self to every gathering and will reflect upon my work as it relates to my faith.

I will allow the General Rules to be a framework in which I reflect upon the nature of my faith and work.

I understand that confession is a vulnerable act. It requires honesty with myself and an understanding that as another person confesses, I will hold it in sacred trust. This means that our group will maintain absolute honesty and confidentiality.

I recognize that within this group are varying levels of management and responsibilities within our workplace. I commit, however, to never use anything that is said in this group against another, whether in conversations with other workers or in any workplace evaluation, as long as it does not conflict with any ethical standards and practices established by our employee policy, standards, and practices.

I will listen to others intently and I will share openly.

I will allow the class leader to guide the conversation and will not force the conversation to go a certain direction.

I commit to actively engage my faith by attending a church service weekly, as well as practicing other spiritual disciplines for personal growth.

I commit to gather in this group weekly.

I willingly surrender to the mutual accountability of others as we hold each other accountable for growing in holiness.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Format

The workplace class meeting will meet once a week either before the start of the workday or after its completion. Ideally, the class meeting would gather at the end of the week in order to reflect on the previous week's work. A class leader will lead the questioning and conversation. The timeframe is one to two hours, depending on the size of the group. Adequate time must be provided so that each person is able to answer the reflective questions below.

The class leader will open the meeting with a scripture reading, a prayer, or the singing of a hymn/song. The opening time is a perfect opportunity for the class leader to share scripture that lays the groundwork for faith and work integration. Chapter two of this dissertation provided a thorough analysis of a biblical theology of work that can be used as a starting place. The class leader can also draw on teachings they learned during their class meeting experience with their pastor.

The class leader will begin by asking and answering the first reflective question. This sets the tone for the meeting and models for the other participants the content of an answer. The class leader may also need to ask follow-up questions or provide instructive commentary to participants in order to admonish and encourage them.

The Nature of the Reflective Questions

The reflective questions are at the heart of the workplace class meeting. The questions revolve around four critical aspects of Wesleyan theology. First, the questions are practical questions. They seek to decompartmentalize participants' lives by inviting

them to share about the ways in which their faith is a part of their decision-making within the workplace.

Secondly, the questions revolve around the General Rules. The Rules establish an ethical standard for what might constitute good work from work that causes harm, directly or indirectly, to one's neighbor. The Rules also establish the need for continued spiritual practice by maintaining spiritual disciplines (ordinances of God) outside of the workplace. These practices are essential to cultivate holiness in the life of a participant.

Thirdly, the questions establish that work is to be stewarded. As was discussed in chapter four, work through a Wesleyan perspective is a gift from God and a means to glorify God. The reflective nature of the questions allows participants to see how their work is not simply a task to be performed, but with attentiveness to God, work becomes an act of spiritual worship. Changing one's perspective that work is a task to work as worship is vitally important to integrating faith and work. Inviting participants to reflect on work through a lens of worshipful stewardship changes the dynamic of what one does for a living.

Lastly, the questions are formational. As noted in chapter four, the telos of Christian living is to grow in one's love of God and neighbor. The gathering in a group setting, the reflectiveness of the questions themselves, and the spiritual oversight and care of the class leader creates an environment in which participants can experience the renewing of the image of God. As the image of God is renewed, one begins to model Christlike behavior in one's daily living. Holy living seeks to incorporate and integrate faith into every aspect of one's life. The workplace class meeting allows this formation to occur.

The questions invite the participants to look back over the previous week of work to see where they integrated their faith. It also helps employees see where they continue to struggle in their faith. The questions are deep questions and will require thoughtful responses. It should be assumed that initially participants might struggle with answering the questions, or their responses might be shallow. This will change over time as the participants become more comfortable with the questions and the group itself.

It should be the goal of the class leader to get through each question. They will need to keep the conversation moving in order to do so. The questions invite participants to begin to look at their work as a part of their spiritual lives. Some of the questions are confessional in nature; these questions require vulnerability. The class leader will need to model vulnerable leadership in order to encourage participants to share where they have fallen short.

Workplace Class Meeting Questions

Below are the questions that are asked by the class leader and answered by each participant.

1. During the past week, describe ways you actively incorporated “good” into your choices or actions at work? What opportunities did you miss? What do you wish you could have done differently?
2. During the past week, describe any of your choices or actions that intentionally caused harm to others. What was your motivation to cause the harm?
3. During the past week, describe any of your choices or actions that unintentionally caused harm to others? What do you wish you could have done differently?
4. How did you or did you not act as a steward of your work this week?

5. During the past week, how did you actively incorporate/reflect any attribute of the Fruit of the Spirit (see list below) into your choices or actions? What opportunities did you miss? What do you wish you could have done differently? Which of the attributes listed below do you find most challenging to reflect or incorporate into your workplace life?
- a. Love
 - b. Joy
 - c. Peace
 - d. Patience
 - e. Kindness
 - f. Generosity
 - g. Faithfulness
 - h. Gentleness
 - i. Self-Control
6. How has your personal devotional time helped you in your work this week? What spiritual disciplines are you currently practicing?
7. How is your life in God?¹³ Or, another way of stating this question, “What is the state of your soul?”

Closing Prayer

The class leader will then close the meeting in prayer, giving thanks to God for the gift of their work and asking God to help each participant continue to grow in holiness through an increased love of God and love of neighbor. For example, a closing prayer might be:

¹³ Elaine A. Heath and Scott T. Kisker, *Longing for Spring: A New Vision for Wesleyan Community* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 34.

Gracious and Loving God, you who created work and establish the work of our hands, we give you thanks for this time together. We thank you that you have called us to the work in which we participate. Help us, always, to see work not as a task, but as a means to glorify you and to actively love and serve our neighbors. Forgive us when our work has caused harm to you, others, or ourselves. Keep our eyes open to see you in the coming week as we perform the tasks we have been assigned. Ultimately, Lord, may our work be of service to you and for your Kingdom purposes, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Midweek Follow-up

The role of a class leader in early Methodism was to provide spiritual care over the participants. In a workplace class meeting, the function is much the same. Forming a workplace class meeting will build deep friendship among the participants, especially with the class leader. Building trust is important in order for participants to feel safe in sharing at the class meeting. The class leader should be encouraged to check in with participants throughout the week to inquire about their spiritual lives and to encourage them in their faith. This check-in does not need to be anything formal, but rather could be a simple conversation while walking into work, a conversation over lunch, or even a text message or email.

Reflections Upon a Workplace Class Meeting

Wesleyanism is rooted in practical application of deeply spiritual truths. The workplace class meeting seeks to be a place in which this process can occur. It is not perfect, and the questions may need to be adapted to fit specific workplace environments.

However, the invitation to reflect upon the nature of one's work as something that is not separate from one's faith is crucial in order to help Christians live a more integrated life.

As has been developed throughout this dissertation, Wesleyanism as a theological tradition leads people to grow in their love of God and their neighbor through the continual, lifelong renewal of the image of God within each person. Participating in practical experiences like a class meeting is foundational for growing in holiness. The workplace class meeting creates such an environment for employees.

The beauty of the class meeting is that while it is Wesleyan, it need not be reduced to only a Wesleyan Christian experience. However, Wesleyan Christians who participate in a workplace class meeting will begin to see how their Wesleyan faith is not something that is isolated to Sunday mornings but is formational throughout the week.

Looking Forward

The scope of this body of work has laid the foundation for a uniquely Wesleyan perspective on work. Wesleyanism must be adapted in order to meet the demands for Christians of today. While Wesley did not explicitly develop a theology of work, his large body of theological literature provides a sufficient lens through which to view work. The intent of this dissertation has been to bring Wesleyanism into the greater theological conversation of faith and work. This has long been a needed voice in the faith and work movement.

This dissertation has not only established what is unique about Wesleyanism as a theological framework in which to view one's work, but it has also provided a practical tool for today's workers to live more integrated lives—the workplace class meeting. Formational language and experiences have been largely absent in the faith and work

movement. A workplace class meeting creates the practical environment in which faith and work integration can occur. The reflective questions invite participants to think more thoroughly about the nature of their faith and work, and to discover ways in which the two can be integrated.

More will need to be written to further develop the uniqueness of a Wesleyan perspective on work. With the ever-changing landscape of the workplace, specifically in regard to the use of technology and globalization of today's labor field, thoughtful reflections on Wesleyan theology must be developed to help Christians live into these changes. This dissertation is one step in helping Christians live more integrated lives in order to meet the growing demands of employment.

Charles Wesley wrote a hymn that captures the Wesleyan spirit toward work that is as useful today as it was when written. Work is to be stewarded as a gift, embraced as a means to grow in holiness, and a part of God's redemptive purposes on earth. Charles' hymn "Forth in Thy Name, O Lord" captures this well.

*Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go,
my daily labor to pursue;
thee, only thee, resolved to know
in all I think or speak or do.*

*The task thy wisdom hath assigned,
O let me cheerfully fulfill;
in all my works thy presence find,
and prove thy good and perfect will.*

*Thee may I set at my right hand,
whose eyes mine in-most substance see,
and labor on at thy command,
and offer all my works to thee.*

*For thee delightfully employ
what e'er thy bounteous grace hath given;
and run my course with even joy,
and closely walk with thee to heaven.¹⁴*

¹⁴ Charles Wesley, "Forth in Thy Name, O Lord (No. 438)," in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989).

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APPENDIX A:

THE NATURE, DESIGN, AND GENERAL RULES OF OUR UNITED SOCIETIES

In the latter end of the year 1739 eight or ten persons came to Mr. Wesley, in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired, as did two or three more the next day, that he would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That he might have more time for this great work, he appointed a day when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every week, namely, on Thursday in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them (for their number increased daily), he gave those advices from time to time which he judged most needful for them, and they always concluded their meeting with prayer suited to their several necessities.

This was the rise of the United Society, first in Europe, and then in America. Such a society is no other than “a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.”

That it may the more easily be discerned whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies, called classes, according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in a class, one of whom is styled the leader. It is his duty:

1. To see each person in his class once a week at least, in order: (1) to inquire how their souls prosper; (2) to advise, reprove, comfort or exhort, as occasion may require; (3) to receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the preachers, church, and poor.

2. To meet the ministers and the stewards of the society once a week, in order: (1) to inform the minister of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly and will not be reproved; (2) to pay the stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding.

There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies: “a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins.” But wherever this is really fixed in the soul it will be shown by its fruits.

It is therefore expected of all who continue therein that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

First: By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced, such as:

The taking of the name of God in vain.

The profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work therein or by buying or selling.

Drunkenness: buying or selling spirituous liquors, or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity.

Slaveholding; buying or selling slaves.

Fighting, quarreling, brawling, brother going to law with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing; the using many words in buying or selling.

The buying or selling goods that have not paid the duty.

The giving or taking things on usury—i. e., unlawful interest.

Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation; particularly speaking evil of magistrates or of ministers.

Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us.

Doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as:

The putting on of gold and costly apparel.

The taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The singing those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God.

Softness and needless self-indulgence.

Laying up treasure upon earth.

Borrowing without a probability of paying; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.

It is expected of all who continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Secondly: By doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men:

To their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison.

To their souls, by instructing, reproofing, or exhorting all we have any intercourse with; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine that “we are not to do good unless our hearts be free to it.”

By doing good, especially to them that are of the household of faith or groaning so to be; employing them preferably to others; buying one of another, helping each other in business, and so much the more because the world will love its own and them only.

By all possible diligence and frugality, that the gospel be not blamed.

By running with patience the race which is set before them, denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and offscouring of the world; and looking that men should say all manner of evil of them falsely, for the Lord’s sake.

It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Thirdly: By attending upon all the ordinances of God; such are:

The public worship of God.

The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded.

The Supper of the Lord.

Family and private prayer.

Searching the Scriptures.

Fasting or abstinence.

These are the General Rules of our societies; all of which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written Word, which is the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these we know his Spirit writes on truly awakened hearts. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be known unto them who watch over that soul as they who must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways. We will bear with him for a season. But then, if he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls.