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# Annotated Bibliography: Work & Faith



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Seattle Pacific University's Work and Faith Collection has grown to be one of the most comprehensive and unique collections of materials addressing the integration of work and Christian faith in the world. Beginning with an initial donation from InterVarsity's Pete Hammond in the winter of 2008, there are now almost 2,000 materials for the student, scholar, and business practitioner to discover. The following annotated bibliography offers librarians insight into this collection and, by extension, into the diverse literature fueling the interdisciplinary study of religion, business, technology, and labor. The list below was compiled with the goal of illustrating this diversity and thus includes classic works in the field of work and faith in addition to more recent – and even more critical – treatments of the theology of work in its historical, theological, and political manifestations. It is the hope of the author that librarians and researchers alike will find in it a starting point from which they can begin to build their own collection on this increasingly significant but admittedly complex topic. For more on the Work and Faith Collection, visit [www.spu.edu/workandfaithcollection](http://www.spu.edu/workandfaithcollection).

Ahn, I. (2017). *Just debt: Theology, ethics, and neoliberalism*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

North Park University philosophy professor Ilsup Ahn contends that contemporary notions of debt are fundamentally amoral, a consequence of their being disconnected from society, religion, and politics. To recover what he calls a “social ethic of debt” will thus require reintroducing both logic and human stories into the equation. In making his case for a specifically Christian approach to debt, Ahn nevertheless draws upon a variety of non-Christian sources. Indeed, he devotes the entirety of chapter 4 to illustrating how the Islamic approach to finance might offer an alternative to the West's “rentier economy.” In this way, the author offers a unique perspective on an issue of moral and economic complexity while simultaneously considering how several religious traditions might contribute to a more just economy and, by extension, a more hospitable business climate.

Cavanaugh, W.T. (2008). *Being consumed: Economics and Christian desire*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

In this explicitly theological treatment, Cavanaugh considers four major areas of contemporary economic theory – the free market, consumerism, globalization, and scarcity – by analyzing a binary specific to each larger theme. These include negative and positive freedom; detachment and attachment; the global and the local; and scarcity and abundance. Written from a Roman Catholic perspective, Cavanaugh's book has much worth exploring for anyone interested in recovering a moral approach to the economic life. Of particular worth for those interested in the ramifications of his vision in both the ministerial and business worlds are his concrete examples of counter-cultural business practices (for example, cooperatives, local trade, etc.).

Engel, K. (2009). *Religion and profit: Moravians in early America* (Early American studies). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Engel's treatment of eighteenth-century Bethlehem, Pennsylvania – and the Moravians who inhabited it – offers readers a look at how business and Christianity have been intertwined since the United States' earliest days. By tracing Bethlehem's early communitarian economy and its connection to Moravian missionary efforts all the way through the economic transformation that occurred following the Seven Years' War, Engel illustrates the close relationship between moral considerations and economic life. In this way, her focused history has much to offer for the discipline of religio-economic history writ large, especially insofar as she contends that neither religion nor economics can ever be divorced from the considerations of daily life but are rather inevitably shaped by them.

Hammond, S. R. (2017). *God's businessmen: Entrepreneurial evangelicals in depression and war*. D. Dochuk (Ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

In this recently published history, Hammond (and Dochuk, who edited the volume upon the author's untimely death) takes up what she considers a significant lacuna in the scholarship of American religious history, namely the early relationship between evangelicals (a group she unfortunately and inaccurately conflates with fundamentalists) and business. Focusing on the period between the two world wars, Hammond treats two of the most significant evangelical business figures: R.G. LeTourneau and Herbert J. Taylor. By attending closely to their lives, she attempts to show how they – and figures like them – changed the face of American evangelicalism and paved the way for the political landscape many assume was solidified during the Reagan Era. In this way, Hammond provides readers with a unique perspective concerning constitutive aspects of evangelicalism's larger relationship with both conservative politics and corporate culture.

Hughes, J. (2007). *The end of work: Theological critiques of capitalism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Hughes offers another explicitly theological take on the subject of work, the modern form of which he considers utilitarian and thus profoundly anti-theological. In his historical overview of Christian treatments of work as well as his own take on the Marxist and British Romantic traditions, he critiques such utilitarianism by offering what he calls a “theological-aesthetic” vision of work, one that sees human work as analogous to God’s own creative activity. In this vision, work must be considered as always and everywhere ordered to something greater than itself. The purification of desire – and a right relationship with the world and its inhabitants – are thus inextricable from a truly redemptive approach to labor or business.

John Paul II. (1990). *Encyclical letter on human work = Laborem exercens: On the ninetieth anniversary of Rerum novarum*. Boston: Pauline Books & Media.

This papal encyclical, which celebrates the 50th anniversary of Pope Paul VI’s *Rerum novarum*, outlines a Christian theology of work in which labor is considered a constitutive aspect of human life and a participation in God’s creative activity. Perhaps the most interesting aspects of the piece have to do with technology and disability. Technology, while a useful tool, can never usurp the human’s right to work; similarly, although work is an integral aspect of human life, disability in no way damages the person’s God-given dignity. For those interested in the larger social ramifications of a Christian theology of work, attention should also be paid to the pontiff’s consideration of family, the cohesion of which is made possible by – and in which the young are prepared for – a lifetime of work.

Kidwell, J. (2016). *The theology of craft and the craft of work: From tabernacle to eucharist*. Oxford: Routledge.

For Jeremy Kidwell, a burgeoning emphasis on craft work signals a general discomfort with the profit-driven labor model of the past several centuries. Furthermore, he senses in this new emphasis the way forward for a more robustly Christian theology of work, one in which *quality* triumphs *quantity*. Kidwell spells this out not, as many others have, through a sustained philosophical critique, but rather by intricately analyzing the Old Testament’s account of the Tabernacle construction as well as those passages detailing the building of the Temple. Such scriptural reflection allows for a more critical approach to work in the contemporary world, much of which he considers to be buried under a veneer of “scientific management theory.” In addition, this unique approach allows readers to see how even the Scriptures understand quality work to be an act of worship offered for the sake of God’s glory.

LoRusso, J. D. (2017). *Spirituality, corporate culture, and American business*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Part of Bloomsbury's "Critiquing Religion: Discourse, Culture, Power" series, this volume examines how spirituality has been employed in business contexts from the era of the New Deal to the present time. As the title might suggest, LoRusso contends that spirituality, corporate culture, and American business have become enmeshed in what he calls the "neoliberalization" of the global political and economic system. Moreover, in his treatment of individual business leaders and changes in management discourse over time, the author intends to show how religion has at times been used to bolster the power and preserve the interests of the corporate elite. In this vein, LoRusso offers a thoughtful critique of some potential dangers involved in mixing religion with business, one that scholars and practitioners will find helpful in an age of political and economic uncertainty.

Miller, D.W. (2006). *God at work: The history and promise of the faith at work movement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Miller's book is a history of the Christian Faith and Work movement in the United States, which – despite focusing almost exclusively on American Protestantism – provides a thoroughgoing description of the movement's history, contemporary manifestations, and widespread influence. Also, he does not shy away from more subjective analysis, noting his appreciation for the integration of Christianity and business brought about by the movement as well as offering prescriptions going forward. It is precisely this mixture of historical description and experienced opinion that makes Miller's book appealing to those looking for a voice that stands in contrast to the likes of Hammond and LoRusso.

O'Brien, T., & Paeth, S. (Eds.) (2007). *Religious perspectives on business ethics: an anthology*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.

O'Brien and Paeth, both professors at DePaul University, provide a set of readings intended specifically for the undergraduate business ethics class. Though primarily devoted to the Christian tradition, the volume includes articles on Zen Buddhism, Confucianism, and Judaism as well. Furthermore, part 3 lays out what the editors call "questions of contemporary business," including environmentalism, feminism, and the effects of globalization. This latter category, considered in religious and business terms, offers a holistic treatment of business ethics that is both fitting and timely for those newly introduced to the complexities inherent in contemporary business practice.

Ranft, P. (2006). *The theology of work: Peter Damian and the medieval religious renewal movement*. New Middle Ages. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

In this treatment of what she calls “medieval work theology,” Ranft contends that a more robust look at the Middle Ages – and, in particular, the religious renewal of the 11th–13th centuries – helps to answer the question of whether Christians in the West developed a theology of work before the Reformation. She begins with a brief historical survey of early Christian attitudes towards work before delving into her primary topic, namely the life and thought of the Benedictine monk and Cardinal Peter Damian. Ranft contends that Damian’s treatment of work was the first of its kind and formed a significant part of his larger reform of the religious life. In the final part of the book, she draws out the implications of Damian’s vision both on the monastic world and the rest of society, noting that he helped to create what was, by the end of the Middle Ages, a view of work as a way of imitating Christ. Ranft’s book thus stands apart from the historiographic mainstream in its willingness to debunk the myth that only with the advent of the Reformation did work once again find its proper place in Christian theology and spirituality.

Volf, Miroslav. (1991). *Work in the Spirit: Toward a theology of work*. New York: Oxford University Press.

In this published and expanded version of the dissertation completed under noted German theologian Jürgen Moltmann, Volf treats what he considers the problem of work by ensconcing it in a specifically pneumatological and eschatological framework. He contends that when we consider work’s telos alongside the person of the Holy Spirit, we are then able to craft a Christian vision of work that takes seriously the humanity of the worker. Particular attention should be paid to his treatment of technology. For Volf, technology is a tool, something that can only be considered virtuous when it contributes to social cohesion, deepens the Divine-human relationship, and sustains rather than destroys the created order. †

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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