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ORDINARY PRACTICE AS ECCLESIAL HOLINESS: INTERSECTIONS OF EVERYDAY WORK, SACRAMENT, AND LITURGY

Joshua R. Sweeden

In every context, Christians wrestle with integrating faith and everyday life. As western Christians emerge from the mold of modernity and a ubiquitous dualism of belief and practice, the challenge of recovering a tangible faith that touches the ground in concrete ways and speaks to everyday circumstances and issues is paramount. A crucial step forward is a retrieval of the holistic nature of faith by being attentive to the ways faith is integrally enmeshed in all realities of life.¹

The Disconnect

Sharing this imperative, Gregory Pierce has noted that Christians generally experience a disconnect between their everyday lives and corporate worship. He states that Christians need guidance in “connecting their Sunday faith to their weekday lives.”² Pierce is referring generically to mainline Christians, yet his findings should be particularly disconcerting for ecclesial bodies who claim to share Wesley’s emphasis of “holiness of heart and life.” While “Wesleyan/holiness” churches (as I will broadly refer to them) have maintained a focus on Christian perfection and the holy life in corporate worship, often little is said about how everyday life—and the ordinary practices that constitute everyday life—relates to, contributes to, or even testifies to holiness (the classic exception being the mid-twentieth century legalistic lifestyle mandates of many holiness churches which say little if anything about holy *practice*).³

The disconnect between worship and everyday life and practice in Wesleyan/holiness ecclesial bodies may be attributed to various factors from the modern construction of spheres (private vs. public, religious vs. secular) to shifts in the purpose and intent of corporate worship

¹ The Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith is a prime example of recent theological scholarship directly engaging the relationship between faith and everyday life. Specifically, the project’s launch of *PracticingOurFaith.org* and the subsequent Practicing our Faith library highlights the indelible connection between Christian practice, the church, and the formation of a way of life.

² Gregory F. Augustine Pierce, ed., *Of Human Hands: A Reader in the Spirituality of Work* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 12.

³ Alasdair MacIntyre defines practices as “a coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity, through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to and partially definitive of that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended.” Practices are not simply *any* activity, but are those that maintain a robust social and historical grounding and whose means are determined by their ends. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 187.

(from formational to highly emotive and experiential). Such factors certainly contribute to a sense of disconnect. However, the most significant cause of disconnect may be an over-emphasis on personal holiness and inner transformation and the corresponding under-emphasis on social or corporate holiness and outward transformation. Whatever the causes, it is my contention that any disconnect between everyday life and practice and corporate worship in the Wesleyan/holiness tradition is magnified by a narrow understanding of holiness that often sidesteps the calling of the church to be a holy people. In this regard, the disconnect between everyday life and worship is symptomatic of larger issue: the need to articulate holy living not only through the lives of individuals but through the corporate life of the ecclesial body.

As a step toward addressing the larger issue, this paper is a preliminary exploration of the relationship between ecclesial holiness, corporate formation, and everyday and ordinary practice. For Wesleyan ecclesial bodies, such an exploration is demanded not only because of the disconnect Christians experience between corporate worship and everyday life, but because John Wesley himself, as Theodore Jennings notes, “seems to be endlessly preoccupied about triviality, about *adiaphora*” (referring to things commonly considered beyond the concerns or statutes of faith).⁴ Wesley, of course, knew that the practices of everyday life are anything but trivial or inconsequential. The task going forward, then, is to approach Wesley through the lens of “practical divinity.” This may require a re-reading of Wesley. As Jennings states:

The systematic habit of mind that we owe, perhaps, to the ghost of Hegel encourages us to look for grand and sweeping theoretical vistas, which can then be made concrete through application to, and illustration by, particular instances. Nothing could be further from Wesley’s approach. In theology he does not enunciate major themes like christology or atonement, from which to draw conclusions about, say, freedom from sin. He is more likely to begin from something like gossip or backbiting and show its incompatibility with love, and in the process say something about the divine nature or the “end of Christ’s coming’.”... He begins with the concrete reality of his hearers or readers.⁵

By way of illustration, this paper will more narrowly focus on the concrete reality of everyday work. The hope is to demonstrate how two elements of ecclesial life—sacraments and liturgy—nurture and shape practices of everyday work. In this way, everyday work can reflect the corporate holiness of the people “called out” as witnesses to God’s reign and be an *extension* of sacrament and liturgy in the world.

Everyday Work as Sacramental

Work is one of the most ordinary and commonplace realities of everyday life. From a modern, western perspective, work is often construed as paid employment, but a fuller understanding recognizes the centrality of work in every person’s life. Appropriately, Karl Barth calls work, “The active affirmation of human existence,” noting both its necessity for survival and its expression of human creative endeavors.⁶ As fundamental to human existence, work serves as a

⁴ Theodore W. Jennings, *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley’s Evangelical Economics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 16.

⁵ Ibid., 15.

prime example of how Christians struggle to understand everyday life and practice in relationship to corporate worship and ecclesial holiness. Any number of ordinary and everyday practices face a similar challenge of being understood—that is, narrated by—ecclesial life. Indeed, if holiness is the transformation of our affections toward God and each other, we should expect that ordinary activities like eating, child-rearing, recreating, conversing, entertaining, consuming and discarding will be reoriented in light of corporate understandings of holy living.⁷ Everyday work, therefore, is to be a significant lens through which to explore everyday life and practice as ecclesial holiness.

Sacrament (lit. “that which is holy”) is historically understood from both the Greek *mysterion* or “mystery” and the Latin *sacramentum* or “sacred oath.” It was Augustine who gave us the oft-quoted definition of sacrament as an “outward sign of inward grace.” John Wesley inherited this definition through the Anglican tradition, although for Wesley, sacraments are “outward signs *and* inward grace.”⁸ This is fitting given Wesley’s emphasis on holiness of heart and life. Sacraments are not only signs and symbols of God’s grace, but they are transformative as well. Consider Wesley’s assertion that the Lord’s Supper is both a sanctifying and converting ordinance. In this case, communion is not only a visible sign of God’s grace, but also concurrently instills grace.

Here the connection between sacraments and holiness becomes clearer. On the one hand for Wesley, “sacraments” were strictly identified as baptism and eucharist—those instituted by Christ in scripture—while, on the other hand, that which is holy is not confined simply to these two ecclesial practices of worship. This is especially true for Wesleyan/holiness churches. Staples notes, for example, how “Anabaptist currents that flowed into the Wesleyan stream through the holiness movement served to water down the Wesleyan doctrine of baptism and to diminish the significance placed on the Lord’s Supper by the Wesley’s.”⁹ Arguably, while the Anabaptist currents that diluted and diminished significance of the sacraments have hindered Wesleyan/holiness churches ecclesologically, those currents could also provide a needed lens

⁶ Karl Barth and A. T. Mackay, *The Doctrine of Creation: Church Dogmatics, Volume III*, 4 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), 527.

⁷ Not anything constitutes a “practice.” While much of what we do in a day, from brushing teeth to folding laundry, does not resemble a practice as typically connoted, it can be difficult to make clear distinctions if everyday life is subsumed under the Christian narrative. In this regard, even the most mundane activities may be practices in that they participate in God’s redemptive activity in the world. Consider the definition of a Christian practice proposed by Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra: “By ‘Christian Practices’ we mean *things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world.*” Something as mundane as eating or working would constitute a practice inasmuch as it is re-narrated through the Christian community and is engaged in light of and in response to God’s activity. See Dykstra and Bass, “A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices,” in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Dorothy Bass and Miroslav Volf (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 18.

⁸ See Rob L. Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1991).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

for uncovering the sacramentality of ordinary practices. The balance required here is similar to the tight-rope that John Wesley walked: maintaining a high-church Anglicanism alongside free-church proclivities.

John Inge's exploration of sacrament may be helpful for the balance Wesleyan/holiness churches need to achieve. Inge argues for the sacramentality of place, specifically with regard to the church. He suggests that the sacraments enable Christians to express the "placed-ness" of God's revelation, particularly that of Christ and the incarnation. We have "sacramental encounters," not "given only to a few," but that exist as testimonies to many of the God who reveals. These testimonies and sacramental encounters come to us, therefore, not only in the storied places of scripture, but in the places that since have been shaped by the narrative. God's continual self-revelatory action in the world is able to be understood because the church's sacraments express the Christian experience of the world, an experience of the world that begins with the *mysterion* of God. As Inge states, "the biblical narrative leads us to expect God's self-revelation and, therefore, that the world is a possible place of sacramentality."¹⁰

Central to Inge's exploration is the correlation between sacramentality and holiness. He even notes that his interest in the subject of place was sparked by the question of what qualifies a "holy place."¹¹ By the end of the text, he concludes that all churches could operate as shrines (or holy places). The church should function as a witness to/in the world embodying prophetically here and now the eschatological reality associated with holy places and pilgrimage. This is similar to how John Howard Yoder describes the church as the "first fruits." The church "is or is to be in itself the beginning of what is to come."¹² Understanding the church as shrine maintains its identity as a storied place, but also signifies that the church is part of a larger story. This larger story is of God and God's relationship with the world in Christ, "the starting point," Inge states, of Christian theology.¹³

The sacramentality of place and the placed-ness of the church have far-reaching implications for how everyday work is conceived as ecclesial holiness. Inge has opened the door for understanding everyday practices as possible places of sacramentality. Indeed, practices are never place-less. Practices can be places of sacramentality, however, only when they are shaped by a narrative of the Christian "experience of the world that begins with the *mysterion* of God." Accordingly, the church remains central in the formation of sacramentality in the world or, as I am arguing, holiness in everyday work.

Everyday Work as Liturgical

Liturgy (lit. "work of the people") often narrowly refers to the rituals of corporate worship, connoting those specific, often formal and "sacramental" performances of worship. More fundamentally, liturgy is the work—outpouring—of corporate identity. Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann defines liturgy as "an action by which a group of people become

¹⁰ John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place: Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 74.

¹¹ Ibid., ix.

¹² John Howard Yoder, "Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics: Gospel Ethics Versus the Wider Wisdom," in *The Royal Priesthood* (Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 125.

¹³ Inge, 123.

something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals—a whole greater than the sum of its parts.”¹⁴ This definition is particularly helpful ecclesialogically. When conceived only in reference to formal worship, liturgy as “the work of the people” refers to the activity of the laity or congregation in response to the clergy. In other words, liturgy is the work of the people because rituals require respondents. Schmemmann, however, recovers the rudimentary meaning of liturgy as the “action by which a group of people become something corporately” and also the action of corporate life participating in a specific calling. Thus, he says, “the Church itself is a *leiturgia*, a ministry, a calling to act in this world after the fashion of Christ, to bear testimony to Him and His kingdom.”¹⁵

Acknowledging the basic meaning of liturgy is a reminder that Christian worship is anything but abstracted ritual confined to Sunday performance. While Christian liturgy is unmistakably performed in corporate Sunday gatherings, it is also corporately performed in individual lives throughout the week. I say *corporately performed* to signify the fact that “individual” performances remain outcomes of corporate identity. In other words, the liturgical performances of Christian worship are both prescriptive and descriptive of Christian confession. Regarding everyday work, therefore, Christian liturgy not only *informs* understandings of work, but is continuously *performed* through good work. In this way, liturgical practices are not abstract rituals confined to corporate gatherings, but extensions of the people of God into the world and in everyday life and practice.

It is at this juncture that the relationship between the church’s vocation and a person’s everyday work demands attention. Wesleyan churches are largely indebted to Martin Luther’s perspective of work found in his strong critique of the clerical captivity of vocation. Seeing the inevitable marginalization of laity whose work was not considered a “calling” and the clerical misuse afforded by the status of a “higher calling,” Luther broadened vocation to include all persons in their “station” of life. Luther’s encouragement of lay vocation has been a predominant Protestant position. Gary Badcock has shown, however, that there is a downside to Luther’s revision. Vocation can become tied to each person’s specific employment and place in the social order.¹⁶ When vocation becomes connected to occupation, and moreover, occupation becomes intrinsically attached to one’s personhood, calling easily comes to mean being a tailor, farmer, judge, or even peasant. Obviously, this can open the doors to a problematic justification of social standing and hierarchy. The significance of Luther’s emphasis on individual vocation may also have distracted some Protestant churches from articulating the more fundamental notion of vocation as corporate and ecclesial.¹⁷

¹⁴ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), 25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁶ Gary Badcock draws attention to Luther’s connection of calling and social standing. He states that for Luther “all people have a standing, and office in the world.... One does not, in fact, need to search far to see what one’s responsibilities are or what one’s standing is.” Badcock elaborates on Luther’s understanding in noting that all people, believers and unbelievers, have an “earthly office,” but the unbeliever “does not embrace it in faith as a calling.... Faith alone allows us to accept our worldly work as something religiously significant,” i.e., vocation. See Gary D. Badcock, *The Way of Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 36-7.

Wesleyan/holiness denominations share the struggle to articulate vocation in corporate or ecclesial terms. It does not help that Methodist and Wesleyan/holiness churches find their roots in a movement which, as Albert Outler notes, had “no doctrine of the church.”¹⁸ Indeed, John Wesley rarely talked about the church in a formal, constructive sense.¹⁹ Arguably, however, the lack of ecclesiological development in Wesley may simply be evidence of an assumed (Anglican) ecclesiology. It is interesting that in his revision of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, Wesley felt no need to address the article on the church. It would be difficult to say John Wesley’s theology and practice was anything less than inherently ecclesial. This is further evidenced by the fact that societies, classes, and bands were designed to complement local congregations and not intended to take congregational form.

Alongside the apparent absence of a formally articulated ecclesiology, there is also limited formal theological engagement of vocation by John Wesley. There are writings and remarks that may evidence a theology of vocation, e. g., “Wesley’s Covenant Prayer,” but these forays must be extracted and compiled.²⁰ In this sense, Charles demonstrates a theology of vocation that places personal calling within the framework of ecclesial calling. When Charles writes, “the vocation of the church is to sustain many vocations,” the intent is to allow “a variety of vocations to develop and flourish with our churches.”²¹ There also is the interconnectedness of personal vocation and corporate worship for Charles Wesley:

Charles’ hymns reflect the myriad of responses to God’s call, experienced in the different forms we have explored, graciously enabling each disciple to reaffirm

¹⁷ The problem with this shift is that it distances “Christian vocation” from the prophetic witness inherent in God’s calling of a people. Good work in the post-Luther arrangement simply means doing one’s work well—with kindness, gratitude, integrity, etc. The greater calling of practicing or performing redeemed work which testifies to God’s reign gets neglected. John Howard Yoder similarly notes how the “Protestant doctrine of vocation” has followed Luther’s model and made vocation a matter of the “order of creation” rather than one’s activity arising from faith in Jesus (*Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World*, 26).

¹⁸ Albert Outler, “Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?” in *The Doctrine of the Church*, ed. Dow Kirkpatrick (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1964), 11ff.

¹⁹ The clearest exception is John Wesley’s sermon “Of the Church” written in 1784. Though brief, Wesley does provide some framework for defining the church.

²⁰ Wesley’s Covenant Prayer first appeared in his *Short History of the People Called Methodists* published in 1781: “I am no longer my own but thine/ Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt/ Put me to doing, put me to suffering/ Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee/ Exalted for thee or brought low for thee/ Let me be full, let me be empty/ Let me have all things, let me have nothing/ I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal/ And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit/ Thou art mine, and I am thine/ So be it/ And the covenant which I have made on earth/ Let it be ratified in heaven/ Amen.”

²¹ Tim Macquiban, “Work on Earth and Rest in Heaven: Toward a Theology of Vocation in the Writings of Charles Wesley,” in *Our Calling to Fulfill: Wesleyan Views of the Church in Mission*, ed. Douglas Meeks (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2009), 69.

her or his true vocation. Worship then becomes for us the “vocation of a lifetime and a joyful obligation” that we need to take seriously, not just on Sundays but in our everyday lives.²²

Yet the fact remains that with John and Charles Wesley we only find occasional statements on vocation and the church.

I am not suggesting that the contemporary struggle in Wesleyan/holiness churches to articulate corporate and ecclesial vocation is the fault of John or Charles Wesley. There is plenty of “ecclesiology” in the Wesleys to be uncovered. Arguably, articulating ecclesial vocation and holiness was never the same priority in the Wesleyan/holiness tradition as was personal holiness. This is especially the case with the American holiness movement which, being “largely a child of 19th-century revivalism...stressed the religion of inward experience, of John Wesley’s ‘warmed heart.’ When such ‘heartfelt’ religion became a reality in people’s lives, they saw less need for churchly structures and liturgies.”²³

For Wesleyan/holiness churches today, the need for a more robust ecclesiology is paramount if we are to talk about ecclesial holiness. Furthermore, it is impossible to consider ordinary practice as ecclesial holiness—especially everyday work—without being able to articulate corporate/ecclesial vocation. A starting point, therefore, is to reach beyond John and Charles Wesley to a fundamental Christian understanding of vocation found in the corporate identity and calling of the people of God.

We might begin by recognizing that the calling (vocation) of the people of God is no less than God’s calling for all creation. As Gary Badcock states, “vocation is best understood in terms of this basic tenet of theology, that humanity is called by God to faith, to holiness, and to service.”²⁴ The people of God discover their vocation in the very fact that God has called all creation to faithfulness. As John Howard Yoder states, “The people of God is called to be today what the world is called to be ultimately.”²⁵ In other words, Christian vocation is fundamentally to live into God’s reign as witnesses of “the world that is to come.” The calling of the people of God is not contingent upon their perfect enactment of God’s reign.

The story of the people of God, of course, is littered with accounts of failure and unfaithfulness. George Lindbeck’s essay “The Church” illustrates this point well: “The church’s story, understood as continuous with Israel’s, tells of God doing in this time between the times what he has done before: choosing and guiding a people to be a sign and witness in all that it is and does, whether obediently or disobediently, to who and what he is.”²⁶ He describes the church’s fundamental vocation as *witness*: “The primary Christian mission is not to save souls but to be a faithfully witnessing people.”²⁷ Accordingly, the church is called to testify to—i.e.,

²² Ibid., 63.

²³ Staples, 22.

²⁴ Badcock, 15-16.

²⁵ Yoder, *Body Politics*, ix.

²⁶ George Lindbeck, “The Church,” in *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, by George A. Lindbeck and ed. James Joseph Buckley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2003), 157.

²⁷ Ibid., 159.

enact—God’s redemptive activity in the world. It is not responsible to establish God’s reign and should certainly avoid the coercive, juridical, and power-seeking tendencies that have marked its history.

When Christian vocation is shaped by the values of the kingdom of God, Christian love becomes expressed in all areas of life, including family, workplaces, friendships, and even the state. The task is “to be holy where we are, amid the responsibilities of ordinary life, and within the community or communities in which we live.”²⁸ Following Schmemmann’s claim that the church is a liturgy, “a calling to act in this world after the fashion of Christ,” the parallels between liturgy and vocation become apparent. Like liturgy, vocation is foremost not an individual’s work, but the work of the people.

The primary understanding of vocation is the call to witness to God’s reign as a people. While witnessing occurs, of course, through individuals in ordinary life, it remains grounded in a corporate and ecclesial identity. Recovering liturgy as “the work of the people” reminds Christians that vocation and calling imply living holy in everyday work. The activities of ordinary life are not interruptions to the church’s liturgy, but potential liturgical acts themselves. Such an understanding does not discount the possibility of specific (e.g., occupational) calling, but does acknowledge that Christian vocation is the calling to be God’s holy people, which is nothing less than liturgy in action.²⁹

Everyday Work as Ecclesial Holiness

Thus far I have explored the possibility of everyday work as both liturgical and sacramental. On one hand, it is important to name both liturgy and sacrament as prescriptive and descriptive of everyday work since they inform this work and are to be inherent in its performance. On another hand, there is an undeniable tension when it comes to differentiating the terms *liturgical* and

²⁸ Ibid., 123. Badcock uses the example of his brother who expresses his “calling” as a fireman to argue that vocation, ultimately, is not a call to specific occupations, but to a way of life. He states, “I am, however, unable to agree with his claim that God called him to be a fireman. The call of God in the Bible is the call to do something that can be directly characterized as religious in quality—for example, some action to which the Word of God directs us. It would be more accurate, therefore, to speak of the calling that his work as a fireman allowed him to fulfill: to show love, to do good, to train for ministry, and to work in Christian service in the church and in the workplace” (106).

²⁹ Alexander Schmemmann makes a similar point in describing the church as a sacrament for the world. He notes how the church is to be sacramental or symbolical, reflecting the liturgy of the eucharist. “Historians of theology have many times noted that in the early patristic tradition we find no *definition* of the Church. The reason for this, however, lies not in the ‘lack of development’ of the theology of that time—as several learned theologians suppose—but in the fact that in her early tradition the Church was not an object of ‘definition’ but the living experience of the new life. This experience—in which we find also the *institutional* structure of the Church, her hierarchy, canons, liturgy, etc.—was *sacramental*, *symbolical* by its very nature, for the Church exists in order to be always changing into that same reality that she manifests, the fulfillment of the invisible in the visible, the heavenly and the earthly, the spiritual in the material.” Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1987), 35.

sacramental. I struggle to envision work as sacramental that is not also liturgical, or liturgical that is not also sacramental. The two terms are not synonymous, and there are conventional ways for distinguishing them, but conventional modes for differentiating liturgy and sacrament (definitions, etymological analysis, historical accounts, etc.) seem to break down when the messiness of lived reality meets Christian practice and witness.

The practice of the eucharist is a primary example of this complexity. It is clearly both a sacrament and a liturgical act. This is not simply because the Christian tradition has named eucharist a sacrament, or because it is the culmination—or focal point—of the church’s Sunday liturgy. The eucharist is a sacrament because it is the preeminent sign of God’s grace. As the church partakes of the eucharist, it is tangibly reminded of the cost of God’s gift. The spilled blood and broken body of Christ are evinced in the elements and the sting of death is remembered. The sorrow is only eclipsed by the proclamation of the mystery: “Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again.” Yet, as Wesley believed, there is more than a simple remembrance happening. The sacrament of eucharist is also constitutive for the church and its holy life. In fact, the eucharist “is much more than a ritual repetition of the past. It is rather a literal re-membering of Christ’s body”—the formation of a eucharistic people.³⁰

Similarly, the eucharist is liturgical because it is the result of people’s work. The people prepare the elements, gather, confess, reconcile, and literally make the bread: “The bread offered is common: it comes from and represents our everyday lives. It was bought with our wages or money from our pension, made by hand or mass-produced in a factory, and sold at a profit. When offered to God, however, a dynamic other than the merely human comes into play. By grace, the bread offered is sanctified through its incorporation into the resurrection of Christ.”³¹

An additional work of the people in the eucharist is the task of *being sent*. The origins of the term “mass” are a reminder that the eucharist goes forth into the world along with God’s people. The term is partly derived from the Latin *missa*, meaning “sent,” giving it a similar root as the words mission, missal, and even missile. It is no coincidence that the liturgy of the eucharist is couched in language of “going forth.” In other words, the eucharist liturgy points to an overflowing of the bread and wine as it is embodied by and continued forward by Christians themselves. In this sense, eucharist is also liturgical, the work of the people, because God’s people share in the extension of the eucharist into everyday life.

30 See William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 229. Cavanaugh reiterates this quotation saying, “Modern Christians often speak of ‘hearing’ or ‘attending’ the Eucharist; priests ‘say’ the mass. The ancient church, by contrast, tended to speak of ‘doing’ the Eucharist (*eucharistiam facere*) or ‘performing’ the mysteries (*mysteria telein*). The word *anamnesis* had the effect not so much of a memorial, as one would say kind words about the dead, but rather a performance. The emphasis is thus on the entire rite of the Eucharist as action, and not simply on the consecration of the elements” (230).

31 Esther Reed, *Good Work: Christian Ethics in the Workplace* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 48. Reed further explains, “Bread from the local bakery represents what I am calling the proper autonomy of the secular. The secular is what belongs to this age or is part of the historical order that we all inhabit. Offering this bread to God, in the knowledge that the divine life will infuse its every part, becomes the framework in which to think about the work of all human hands.”

What I am suggesting may only be a starting point for Christians who find the practice of eucharist far removed from the everyday world of work. It often seems that giving God thanks and praise is a routine exercise reserved for Sunday, an isolated liturgy that only momentarily triumphs over the realities of the week. But a cloistered eucharist is a contradiction of both its sacramental nature and liturgical function. The thanksgiving that is the eucharist engenders a full-bodied response to God's gifts. If Christians "know the accursed nature of work, but we also know that Christ is risen," then the proclamation of the Paschal Mystery should overflow into everyday life.³² Accordingly, the eucharist breaks down "modern notions of the private-public divide."³³ The transformation of the bread corresponds to the transformation of human work and the eschatological, forward-looking dynamic of the eucharist gives meaning to the bread and to the work of human hands.

Consequently, the spheres of private-public, earthly-heavenly, and religious-secular are shattered. Concerns about "workplaces that belong to the proper autonomy of the secular are drawn into the transforming influence of the gospel."³⁴ Similarly, Alexander Schmemmann shows how the eucharist collapses the spheres of time and space. He calls the eucharist "the *preface* of the world to come, the door into the kingdom," and at the same time asserts that when we proclaim "the kingdom *which is to come*, we affirm that God *has already endowed us with it*." In the eucharist, "the future has been given to us" in order that "it may constitute the very *present*."³⁵ Through the act of thanksgiving the church discovers its vocation, the calling to respond by enacting God's gift of the future in the world. The result is a tangible reorientation of everyday life under the reality of God's reign.

One can see that the eucharist is a prime example of how sacrament and liturgy are both prescriptive and descriptive of everyday work. As a practice constitutive for the church, the eucharist shapes and informs practices of work. At the same time, as the eucharistic community engages the world, the eucharist is extended by the church through everyday practices of work. Accordingly, everyday work is an indelible part of the church's holiness. Work is the most consuming activity of our daily lives (I am not simply talking about paid employment, of course). If ecclesial holiness is to be embodied by persons in the everyday, uncovering how practices of work may be holy is an unavoidable task. It would matter, of course, what the work is, if it testifies to and participates in the new creation, if it points to God's reign. I would not attempt to claim at all work can be holy. But if everyday work can be liturgical, then it would be difficult, at least in a Christian theological sense, to not also say that everyday work is ecclesial. Similarly, if everyday work can be sacramental, then we could also say that it is holy.

I am proposing that the holiness of any practice, including work, is grounded in the church. This claim is very appropriately "Wesleyan." John Wesley recognized grace and holiness outside the traditional structures of church, yet nevertheless insisted that holiness is engendered by the practices and disciplines of the Christian community. The Methodist movement worked

³² Ibid., 51.

³³ Ibid., 46.

³⁴ Ibid., 49. In the eucharist, one sphere is not exchanged for another, as if the private represses the public, or the heavenly the earthly. Instead, as the bread of the eucharist displays, the bread remains bread—the work of human hands—"but becomes for the faithful a reality composed of two realities, an earthly and an heavenly." See Reed, 48.

³⁵ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 39.

alongside congregations. Wesley insisted that members of societies, classes, and bands be connected to a congregational life where the sacraments were practiced.³⁶ Furthermore, the formation of ordinary practice as ecclesial holiness was a primary concern for Wesley.³⁷ His restorationist impulse for Christian perfection and holiness led to the creation of a movement that was, as Outler suggests, “an evangelical order within a regional division of the Church catholic,”³⁸ or as Colin Williams puts it, “*ecclesiolae in ecclesia*—small groups of believers living under the Word and seeking under the life of discipline to be a leaven of holiness within the ‘great congregation’ of the baptized.”³⁹ In this sense, Wesley hoped that the Methodists would exemplify the fundamental calling of the church by embodying holiness in everyday life.⁴⁰

The vocation of Wesleyan/holiness today must remain grounded in the calling to be “a leaven of holiness” for the church catholic. As John Wesley believed, this is a task that does not begin with theological “distinctives” but with the pursuit of Christian perfection made evident through ecclesial holiness in ordinary practice.

³⁶ Though Wesley had his own preferences regarding ecclesial structure and worship, he found “many reasons to abate [the] zeal” of prescribing a particular style for others. Yet he always maintained that “every follower of Christ is obliged, by the very nature of the Christian institution, to be a member of some particular congregation or other (some church, as it is usually termed), which implies a particular manner of worshipping God—the “two cannot walk together unless they be agreed” [cf. Amos 3:3]—yet none can be obliged by any power on earth but that of his own conscience to prefer this or that congregation to another, this or that particular manner of worship.” This reasoning carried over into an expectation that members of the movement maintain membership in a local congregation. See John Wesley, “Catholic Spirit,” in *John Wesley*, ed. Albert Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 96.

³⁷ Staples appropriately states, “Now it so happened that the Wesley of the ‘warmed heart’ was none other than Wesley the ‘High Churchman, the son of a High Churchman,’ to use his own words. This latter Wesley, the lifelong Anglican, had an enduring appreciation for the established church, and for him the Anglican liturgies and sacraments were of immense importance for the cultivation and propagation of holiness.” See Staples, 24.

³⁸ Albert Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 306.

³⁹ Colin Williams, *John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1960), 149.

⁴⁰ According to John W. Wright and J. Douglas Harrison, it was “part of the Methodist vocation...to remain faithful members of the various ecclesial bodies in which they worshiped, with their distinctive beliefs, polity, and liturgies. Methodists were to leaven the church catholic as part of it. They were not a distinct ideological group, but a voluntary group of believers within the church catholic who had been reconciled to each other in their pursuit of Christian perfection by means of the Methodist discipline.” See John W. Wright and J. Douglas Harrison, “The Ecclesial Practice of Reconciliation and the End of the ‘Wesleyan,’” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37-2 (2002): 207.