

UNITED METHODIST POLITY & 21st CENTURY POST-FORDIST CAPITALISM IN THE
UNITED STATES

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Introduction

I contend that there is a material connection between the value structures found in both Christianity and capitalism. Historically, this connection has been treated as static. This treatment is unfair because it has led to reduced criticism and imaginative thinking about economic systems and United Methodist polity. I also acknowledge that unawareness of this dynamic relationship has led to some harmful changes in the value structures of both Christianity and capitalism; the fallacy of misplaced concreteness is a classic example. The value structures found within Christianity can beneficially inform capitalism, and vice versa. No true progress can be made by talking about Christianity and capitalism in strictly abstract terms, so I will focus on United Methodist polity and businesses that operate within 21st century post-Fordist capitalism in the United States. To do so, I will provide a brief history of both United Methodist polity and capitalism in the United States to provide adequate context and connect a few of their historically-shared value structures: abundance over scarcity, innovation over traditionalism, and connectionalism over self-interest. Then, I will explain how each field has deviated from these value structures and propose practical solutions for each to improve upon their positions. Before I do that, I must verify that the roots of capitalism's value structures do, in fact, reside in Christian history.

Chapter 1 - The Roots of Capitalism's Value Structures Reside in Christian History

It is clear that a material relationship exists between the value structures of both Christianity and capitalism. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber agrees and attempts to theorize how the growth of both Christianity and capitalism came about in relationship to one another. He does this by describing the historical relationship between the

Protestant Reformation and the development of capitalism, placing emphasis on how ascetic Protestants indirectly established the value structures found in capitalism.

Weber's definitions of "the Protestant ethic" and "the spirit of capitalism" are material to my argument that the value structures of Christianity and capitalism are connected. He paints "the Protestant ethic" as the hard work demonstrated by ascetic Protestants in their application of religious character to worldly activities. Calvinists serve as an excellent example. Since Calvinists assume that God's grace is unreachable, they are led to seek the creation of their own salvation or, as Weber more accurately states, "the conviction of it."¹ They seek confirmation of their own salvation in their worldly successes because "lack of self-confidence is the result of insufficient faith"² and the elect are those who walk among the faithful. Weber defines the "spirit of capitalism" as "that attitude which seeks profit rationally and systematically in the manner... illustrated by the example of Benjamin Franklin,"³ who articulates that time spent in idleness is time spent throwing away opportunities to increase one's wealth. In Weber's definitions alone, we have already identified two value structures: 1) hard work leads to self-confidence, and 2) profit is attained through systematic means.

Capitalism did not spontaneously appear as the result of the development of rationalism. If that were true, capitalism would have come about when Rome was first establishing its legal system. Weber, too, holds that capitalism is not merely some natural product of rationalism. In reality, the growth of Christianity was a major cause of present-day capitalism. The teachings of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation and the influx of Protestants into universities tell the most significant part of this story.

¹ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 69.

² Weber, 66.

³ Weber, 28.

Capitalism existed long before the Protestant Reformation. However, the Reformation provided it with religious justification, which fueled its proliferation. Martin Luther would not have condoned the abstract idea of capitalism as it exists today. He spoke directly against usury and interest and thought that seeking material gain was equivalent to taking from others. Even so, he certainly is responsible for sparking the revolution about individual callings that contributed to the development of capitalism. He said that “every legitimate calling has exactly the same worth in the sight of God.”⁴ This statement provided worldly labor with religious sanction and significance, which was divergent from Catholic teachings at the time.

Throughout the Protestant Reformation, universities experienced an influx of Protestants. Weber shares that many Catholics stayed at home because they tended to have wealthier parents. He says, “[in] the present case the Protestant prefers to eat well, the Catholic to sleep undisturbed.”⁵ As these Protestants began graduating from college, they embraced the idea that their worldly activities (i.e., jobs) had religious significance. Weber explains how four different categories of ascetic Protestants came to incorporate capitalism into their doctrines. As noted previously, Calvinists embraced the Protestant ethic to attain self-confidence of their salvation. Pietists “[rationalized life] from the standpoint of utility.”⁶ Methodists, who believed that someone could be assured of their salvation immediately through faith, established a way for people to engage in ascetic conduct in a world that rejected predestination. The Baptist sects valued silent waiting in anticipation of God’s revelation, leading them to worldly ascetic lives. These four categories of ascetic Protestantism share many of the same value structures. They believe that doing the will of God can be accomplished through systematic, methodical living.

⁴ Weber, 41.

⁵ Weber, 8.

⁶ Weber, 86.

They believe that each person has a life-task, or calling, that can provide them with some confidence in the possibility of their salvation. They believe that labor is an end ordained by God, that seeking spontaneous enjoyment is wrong, and that inequality is normal. These value structures became secularized and distorted because leaders and other thinkers treated them as static and unconnected rather than dynamic and interwoven.

Distorted Value Structures and the Theological Economy

Christianity and capitalism are not ideologies; they are operating systems, subject to changes and updates. For much of history, they have not been treated in this manner. Because they have been treated as ideologies, professionals have often strayed away from approaching them creatively. In *Economy of Grace*, Kathryn Tanner critiques economists for taking the assumptions of Western capitalism as a given and introduces the idea of noncompetitiveness as the basis for an alternative economic system. Tanner presents her “theological economy” to further challenge the assumption that capitalism is merely the natural result of rationalization over time by demonstrating how theology can be used to imagine alternative economic models.

In a sense, theology is dynamic. There are certain fundamental truths, such as the Trinitarian nature of God, the attributes of God, and original sin, but most topics that extrapolate from these have been contested for millennia. Because of this dynamic nature, Tanner argues that theology can serve as a tool to imagine alternatives to capitalism as it exists today. She introduces the idea of a “theological economy,” otherwise known as an “economy of grace.” At first glance, the concept of a “theological economy” seems unrealistic because it would require an extensive reimagining of the global economic system. Tanner asserts that “a theological

economy... is always formed in response to... the economy it contests.”⁷ She, like many other theologians, emphasizes how God is transformative. Tanner acknowledges some of the challenges associated with her proposal and states that global capitalism and her idea of a theological economy are more similar than different. The primary issue with capitalism is the injustice it sparks and pours lighter fluid over. Such issues include greater wealth inequality, predatory interest rates on payday loans, and highly conditional bailouts for indebted nations. These are problems that can be resolved systematically. While it may seem like humans are powerless and cannot change the system, Tanner asserts that capitalism is malleable, especially by engaging with political bodies.

Like Weber, Tanner believes that Protestant theology played a significant role in the propagation of capitalism in the West. She fights the reductionism that attempts to discuss other fields in narrow economic terms. Pierre Bourdieu had fallen victim to this; he tried to reduce the complexities of human beings by assuming that all people are “purely self-concerned calculators of what will most benefit them economically.”⁸ Tanner argues that people are social actors because they were raised in a social system, not because they are perfectly independent rational-choice actors. Her battle against Bourdieu’s reductionism is one of the ways she opposes the assumption that capitalism was merely the natural result of rationalization over time. In her view, economists often engage in reductionist dialogue. A result of this has been the assumption by economists that capitalism has no connection to and shares no value structures with Christianity. Not only do economists need to recognize this relationship, they also need to see how the value structures capitalism once shared with Christianity have been distorted, and vice versa.

⁷ Tanner, *Economy of Grace*, 88.

⁸ Tanner, 17.

A Case of a Distorted Value Structure

The dynamic, substantive connection between the value structures of Christianity and capitalism, gone unrecognized and unevaluated, has led to some harmful changes. It is crucial that theologians and economists become aware of these deviations and make strides to correct them. Within the field of economics, just one example of this is the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. In *For the Common Good*, Daly and Cobb assert that the success of a discipline is often measured by the extent of abstraction it has achieved. This value structure has deviated from the Christian value structure that recognizes the complexity of human beings.

Economics is successful by this measure because economists have been able predict with relative certainty the nearness of future recessions by analyzing the Treasury yield curve (i.e., economists generally agree that an inverted yield curve indicates the coming of a recession). The physical sciences, too, have experienced success by this measurement because they have been able to explore such abstract topics as quantum physics and string theory with enough confidence to make productive advances. However, high levels of abstraction can easily lead professionals to place an undue amount of confidence in their findings. This confidence leads to a scarcity-centric view of the world rather than an abundance-oriented one and leads people to view themselves as wholly set apart rather than part of a larger, interconnected economic system.

The primary problem with using abstraction as the measure of success is that it encourages professionals in nearly every academic field to make overgeneralizations about the nature of their subject matter. For economists, it means jumping into the reductionist trap Tanner mentioned earlier. Humans are complex beings that cannot be simply reduced to rational-choice actors on a supply-demand curve. The world of economics has long placed extrapolating

scientific findings over maintaining historical accuracy. For example, Adam Smith established a set of economic laws for societies to operate under, but did not devote much time to defining the limits of the societies he suggested they would be applicable to.⁹ It is where these abstractions attempt to replace the concreteness of reality that we encounter the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Smith takes the assumption that market participants are pure, rational-choice economic actors; Cobb and Daly disagree. When the externalities of economic exchange become more than just minor externalities, we must restructure the fundamental way that we approach exchange. Capitalism, being an economic system, must be reimagined accordingly.

Structuring this Thesis

Thus far, I have been speaking in abstract terms about the relationship between the value structures of Christianity and capitalism. While some level of abstraction is necessary, it is now my intent to step toward practical and useful applications by narrowing down my arguments to United Methodist polity and 21st century post-Fordist capitalism. To do so, I must provide a brief history of each of these in the United States and begin to highlight some of their shared value structures.

Narrowing Christianity down to United Methodist Polity

A Brief History

United Methodist polity emerged from abstract Christianity over the course of four major stages: 1) the Protestant Reformation, 2) John Wesley at Oxford University, 3) United Methodism in the United States, and 4) United Methodist polity found in the Book of Discipline, Book of Worship, and United Methodist Hymnal.

⁹ Daly, Cobb, and Cobb, *For the Common Good*.

The first stage is the Protestant Reformation, which began after Martin Luther nailed his “95 Theses” to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church on October 31, 1517. His theses detailed his complaints about the Catholic Church, which included his opposition to the Church’s practice of selling indulgences to reduce a parishioner’s time in purgatory before going to heaven. Luther’s teachings on salvation by faith alone and the authority of the Bible, which the Catholic Church (by implication) opposed at the time, culminated in the Protestant Reformation. The United Methodist Church falls under the heading of “Protestant” and holds both of these Lutheran teachings as doctrine.

The second stage is the growth of Methodism, first at Christ Church in Oxford and then beyond, under the leadership of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church. It all started with the foundation of the Holy Club in 1729. During this time, “Luther’s liberating idea of justification by faith... had been buried under two centuries of rubble, but now suddenly, across the English-speaking world, it was rising again with astonishing power.”¹⁰ Wesley struggled with the idea of predestination, feeling a deep inner disgust for it because he saw it as an attack on both God’s goodness and human responsibility. As he grew intellectually and spiritually, the foundational doctrines of the Methodist church became increasingly concrete. He sailed to Georgia to serve as a pastor for the British colonists there for a while, but ended up returning to England prematurely after the congregation rebelled.

The third stage is the growth of Methodism in the United States, which began in 1766. A small group of Methodists were successfully expanding, and they wrote to Wesley to send over missionaries that could help lead them. Ministers such as Francis Asbury traveled throughout the colonies and shared the Methodist message. In resemblance to the historic Holy Club,

¹⁰ Tomkins, *John Wesley*, 44.

Methodists maintained a systematic, methodical approach to fellowship, worship, and service. The fellowship of Methodists experienced a number of schisms and reunifications over disagreements on topics such as slavery. On April 23, 1968, the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the Methodist Church combined to officially form the United Methodist Church.¹¹

The fourth stage is the establishment of United Methodist polity, which can be found mainly in the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church and partly in the United Methodist Hymnal and the United Methodist Book of Worship. The Book of Discipline was first published in 1784 and has been updated every 4 years to express the changes made by the corresponding General Conference. The Book of Discipline is the codification of the laws and doctrines of the United Methodist Church. It contains such items as the Constitution, Social Principles, and information about the organization and administration of the Church.

Connecting Value Structures between Christianity and UM Polity

United Methodist polity retains many of the characteristics and value structures that Weber, Tanner, and Daly and Cobb referred to. Namely, the most prominent of these are the high valuation of methodical, systematic means to experience God's grace, the emphasis on calling (especially in the church), and the importance of social principles and good stewardship.

Both early Christians and modern United Methodists place a great deal of value on engaging in methodical, systematic means of experiencing God's grace. The esteemed Richard Foster, in his book *Celebration of Discipline*, says that "inner righteousness is a gift from God to be graciously received." (p.6) Christians have long engaged in the pursuit of inner righteousness through such spiritual disciplines as prayer, fasting, service, and confession, to name a few. In

¹¹ United Methodist Church (U.S.) et al., *The Book of Discipline, 2012 (Free Edition)*, 11.

the Holy Club, John Wesley required the maintenance of strict schedule of practicing these means of grace. Methodists often divide the means of grace into works of piety and works of mercy. Examples of works of piety include fasting, evangelizing, and sharing in the sacraments (Baptism and Communion). These are practiced to receive and experience God's grace. Examples of works of mercy include feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and giving the thirsty something to drink. These are practiced to share God's grace with others.¹² Both early Christians and United Methodists believe that God's grace can be experienced through systematic means.

The importance of calling is emphasized among early Christians and modern United Methodists. The biblical stories of Jonah, David, each of the disciples, and Jesus himself all deal with calling. Within the UMC, people who feel a call to ministry are led through a strict, discipline-oriented candidacy process that encourages continuous discernment, stability (e.g., mental, financial, physical), and connectionalism. People who aspire to become full-time ordained ministers typically apply for membership in the Order of Elders or Order of Deacons. While the concept of calling, especially as it exists individually, primarily resides in later Protestant teachings, early Christians experienced God's communal call upon their lives to follow "the Way", respond to the Great Commission, and evangelize.

Early Christians wrestled with their historical and cultural context to establish social principles to operate under. The Church of Corinth struggled with whether or not to continue the tradition of circumcising new believers. The Book of James emphasizes the importance of works in the life of faith, saying "faith without works is dead." (James 2:26b) United Methodists continue the tradition of brawling to establish social principles. One of the most profound current

¹² United Methodist Church (U.S.), "Growing Vital Churches."

threats to the integrity of the UMC is the topic of homosexuality and the debate on whether individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community should be guaranteed full inclusion in the church. The UMC's current stance is that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching."¹³

Narrowing capitalism down to 21st century post-Fordist capitalism

A Brief History

Capitalism has experienced a notably shorter history than Christianity. The "father of capitalism", Adam Smith, never used the term "capitalism". Its first record of use was by William Makepeace Thackeray in 1854 in his book, *The Newcomes*. Fordism in the United States came about in the early 20th century and was characterized by mass production for the mass consumer through the specialization of labor. Henry Ford is credited with its creation as he sought to produce an affordable Ford Model T. Post-Fordism, which has become the dominant system of production in the U.S. with the turn of the 21st century, is typified by market segmentation, small-batch production, and the growth of the service and white-collar industries. In simple terms, it represents a shift from standardization to customization. It has enabled many of the processes of production to be outsourced to lower-wage countries, resulting in shared economic growth. Some notable examples include the outsourcing of IT services and textile production to India.

Throughout this paper, I maintain the assumption that capitalism was formulated for a noncompetitive, connectional purpose. Understandably, this may come across as surprising. My rationale is that early capitalists drew much of their drive from forming relationships with the

¹³ United Methodist Church (U.S.) et al., *The Book of Discipline, 2012 (Free Edition)*., para. 304.3.

people and businesses around them. Networking has always been an integral component of the system of capitalism, and it is not successful if both parties are simply trying to take advantage of the other. Networking requires both parties to be intentional and engaging in their relationship; it requires them to periodically act in each other's best interest. Without a genuine concern for the best interest of each other, networking fails. Capitalism also began with labor specialization in small communities of people, allowing some to focus on farming and others on taking care of the home or selling goods. The first capitalists realized that interdependence and connectionalism were vital to the success of their communities. This connectionalism can be seen throughout the early history of capitalism, but it has since begun to fade away.

Connecting Value Structures between Capitalism and 21st Century post-Fordist Capitalism

21st century post-Fordist capitalism preserves many of the characteristics and value structures that existed when capitalism was first being practiced. The most significant of these are value maximization, private property ownership, and self-interest.

Value maximization has remained a stable tenet of capitalism. It simply means that the production of goods and services should contribute to a positive-sum game. When someone goes to the store to purchase a carton of eggs, they do so because the value the eggs brings to their household is greater than the price of obtaining them. Profit is often depicted as an outcome of this. This still rings true within 21st century post-Fordist capitalism. Technology has enabled companies to empower consumers to customize their new cars down to the shade of the interior leather and whether or not they want carbon fiber décor. Profit is often temporarily foregone to increase production capacity for different markets. Amazon, founded in 1994, did not turn a profit until 2001. By increasingly segmenting markets, companies are able to create more value.

Private property ownership is another fundamental facet of capitalism. In *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith agrees, saying, “As the capital of a private man, though acquired by a particular trade, may increase beyond what he can employ in it, and yet that trade [continues] to increase too, so may likewise the capital of a great nation.” (p.158) The ownership of private property encourages people to create value for their households, and thus create value for their nation. For example, Kenya tried to encourage the conservation of elephants by instituting anti-poaching laws and experienced a net loss in the elephant population. Zimbabwe, experiencing the same problem, instituted private property ownership rights over elephants and saw a net gain in the elephant population. For consumers operating under 21st century post-Fordist capitalism, this truth persists. With a greater amount of personalized goods at their disposal, consumers can make better economic decisions for their households.

Self-interest, differentiated from selfishness and greed, is the hallmark and primary driver of capitalism. Self-interest means that people tend to do whatever is in their best interest. In the marketplace, expanding the options people have to act in their best interest is rewarded. This is often called the invisible hand theory, first pioneered by Adam Smith. Some economists, such as F.A. Hayek, argue for a system where bad individuals are weeded out of society in their concern for self-interest. Within 21st century post-Fordist capitalism, people still act according to their self-interest. For example, Elon Musk is interested in sustainability and lowering the barriers to space exploration, leading him to create Tesla Motors and SpaceX. Market segmentation empowers companies to better cater to the specific needs of the consumers they serve.

Conclusions

At this point, I have articulated how there exists a material connection between the value structures found in Christianity and capitalism. I have asserted that this connection is naturally dynamic, which requires decision-makers to criticize it and think creatively about it. I have also contended that this dynamic relationship has led to some harmful changes in the value structures of both Christianity and capitalism. To avoid the dangers of abstraction, I have narrowed down Christianity to United Methodist polity and capitalism to 21st century post-Fordist capitalism in the United States and provided adequate historical and conceptual context for each. In the next chapter, I hope to provide greater substance to each of these, present the primary value structures found within them, and discuss their relationship with each other.

Chapter 2 – Defining the Shared Value Structures

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight three of the key value structures that were shared between the fields of United Methodist polity and 21st century post-Fordist capitalism in the United States in the 16th century and to examine how these fields have deviated from these historical foundations. Since the UMC or Methodism didn't exist in the 16th century, I will be looking to the roots of the UMC, which stemmed from the birth of Protestantism. The value structures these fields shared in the 16th century are abundance over scarcity, innovation over traditionalism, and connectionalism over self-interest. Over time, capitalism has been slowly deviating from some of these value structures, especially since the proliferation of post-Fordist capitalism in the late 20th century and early 21st century in the United States. For both fields, I will provide a more in-depth analysis of their general organizational structures, talent acquisition systems, and internal judicial processes to comment on how these altered value structures are present in these fields today. By organizational structures, I am referring to the executive, legislative, and judicial structures found within each system and focusing on the general UMC

organizational structure and the organizational structures of individual businesses. By talent acquisition systems, I am talking about how each field generally goes about hiring staff. By internal judicial processes, I am looking at how the UMC and individual businesses deal with breaches of internally-generated rules. These analyses will provide a more comprehensive picture of the deviations that have occurred from the value structures once shared between these fields in the early 16th century.

Identifying the Shared Value Structures

I have provided sufficient context on the environments of United Methodist polity and 21st century post-Fordist capitalism to now highlight three of the key value structures once shared between these two fields. A value structure is a foundational trait that exists within a given system and affects, whether directly or indirectly, the way in which that system operates to a significant, material degree. A value structure places value and preference on one trait over another. For example, the value structure of preferential treatment of the poor over preferential treatment of the wealthy prioritizes helping poor people over helping rich people. Historically, the value structures shared between the aforementioned fields included abundance over scarcity, innovation over traditionalism, and connectionalism over self-interest. Abundance over scarcity means that the UMC or an individual business would prioritize the pursuit of opportunities and growth of strengths over defending against threats and fixing weaknesses in regards to its relationship with the external environment. Innovation over traditionalism means that these organizations would promote brainstorming, organizational flexibility, and research and development over adhering to the status quo of its operations. Connectionalism over self-interest means that the UMC and businesses would value the formation of relationships between individuals and other organizations over promoting unhealthy competition between them. I

contend that the value structures of modern capitalism have drifted toward scarcity as principle and self-interest. I also assert that the value structures of UM polity have drifted toward traditionalism. These deviations must be recognized and corrected to ensure the survival of each field.

Abundance and Scarcity

Both UM polity and capitalism once shared the value structure of abundance over scarcity. The UMC recognizes that “God’s grace is manifest in all creation even though suffering, violence, and evil are everywhere present.”¹⁴ This treatment of God’s grace as abundant does not excuse humanity from responding through disciplined action because, in the spirit of the Book of James, faith is demonstrated through good works. Capitalism, too, once exemplified this value structure of abundance. In the 16th century, “capital, more abundant merchandise, sailing ships, and weapons... were the means of expansion for commerce, discoveries, and conquests.” John Calvin, as mentioned earlier, turned commercial success into a mark of divine election while justifying commerce and charging interest on loans.¹⁵ Capitalism, with this religious justification, was focused on growth by utilizing the abundance of the means of production (land, labor, capital, etc.) rather than emphasizing the scarcity of these resources.

Now, capitalists appear to focus more on combating scarcity than celebrating abundance. The dollar is the “scarce resource for which every company has to fight every other to the death.”¹⁶ This zero-sum approach has led to poor wages for working-class citizens. Fortunately, the living wage movement has provided some push-back on this by arguing for the preferential

¹⁴ United Methodist Church (U.S.) et al., para. 102.

¹⁵ Beaud, *A History of Capitalism, 1500-1980*, 18.

¹⁶ Tanner, *Economy of Grace*, 38.

option for the poor, which “emphasizes humanity’s radical interdependence and particular responsibility to the ‘least of these.’”¹⁷ I will cover this topic more in the following chapter. I contend that the economic assumption of scarcity has led to a reduction in imaginative business modeling and political actions that nudge society toward positive-sum outcomes. For example, the fallacy of misplaced concreteness hinders the ability of economists to explore alternative economic solutions to many of today’s most pressing issues (e.g., unfair wages). This scarcity outlook pits companies against each other rather than pulling them together for the benefit of society.

Innovation and Traditionalism

Both UM polity and capitalism once shared the value structure of innovation. Both early capitalists and early Methodists sought to meet their ends, be they value or holiness, through systematic, disciplined means of innovation. The term “Methodist” was coined by students at Oxford University to mock the systematic approach of John Wesley’s Holy Club to working toward sanctification. Wesley transformed the state of the universal church by igniting the proliferation of the practice of itinerancy through his field-preaching, through his devotion to mission and service, and by emphasizing the means of grace systematically. He openly opposed George Whitefield’s commitment to predestination, presenting free will and salvation by faith as truth.¹⁸ In short, John Wesley is characterized by the systematic and disciplined innovative movement that he began in protest of the Anglican Church. Unfortunately, UM polity has deviated toward a more traditionalist state to avoid risk. By “traditionalist”, I am referring to the presence of an inappropriate level of resistance to change and subdual of creativity that has

¹⁷ Snarr, *All You That Labor*, 52–54.

¹⁸ Tomkins, *John Wesley*, 17.

negatively impacted the success of the church in achieving its mission. Capitalists, too, once agreed on a similar approach to innovation exhibited by John Wesley. Profits are achieved through systematic processes of brainstorming, research and development, manufacturing, and distribution. Capitalism rewards innovation rather plainly: through growth and profits. The objective of capitalism, both historically and today, is to maximize value. This is clear and evident in the synergy approach to strategic management within multibusiness companies, where a parent company seeks to leverage the core competencies of each subsidiary business unit and pursue shared opportunities. Value chain analysis, which is used to identify specific functional areas where value can be added in a business, is becoming increasingly popular in 21st century post-Fordist capitalism in the United States.

Connectionalism and Self-Interest

Both UM polity and capitalism once shared the value structure of connectionalism. This value structure is unique from the others because connectionalism is not inherently opposed to self-interest. In many cases, connectionalism is the result of the collective self-interest of a group of people. My intention is to assert that connectionalism should provide meaning and guidance to self-interest, not the other way around. Across most of the history of capitalism, connectionalism has empowered the working class to unionize and improve working conditions. For example, a strike by teachers in West Virginia in February and March of 2018 resulted in a 5 percent raise in salary. While one of the tenets of capitalism is the pursuit of one's own self-interest, one's best interest can be achieved most effectively through connectional cooperation. Self-interest is harmful insofar as it is brought to its extreme: greed. Unfortunately, self-interest has become more important than connectionalism when it comes to capitalism in the United States.

Some areas of capitalism have deviated from connectionalism as an end toward unapologetic self-interest, where fraud is incentivized and wealth inequality is proliferated. Companies and special interest groups wield an undue sum of influence over lawmakers. After the 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida, many lawmakers across the United States hesitated to enact stronger gun regulations in part because they feared losing out on funding from the National Rifle Association. In addition, large corporations are no stranger to accounting scandals and insider trading (e.g., Enron, Worldcom, and Martha Stewart). Self-interest has suppressed the positive impact of connectionalism by incentivizing lawmakers and large corporations to make unethical decisions. The UMC is struggling with this as well.

Connectionalism is one of the foundational tenets of the UMC. In the UMC, there are believed to be means of grace, which are divided up into works of piety (individual) and works of mercy (communal). Works of piety include such disciplines as prayer, reading Scripture, and fasting. Works of mercy include disciplines like congregational worship, partaking in Communion, and doing missions. Together, these works function to connect humanity with God in meaningful ways and to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The latter demonstrates the importance of community, fellowship, and ultimately connectionalism within UM polity. True connectionalism looks like seeking unity through ongoing conversation and relationship-building rather than taking sides or simply agreeing to disagree. It looks like partnering with other local churches to advance the mission of Jesus Christ through ecumenical ministries rather than seeking to compete with the church next door. It looks like formulating intentional, reflective, and personal accountability processes rather than faceless accountability from a distance. Unfortunately, the UMC appears to be drifting away from connectionalism and toward self-interest. For example, some groups within the UM connection

have preferred divisiveness to advance their self-interest on either side of the homosexuality debate rather than connectionalism to have intentional and solution-driven discussions about it.

United Methodist Polity & the Value Structures

In this section, I will cover the general organizational structure of the United Methodist Church, its talent acquisition systems, and its judicial processes to demonstrate the truthfulness of the assertions I have made thus far about its value structures. I have gathered most of this information from the Book of Discipline, current United Methodist clergy and laity, and personal experience. The Book of Discipline functions as the rulebook of the UMC; it codifies the social principles, judicial processes, and organizational structure of the UMC.

The organizational structure of the United Methodist Church is best described as a connectional system. It is similar in many ways to the United States government because it has legislative, executive, and judicial bodies. It has a Constitution and has codified many of its standards, social principles, and ideals in the Book of Discipline and Book of Resolutions. The UMC is made up of approximately 7 million professing members¹⁹ organized among 44,112 churches or preaching places.²⁰ Clergy generally plan, organize, lead, and control the day-to-day operations of local churches and are organized into two orders: Elder and Deacon. Elders are ordained to live a life of Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service and typically serve as Senior or Associate Pastors in local churches. Elders are called to proclaim the gospel, administer the sacraments of Holy Communion and baptism, order the church through leadership and administration, and to further the mission of Christ in the world. Deacons are ordained to live a life of Word, Service, Compassion, and Justice. In other words, they are called to proclaim the

¹⁹ United Methodist Church, “2016 Stats Summary with 2015 Comparison.”

²⁰ United Methodist Church, “Data Services - Quick UMC Facts.”

gospel, further the mission of Jesus in the world, exercise compassion for the marginalized and oppressed, and advocate for just resolutions in response to wrongdoings. They typically specialize in a particular field of ministry and serve in local churches, as missionaries, as military or hospital chaplains, etc. These ordained clergy oversee local churches that are organized into Annual (in the United States) and Central (in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines) Conferences. In the United States, the Annual Conferences are gathered into five Jurisdictional Conferences based on geographic location. Every four years, around 1,000 clergy and laity (in 1:1 proportion) gather at a General Conference, where legislative changes to the Book of Discipline and Book of Resolutions are often made. Bishops are elected by the Jurisdictional and Central Conferences and generally oversee one or more of the Annual Conferences or geographic areas within their particular Central Conference.

For 46 years, the UMC has been wrestling with itself on whether to allow LGBT+ individuals to get married and become ordained clergy in the church. It has experienced an 18 percent loss in worship attendance between 1974 and 2012 in the United States.²¹ Albeit ambiguous, there has been language in the UMC as of late about a new form of church appearing on the horizon; District Superintendent Rev. Dr. Candace Lewis describes it as a “software update”. While this sounds promising, many young clergy remain uncertain about the future of the UMC. Progressive Methodists in the U.S. want the restrictive, conservative language found in the Book of Discipline (i.e., “the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian

²¹ Hahn, “Economist: Church in Crisis but Hope Remains.”

teaching”)²², to be changed. Many blame church leaders for prioritizing church property retention over discerning a proper solution.

The UMC has allowed special interest groups to exert an inappropriate amount of influence over its organizational structure. The Good News Movement, Wesley Covenant Association (WCA), and the Legal Counsel for the Wesley Covenant Association are special interest Christian organizations that advocate against LGBTQ inclusion in the UMC. In March 2018, they released statements that threatened to tear the UMC apart by getting conservative church to leave the denomination if the stance of the UMC changes. The WCA has pledged to “present alternative legislation opposing A Way Forward” and others have promised to provide legal counsel for churches wishing to take advantage of contractual loopholes to leave the denomination.²³ These threats are characteristic of competitive self-interest rather than connectionalism, and they are putting the UMC in jeopardy of a violent split.

As for talent acquisition, most staff members in local churches are laity members that are hired from the labor market. They may serve as teachers, choir directors, and staff members for a childcare service hosted by the church, among many other roles. Many churches do not have a Human Resources department, so much of the work falls on pastoral leadership and Staff-Parish Relations Committees. Clergy are recruited and trained through intense, systematic, and discernment-oriented candidacy and ordination processes. These processes include psychological and financial assessments, written and oral interviews, and education requirements (e.g., prospective Elders are required to earn a Master’s degree in Divinity). They are appointed within the United Methodist itinerant system by the bishop of their respective conference. The purpose

²² United Methodist Church (U.S.) et al., *The Book of Discipline, 2012 (Free Edition)*., para. 304.3.

²³ UMJEREMY, “UMC Schismatics Are Now in Plain View...but Why?”

of the itinerant system is to match the various skills and gifts of pastors with the diverse needs of congregations.

The process of clergy recruitment has evolved significantly over the years, but many of its core components have changed very little. This traditionalism, or resistance to considering new possibilities, often comes at the expense of pastors and their spouses. For example, the lack of change that has come from clinging to tradition for tradition's sake can be clearly found in some rural churches, where smaller populations allow them to disregard people who do not agree with them. Urban churches tend to be more progressive because they are surrounded by people with broader interests. The itinerant nature of the system has, in some cases, led to appointments where the needs of the congregation are not matched well with the skills of the pastor. If reappointments occur regularly, they can place a significant amount of stress on clergy marriages and hinder the pastor's ability to get integrated into their community. It takes many years to understand and shift the culture of a community. One study points out that the "average pastoral tenure in Protestant churches is less than 4 years", that three-fourths of growing churches had pastors that had been there for more than 4 years, and that two-thirds of declining churches had pastors that had been there for less than 4 years.²⁴ Elders in the UMC are also part of a guaranteed appointment system. As long as they continue to bear some fruit in their ministry and refrain from committing any egregious moral failures, they are effectively tenured until retirement. Unfortunately, this guarantee may be bringing harm to the UMC. It makes it harder for the connection to let go of ineffective pastors, and it clashes with 21st century post-Fordist labor flexibility, which is characterized by a heightened level of job mobility among young adults and people typically working more than one job to support their families. For example, a

²⁴ Arn, "Pastoral Longevity and Church Growth."

parent might work in a hospital full-time during the day and drive for Uber at night. The itinerant system, coupled with the high working hour demands of serving as a pastor, can lead pastors to feel trapped. The itinerant system resembles the job and life security that was demanded strongly under the Fordist system, so alternatives should be seriously considered. The judicial system of the UMC, too, should be updated.

The judicial system in the UMC is similar to the judicial system of the United States (which also need updating, but that discussion falls outside the scope of this paper). For example, it includes the right of a complainant to notice of hearings²⁵ and the right of a respondent against double jeopardy²⁶. The Judicial Council is the highest-ranking judicial body in the United Methodist Church and has the power to declare actions of the General Conference to be unconstitutional and affirm, alter, or reject decisions of law made by bishops in response to questions, among other powers. All actions by the Judicial Council are considered to be final, much like the decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court. Trial courts exist below the Judicial Council that may handle chargeable offenses made by clergy or laity. Consequences for charged offenses may include involuntary termination of employment, revocation of credentials, or removal from professing membership.²⁷ Most disputes are resolved at the local church, district, and conference levels. They may range from violations of good moral character on the part of clergy to disobedience to the Book of Discipline (e.g., by performing same-sex marriage ceremonies).

The Johnson Amendment, a change made in 1954 to the U.S. tax code, prohibits 501(c)(3) organizations, including the UMC, from supporting or opposing political candidates. In

²⁵ United Methodist Church (U.S.) et al., *The Book of Discipline, 2012 (Free Edition)*, para. 2701.1b.

²⁶ United Methodist Church (U.S.) et al., para. 2701.2d.

²⁷ United Methodist Church (U.S.) et al., para. 2711.3.

effect, it prohibits churches and other non-profit organizations from serving as tax-exempt political machines. 79 percent of Americans oppose allowing pastors to endorse candidates from the pulpit.²⁸ However, some argue that Lyndon B. Johnson proposed the amendment to silence the conservative non-profit organizations that were opposing his reelection in the Senate. Opponents of the Johnson Amendment say that “the church has chosen to ignore open immorality in culture and in government while at the same time neglecting to call attention to those political leaders who do strive to live according to Christian morals and values”.²⁹ Little debate has occurred among UMC pastors about this amendment. This silence exists partly because the large scale of the UMC, much like the large scale of toy companies and automobile manufacturers, has caused it to sway away from innovation. Innovating entails taking on risk, and the UMC appears to be risk-averse at this moment in history. Traditionalism is the safety net, but it may be killing the UMC.

21st Century post-Fordist Capitalism and the Value Structures

In many ways, the stakeholders that operate under 21st century post-Fordist capitalism exist within a system very similar to that of the United Methodist Church. I will hone in on the general organizational structure, talent acquisition systems, and internal judicial processes that concern businesses under this heading to further exhibit the reliability of the allegations I have made thus far about its value structures.

Most businesses operate independently from one another and come in a wide variety of types. Sole proprietorships are ideal for small businesses that have relatively few assets and are owned by a single person. Partnerships are ideal for similar businesses with two owners. Limited

²⁸ “The Case in Support of the Johnson Amendment.”

²⁹ Fiorazo, “The Johnson Amendment and the Agenda to Silence Christians.”

liability corporations and limited liability partnerships help owners mitigate the risks posed to their personal assets in their business dealings. Corporations are ideal for large companies that need easy access to large amounts of capital. All businesses operating in the United States are subject to U.S. laws and regulations. Many companies have bylaws (e.g., in their Articles of Incorporation) that prescribe certain processes, standards, and methods that the employees of the firm must abide by. Generally speaking, every company desires to maintain itself as a going concern. Post-Fordist companies like Vistaprint, TurboTax, and Forever 21 tend to have wide chains of command and value innovation and customer service. Vistaprint, for example, will replace any product through priority shipping if a customer is not satisfied with it. Post-Fordism represents the shift from mass standardization to mass customization, and this is driven largely by the vast amounts of data companies can now collect about consumers. Facebook offers a customized user experience based on an individual's preferences, such as their political stance (derived from posts they have shared) and recent Internet searches.

The organizational structure of businesses in the United States today remains faithful to the shared value structure of innovation and empowers post-Fordist companies to more effectively meet the needs of their customers. In a sense, it enables businesses to be connectional. For example, Amazon, JPMorgan Chase & Co., and Berkshire Hathaway Inc. recently announced a joint venture project to reduce the costs of healthcare for their workers. In doing so, they are created a customized healthcare solution for their employees. Collaboration between businesses to pursue certain social initiatives like healthcare improvement is indicative of the presence of a connectional mentality because it demonstrates that their central focus is on improving lives rather than shutting down the competition. Businesses that solely focus on

eliminating competition lose sight of providing value to the customer and end up failing, and businesses that collaborate to shut down competition often run into trouble with anti-trust laws.

Unfortunately, connectionalism is not always the focus of businesses. Of the 14 workers that committed suicide at Foxconn, a major manufacturer of Apple iPhones in China, 13 of them jumped from the rooftops of the on-site dorms to “bring attention to a substandard wage structure and work environment”³⁰. A single parent with two dependents in the U.S. working 60 hours per week at \$7.25 an hour (minimum wage) will take home just under \$20,000 a year after taxes, which is below the federal poverty line. No company should ever place securing profits above the welfare of its workers. Payday loan companies often charge predatory interest rates and high penalties for late repayment; this spurs a cycle of debt for families living paycheck-to-paycheck that is inescapable. Companies of all sizes must strive to pay their workers a fair wage and sufficient benefits to take care of at least the basic needs of their families.

The talent acquisition systems of companies operating under 21st century post-Fordist capitalism are much more advanced than those of the UMC. Professionals such as Certified Public Accountants, lawyers, and doctors are required to complete specific educational requirements and successfully pass rigorous certification examinations. Businesses often reap the benefits of a larger labor market than churches; as a result, they find ideal candidates for open positions more efficiently. Large businesses typically have Human Resources departments that oversee recruiting, employee relations, and benefits. In a post-Fordist economic environment, information technology solutions make it easier for small businesses to outsource this work. Moreover, post-Fordist businesses are realizing that labor flexibility can provide them with

³⁰ Freeman, “Inside the World’s Factories Lie Centuries of Innovation & Dehumanization.”

immense benefits if used properly. Amazon, for example, hires seasonal workers during the winter season to help it fulfill its influx of holiday orders. The UMC could benefit from learning about these new systems.

Modern businesses have done an excellent job at innovating within the labor market, especially in the realm of information technology. They are starting to ask college graduates for ePortfolios of their work and recruiting through websites like LinkedIn and ZipRecruiter. Even with these innovations, a sense of job scarcity continues to exist. In 2012, the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that “about 44% of grads were working in jobs that didn’t require a college degree”³¹. Another study showed that 45% of recent college graduates are still living at home.³² Understandably, college graduates fear that they will end up working part-time or be underemployed when they join the workforce. To resolve this, businesses and colleges have started working more closely to use internships as a vehicle to full-time employment. However, much more needs to be done.

In many corporations, the Board of Directors may include provisions in the bylaws that dictate how internal or external disputes should be handled. For example, a company’s bylaws might require the inclusion of arbitration clauses in contracts with clients to avoid racking up unnecessary legal fees. Publicly-held corporations, among other business types, are required to publish annual financial statements that provide shareholders and other stakeholders with enough information to make reasonable decisions. Generally Accepted Account Principles (GAAP), which can be found in the Financial Accounting Standards Board Codification, dictates what types of information a firm should report. Violating GAAP, while not illegal in most cases, often

³¹ Desilver, “5 Facts about Today’s College Graduates.”

³² Weissmann, “Here’s Exactly How Many College Graduates Live Back at Home.”

results in significant financial setbacks (e.g., in the case of Enron) because it reduces the comparability and understandability of the financial statements. Responsibility for white-collar crimes such as embezzlement and money laundering often falls on the individual who committed them.

One of the most profound problems businesses and their employees are facing today is the extreme wealth inequality that results from the intermingling of self-interest, wealth accumulation, and politics. The wealth gap has been growing exponentially; over the past 30 years, the wealthiest 1% of Americans saw their share of income jump from 12 percent to 21 percent.³³ Between 1979 and 2007, they saw their after-tax income grow by 275 percent.³⁴ This disparity in income is reflected in the courtroom for three main reasons: 1) the U.S. Constitution does not establish social and economic rights, 2) the Equal Protection Clause does not prevent courts from discriminating on the basis of wealth, and 3) class-based distinctions are subject to a lenient rational-basis review (where the court merely determines if the distinction aligns with the purpose of the body that assembled the particular law). Between 2006 and 2009, “the party supported by the Chamber of Commerce prevailed in almost 70% of cases in which the Chamber of Commerce was either a party or amicus before the Roberts [Supreme] Court”³⁵. Stated simply, success in court is positively correlated with wealth. This is one of the most egregious failures of capitalism: disincentivizing the preferential treatment of the poor in the name of self-interest and constructing false rationalizations for doing so.

Conclusions

³³ Gilman, “A COURT FOR THE ONE PERCENT: HOW THE SUPREME COURT CONTRIBUTES TO ECONOMIC INEQUALITY,” 7.

³⁴ Gilman, 6.

³⁵ Gilman, n. 159.

Thus far, I have asserted that the value structures once shared between the fields of UM polity and 21st century post-Fordist capitalism were abundance, innovation, and connectionalism. I argued that UM polity has remained faithful to a theology of abundance, but has deviated away from innovation and connectionalism toward traditionalism and self-interest. I also asserted that 21st century post-Fordist capitalism has remained close to innovation, but has deviated away from abundance and connectionalism toward scarcity and self-interest. I provided a deeper look into the organizational structures, talent acquisition processes, and judicial systems of both fields and commented on how these deviations in value structures have negatively impacted each of them. Having introduced many of the problems each field is currently facing, it is my intention in chapter 3 to propose a few equitable solutions to each of them.

Chapter 3 – Practical Solutions for these Deviations

Now that I have established the historical and conceptual connection between UM polity and 21st century post-Fordist capitalism in the United States, highlighted their historically shared value structures (abundance, innovation, and connectionalism), and articulated how these fields have deviated from these value structures over time, I am now sufficiently prepared to present practical solutions to some of the major problems these fields face. Capitalism has always had some degree of scarcity and self-interest at its roots. However, these have been revealed as harmful when taken to their extremes. Thus, I propose that companies should pursue noncompetitiveness to combat issues such as the unacceptable increase in wealth inequality. UM polity's deviation toward traditionalism and self-interest has sparked divisive conflicts over the issue of homosexuality and caused the UMC to become risk-averse.

How Christians Participating in Capitalist Structures Ought to Behave

To recap, my first contention is that 21st century post-Fordist capitalism in the United States has deviated away from the historically-shared value structures of abundance and connectionalism toward extreme scarcity and self-interest while remaining generally faithful to the value structure of innovation. Unfortunately, this has led to excess competition between companies and an increase in wealth equality in the U.S. and abroad.

Replacing Competition with Noncompetitiveness

This competition, while upholding capitalism's vow to innovation, has led companies in the United States to take on large amounts of debt to leverage themselves against their competition, resulting in great harm being done to their employees, consumers, and other stakeholders. The downfall of Toys R Us is a classic example. It had been paying \$400 million a year to service its debt of \$7.6 billion before it was acquired.³⁶ Hundreds of employees have been laid off, and many hundreds more are to come. Another example is the rapid growth of Bitcoin (BTC) and other cryptocurrencies, which are the capitalist's utopian dream: decentralized, free from hyper-regulation (for now), and available for nearly anyone, anywhere to purchase. Between 2010 and late 2017, the price of BTC jumped from just \$0.05 per BTC to just over \$17,500. At the time of writing, it now sits at \$7,000 per BTC, representing a loss of over \$207 billion over the course of just a few months.³⁷ I assert that five clear steps can be made to foster a community that is increasingly noncompetitive and enhance innovation: 1) incentivize companies to work together through joint ventures, strategic alliances, and consortia; 2) adopt a positive-sum mindset; 3) lower conditions on bailouts provided by the International Monetary Fund to encourage cooperation across borders; 4) reward companies for engaging in corporate

³⁶ Hoza, "With Vultures Lurking, Toys R Us Never Had a Chance."

³⁷ "Cryptocurrency Market Capitalizations."

social responsibility; and 5) hold companies responsible for the impacts they have on the environment.

One step businesses in the United States could take to return to the value structure of abundance and promote noncompetitive connectionalism is to lobby for laws or create non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that incentivize companies to work together through joint ventures, strategic alliances, and consortia. Joint ventures occur when two or more companies band together and create a new company that benefits from the core competencies and strengths of the parent companies to provide some value-added good or service. For example, Amazon, Berkshire Hathaway, and JPMorgan Chase recently launched a new health care company to focus on reducing healthcare costs for their employees.³⁸ This initiative avoids the flaws associated with extreme competitiveness in capitalism because it directly seeks to help those who are often not rewarded for the success of their company: the front-line workers. It acknowledges that while capitalism generally increases wealth across the board, it does so discriminatorily in favor of the wealthy. In industries where few large companies dominate the market, strategic alliances could be beneficial for small businesses. A strategic alliance is similar to a venture, but the companies involved refrain from taking equity (ownership) stakes in each other. An example of this is the “Got Milk?” campaign in the milk industry. Companies should also be rewarded for assembling consortia, or “large interlocking relationships between businesses of an industry”³⁹. In Japan, consortia are known as “keiretsus” and serve as a significant social phenomenon. In South Korea, they are known as “chaebols”; Samsung is a good example.⁴⁰ If government can be used to reward companies for cooperating together to create value through strategic initiatives

³⁸ Chappell and Dwyer, “Amazon, Berkshire Hathaway And JPMorgan Chase Launch New Health Care Company.”

³⁹ Pearce, Robinson, and McGraw-Hill Companies, *Strategic Management*, 234.

⁴⁰ Pearce, Robinson, and McGraw-Hill Companies, 234–35.

like joint ventures, strategic alliances, and consortia, capitalism in the United States today can make healthy steps toward returning to its roots of abundance and concretely pursue the worthwhile goal of connectionalism.

Another step businesses could take to pursue noncompetitive connectionalism is to adopt a general positive-sum mindset when it comes to taking care of consumers. In game theory, a positive-sum game is one where the net gain is greater than zero. Retail sales often are indicative of a positive-sum game because the customer values the item greater than the cost of that item and the retailer values the customer's dollars greater than holding onto the item. A non-example would be a company coercing customers to purchase their products or dumping waste in the local river. In many cases, businesses prioritize outsmarting the competition over providing value to their consumers. For example, Exxon placed obtaining oil more efficiently than its competitors over practicing appropriate environmental protection standards, which led to the spillage of 11 million gallons of oil in 1989.⁴¹ When companies divert their attention away from their consumers and solely focus on eliminating or disempowering their competition, it can negatively impact their goodwill and reputation.

Thirdly, companies should encourage the U.S. government to lower conditions on bailouts provided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to encourage noncompetition between companies across national borders. Currently, the IMF serves to bail out nations that have been struggling economically, like Greece, usually because they have taken on large amounts of debt. However, these bailouts come with extremely restrictive conditions that tend to give companies in developed nations the upper hand. Businesses in the U.S. should put pressure on international regulatory bodies such as the IMF and the World Bank to "take steps to set up

⁴¹ Pearce, Robinson, and McGraw-Hill Companies, 57.

international funding sources that would do for the global economy what a federal bank ordinarily does for a national economy... [dampen] the tendency of money to pile in when the going is good and flee when times get difficult”.⁴² Generally, the free flow of capital is beneficial, but it is harmful when its liquidity has the power to spell disaster for the stability of the economic systems of developing nations. By relaxing the conditions on bailouts and slowing the extreme liquidity of capital across national borders, steps can be made toward a more noncompetitive world. Restricting businesses from interacting with one another hinders connectionalism.

Another way noncompetitiveness can be promoted in 21st century post-Fordist capitalism in the U.S. is to reward companies for engaging in corporate social responsibility (CSR). CSR is “the idea that business has a duty to serve society in general as well as the financial interest of stockholders”⁴³. The reinvigoration of the environmentalism movement, increasing buyer power, and globalization are ongoing trends that push for the use of CSR in business. While studies have shown inconclusive results on the impact of CSR on a firm’s bottom line, practicing CSR has been shown to benefit a firm’s reputation and goodwill when it properly balances its collaborative social initiatives between active engagement and philanthropy. Recently, Facebook took a reputation hit for disclosing the profile information of 50 million of its users to data analytics firm Cambridge Analytica.⁴⁴ This happened in part because Facebook failed to exercise its CSR to protect the data it collected from its users and disclose when and with whom it was sharing that data. CSR drives firms to self-regulate, which decreases the costs associated with more governmental regulations. Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, has called on the government to

⁴² Tanner, *Economy of Grace*, 128.

⁴³ Pearce, Robinson, and McGraw-Hill Companies, *Strategic Management*, 56.

⁴⁴ Lam, “Everyone Is Talking about Cambridge Analytica, the Trump-Linked Data Firm That Harvested 50 Million Facebook Profiles — Here’s What’s Going on.”

impose regulations on social media platforms like Facebook. The benefits of CSR drive firms to work together noncompetitively to reduce costs and maximize value because it emphasizes a company's economic and social responsibility for the society it operates within. CSR attempts to assign value to the efforts a company demonstrates toward creating a more connectational consumer environment.

Further, noncompetitiveness can be supported by holding companies responsible for the impact they have on the environment. Large companies have been known to dump chemicals into rivers, trash into landfills and the ocean, and pump CO₂ into the atmosphere. Businesses in the United States, either through regulations or NGOs, should be rewarded for adopting practices such as just-in-time (JIT) inventory management and total quality management (TQM). They could lobby for the issuance of CO₂ licenses and imposition of carbon taxes to dissuade companies from polluting the air, especially near large cities. Environmentalism is a goal that every firm, regardless of its purpose, can gather around. Consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the ecological impacts of firms and are factoring that awareness into their purchasing decisions. By working together to achieve sustainability, companies can become increasingly noncompetitive and provide fairer wages for their workers. Businesses need to see themselves as members of a community that includes not only the other businesses that they compete with, but consumers and the environment as well.

Resolving Wealth Inequality

The aforementioned deviations from the historically-shared value structures have empowered conservative policies with capitalist roots to yield poor wages for low-skilled labor in the U.S. As noted in the previous chapter, the wealth gap between the poorest and richest U.S.

workers is growing. Women and people of color are receiving disproportionately lower incomes than their white male counterparts, even when their level of education and work experience are equivalent. The following five measures could be implemented to help reduce this gap: 1) increasing the quantity and quality of public goods, 2) connecting the minimum wage to a sufficient consumer price index, 3) stopping predatory payday loan companies, 4) investing in training for workers whose jobs have been replaced by automation, and 5) guaranteeing equitable legal counsel for the poor.

One step businesses could take toward reducing wealth inequality in the United States is to increase the quantity and quality of public goods such as transportation infrastructure, parks, and technology centers. Mobility is one of the most significant factors when it comes to reducing poverty in a given area. By reducing the time it takes to get from one place to another, such as from a job to night classes at a local college, low-skilled workers can more easily take care of their families and move upwards in their income.⁴⁵ Compared to its European neighbors, the U.S. has much work to do on improving its transportation infrastructure. Improvements might include more regular bus schedules and incentivizing ride-sharing by designating more carpool lanes on highways. Parks, especially in urban environments, can provide temporary housing for the homeless and improve morale and job satisfaction. Technology centers could be included more readily in libraries to assist low-skilled workers in their job hunting by providing free-to-use computers and WiFi; many homeless and low-income people do not have access to a computer to receive email or do homework on. These options represent an opportunity for people to be increasingly connective with each other and with the labor market because they reduce barriers that currently stand in the way of relationships being formed.

⁴⁵ Bouchard, "Transportation Emerges as Crucial to Escaping Poverty."

Another way wealth inequality in the U.S. could be reduced is by connecting the federal minimum wage to a sufficient consumer price index (CPI). The federal minimum wage is updated infrequently and is often overlooked. Moreover, the increases that do occur appear to be arbitrary and inflation-blind. By connecting the minimum wage to a CPI and adjusting for inflation and cost of living at least semiannually, we can ensure that low-skilled workers can make enough income from a 50 hour workweek (just above the average of 35 to 40 working hours a week) to provide housing, food, clothing, and some insurance for themselves and their dependents. This would reduce the need for initiatives like the USDA Food Stamp Program. Moreover, it would communicate that the minimum wage is intended to be a tool that affirms the abundance (as opposed to scarcity) of labor talent present in the U.S.

Further, businesses should encourage the voters to stop payday loan companies from charging predatory interest rates and fees. In many cases, these companies single-handedly keep low-income families stuck in a perpetual cycle of debt. The actions of predatory loan companies are indicative of a capitalism that values self-interest and scarcity. If a family is trying to pay their bills, taking on debt only makes the problem worse. Churches and NGOs could provide zero-interest, short-term loans tied to educational programs to struggling families to help them get above the poverty line. This model, also known as microlending, has been proven fruitful when the funds are used for increasing income generation.⁴⁶ By investing in this model and barring payday loan companies from charging extreme interest rates and fees, we can more effectively reap the benefits of a capitalism that is connectional and abundance-driven.

In addition to stopping predatory payday loan companies, the U.S. government should invest in training for workers whose jobs have been replaced by automation. For example, the

⁴⁶ “About the Microfinance Connection.”

number of self-service check out machines in large stores such as Walmart and McDonalds are rapidly reducing the need for check-out clerks. Reducing wealth inequality requires these people to remain employed in some way. Education is the most viable means of ensuring that happens. While the cost of college tuition is on the rise, many community colleges and vocational training institutions are keeping their costs low. In fact, employers are starting to value work experience more, especially in fields that do not require a significant relative level of hard skills, such as business and education. Providing workers with this assurance would show that capitalism can be a means to job security. Allowing jobs to become obsolescent without providing options for workers to pursue other opportunities is not a connectional strategy.

The final (and perhaps most significant) step I propose is to ensure equitable legal counsel for the poor. Without access to significant cash reserves, people who find themselves in poverty in the U.S. often receive low-quality legal representation while large companies can hire lawyers that can drive up legal fees until the individual can't afford to keep fighting. More than 5,000 lawsuits are filed against Walmart each year, or about 14 times per day, for poor business practices, which include gender discrimination, denial of overtime, and forcing workers to work off-the-clock, among other complaints.⁴⁷ Walmart often settles out of these lawsuits for less than would be awarded otherwise. It would be beneficial for the Bar Association to require lawyers to spend a designated number of hours per year serving low-income families. Some churches and NGOs have started providing low-cost or free legal counsel to these families, but the issue of quality remains. Providing quality legal counsel to the poor is just one of the ways capitalism can become more connectional and less focused on scarcity because it illustrates that ensuring

⁴⁷ Van Riper, "Wal-Mart Stands Up To Wave Of Lawsuits."

equitable opportunities is beneficial to the formation of relationships and celebrates the economic value that all people can bring to the table, regardless of income.

How Christians Participating in UM Polity Ought to Behave

My second contention is that UM polity has deviated away from innovation and connectionalism toward traditionalism and self-interest. The two major issues UM polity is facing are divisive conflict and how risk-averse it has caused the UMC to become. Regarding the first, I will explore recent debates about the ordination of clergy and marriage of individuals who identify as homosexual. My hope rests in the opportunity the UMC has to become more flexible, more connectional, and more innovative.

Resolving the Issue of Homosexuality

During the General Conference of 2016, the Commission on a Way Forward was approved by the Council of Bishops to discern ways to empower unity within the church on the topic of human sexuality. The Commission was tasked with looking at all passages concerning human sexuality in the Book of Discipline and to consider making revisions. In spite of this, several special interest groups have abandoned the Methodist emphasis on connectionalism to pursue their own agendas. I contend that the UMC needs to recall the innovative roots from which it came and empower its connectional nature to bear more fruit by: 1) supporting the Commission on a Way Forward with an open mind, 2) temporarily exercise a greater degree of mercy in the trial courts and Judicial Council in cases involving LGBT+ rights, 3) discourage misplaced concreteness, 4) support the protection of the Johnson Amendment, and 5) conduct regular audits of the church to identify areas where undue political influence and false information exists.

Members of the UMC can return UM polity to its connectional and innovative roots by lending an open ear to the Commission on a Way Forward and to members of the LGBT+ community. It is easy to have an argument about any topic, but being a Christian means listening to stories and looking for meaning in them – Jesus spoke in parables, not arguments. That being said, the UMC needs to reduce its tolerance of threats made by special interest groups. It also needs to make room within the denomination for these conversations to happen. Special interest groups tend to be formed when people feel like they cannot safely exercise their beliefs within a given system on their own. When freedom of speech is denied in the church, people begin to form their own echo chambers which appear to exacerbate the disagreement. Connectionalism is deteriorated when divisiveness through the work of special interest groups is tolerated. This tolerance can be reduced by requiring churches to construct and adhere to district-approved behavioral covenants that promote inclusiveness when it comes to divisive issues. Doing so would place connectionalism and the abundance of God’s grace above any divisive issue that could ever face us.

I contend that the trial courts and Judicial Council of the UMC should temporarily exercise greater mercy in cases involving LGBT+ rights. I acknowledge that this breaches precedent, but flexibility must be exercised to leave room for the Holy Spirit to work. While the Book of Discipline currently excludes LGBT+ persons from getting married or ordained in the UMC, many members (especially in the U.S.) disagree with the current language. As the UMC discerns the best avenue for retaining unity, stripping clergy of their credentials in the midst of such divisiveness does not feel ethically sound. The proper solution to such a massive issue as this will not be found by silencing one side of the aisle. Connectionalism is deteriorated when people are pushed out of the connection.

Further, I suggest that members of the UMC should promote unity by discouraging misplaced concreteness in their discernment. As mentioned in chapter 1, misplaced concreteness is the fallacy that occurs when high levels of abstraction are encouraged in a field, resulting in unfairly concrete claims to be made about multifaceted subjects. At the essence of this assertion is my plea for members of the church to listen to each other intently. It is easy to sit in a trench; it is much harder to climb out of it. Regardless of where each layperson or clergyperson stands theologically, it is my hope that they might afford each other the room to listen and to be heard. Problems with easy solutions tend to be resolved quickly; this is not one of those problems.

The UMC's support for the Johnson Amendment, the tax law that prevents church leaders from supporting political candidates, should be codified in the Book of Discipline because its repeal might result in an unapologetic political takeover of the church. Without the Johnson Amendment, churches would be able to endorse political candidates and contribute to their campaigns tax-free. Repealing it would expand the divisiveness that already exists within the church, especially regarding human sexuality. This is not to say that churches should not engage in political discussions; Christianity is inherently political in the sense that it announces and beckons the coming of the kingdom of God. Repealing the Johnson Amendment would cause many to further abandon their trust in the church, which is a move away from connectionalism and toward self-interest.

Lastly, the UMC should conduct regular audits of the church to identify areas where undue political influence and false information exists. The UMC has a responsibility to uphold the primacy of Scripture in its dealings. To protect itself from being taken advantage of, UMC polity should be crafted to encourage members on either end of the political spectrum to move toward unity with one another rather than divisiveness (e.g., on the topic of homosexuality). In

an era where large companies such as Facebook and Google collect vast amounts of information from their users and sell targeted advertisement space to companies based on this information, the problem of divisiveness is growing. Advocating for unity will place connectionalism over self-interest and the abundance of God's grace over any mention of scarcity in UM polity.

Resolving the UMC's Aversion to Risk

John Wesley, the father of the Methodist church, was an innovator. He started the Holy Club at Oxford University in protest against the weak preaching and teaching of the Anglican Church. In a world that denied women preachers, he encouraged Sarah Crosby to “preach but to avoid as far as possible the form of preaching”⁴⁸. When Charles Perronet, a Methodist lay preacher, provided Communion to those listening to him, John Wesley's brother Charles was appalled that a lay member had done so. John nudged it off as “the logical conclusion of appointing lay people to preach”.⁴⁹ The fall of UM polity into self-interest and scarcity has deprived it of much of Wesley's innovative spirit. For example, only Elders can administer Communion and baptize people, unless a bishop grants sacramental authority to an ordained Deacon to do so. In response to this risk-aversion, the UMC could promote connectionalism and abundance by: 1) amending the Book of Discipline to promote flexibility over rigidity, 2) revising the guaranteed appointment system, 3) providing Deacons with the same authority to administer Communion and baptize people that Licensed Local Pastors (LLPs) receive, 4) incentivizing the development of Fresh Expressions and similar movements, and 5) making districts more connectional.

⁴⁸ Tomkins, *John Wesley*, 167.

⁴⁹ Tomkins, 150.

I propose that the UMC should amend the Book of Discipline to encourage both clergy and laity to act innovatively in the ministries they lead. A practical example might include designating certain churches as “experimental” or “laboratory” churches that are afforded a greater degree of leniency in regard to adherence to the Discipline and are provided with additional conference funding. In the Gulf Central District of the Florida Annual Conference, my home church (Anona UMC) is designated as such a church, but is not allowed to be permitted to act outside the boundaries of the Book of Discipline. It would benefit the church to follow the lead of companies like The LEGO Group, which pioneered the innovation matrix model. The model highlights the main functions of a given business (e.g., hospital visitation) and ranks them based on whether they marginally improve current operations, add greater value to an existing function, or attempt to redefine a function entirely.⁵⁰ By adopting this model and including language in the Book of Discipline to encourage clergy and laity to innovate, the UMC can make strides to become less risk-averse, less traditionalistic, and more connectional. A connectional church is willing to take on risks to stay relevant, challenge the status quo, and bear fruitful growth.

Another way UM polity could be improved to better reflect the UMC’s history of abundance and connectionalism over scarcity and self-interest is to revise the guaranteed appointment system. At the 2012 General Conference, legislation to end guaranteed appointment for ordained Elders passed, but it was swiftly overturned by the General Council. The Study of Ministry Commission, supported by the UMC under the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, found that “job tenure for elders limited the church’s ability ‘to respond to the primacy of missional needs’ and created a financially unstable oversupply of clergy in certain

⁵⁰ Robertson and Breen, *Brick by Brick*, 176.

conferences.”⁵¹ One change that could be made is to implement long-term review processes and continuing education requirements that assess and equip clergy for fruitfulness in ministry. If an elder proves to be unfruitful over the long-term, their conference should consider providing them with additional training or an exit plan. Training would empower the UMC to be more connectional in its overall mission and vision, and assessments would encourage ministers to take appropriate risks in their ministries rather than fall into static, traditionalistic, and mundane weekly schedules.

Further, UM polity should be adapted to equip Deacons with the authority to administer the Eucharist and baptize people to the same degree that LLPs have. While Elders are called to administer the sacraments, fewer and fewer young people are becoming ordained as Elders in the UMC. It is becoming inefficient to only equip Elders and LLPs with the authority to bless the elements and baptize people. The primacy of the Order of Elder’s devotion to the sacraments can be maintained while empowering other clergy to administer them as well. Currently, Deacons can administer the sacraments under the express authority of a District Superintendent or bishop, but this loophole is exercised only in rare instances. LLPs have the authority to administer the sacraments strictly within their charge or congregation. Allowing Deacons and to administer the sacraments with the same degree of authority as LLPs would free up time for them to explore more innovative and connectional ministry opportunities.

Fresh Expressions is a movement in the Florida Conference designed to connect UM churches with “nones and dones,” which include people who have no religious affiliation or are done with religion entirely. UM polity could easily include incentivizing structures for this innovative type of ministry. The Florida Conference has already shown significant support for

⁵¹ Hodges, “Guaranteed Appointment Debate to Resume at GC2016.”

this movement in part because Bishop Ken Carter co-authored the book *Fresh Expressions*. This opportunity, among others, is a chance for churches to combine their core competencies and engage in joint ventures. Fresh Expressions is a new means through which churches can break from their traditional way of doing things, innovate, and become increasingly connectional.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, UM polity must promote connectionalism within and between the districts in each of the annual conferences. In every one of the several pastoral internships I have served in, the pastor I served under has expressed the desire to be involved in pastoral accountability groups and to have a stronger positive working relationship with their District Superintendent. One of the greatest and most underutilized assets the UMC has at its disposal is its connectional heritage and ability. I would advocate for mutually beneficial collusion between churches. The UMC could be a global leader not only through connectionalism within itself, but through ecumenical connectionalism as well.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have presented very practical solutions to the problems of excess competition and increasing wealth inequality caused by the deviation of 21st century post-Fordist capitalism in the United States toward self-interest and scarcity. I have also proposed solutions to the divisive conflicts and risk-aversion caused by the deviation of UM polity toward traditionalism and self-interest. My hope is that these solutions would enable these fields to learn from each other's shortfalls and become increasingly mutually beneficial.

Final Thoughts

United Methodist polity and 21st century post-Fordist capitalism in the United States are deeply interconnected and can bear more fruit together than apart. This connection exists because

the value structures found within capitalism are deeply rooted in Christian history. While some decision makers have remained faithful to the original purpose of the value structures found within these fields, others have not. The historical value structures (abundance, connectionalism, and innovation) have been betrayed in part by both fields. United Methodists and business leaders can learn something new about their operations by examining these consistencies and deviations. United Methodists ought to recall their innovative roots in the Protestant Reformation and in the life of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodism. Businesspeople in the United States ought to recall the roots capitalism has in Christian history and make movements toward noncompetitive connectionalism and a mindset of abundance. With greater awareness of the relationship that exists between these fields, we can explore practical solutions to some of the greatest problems church and business leaders are facing today.

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