

FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Leland Ryken, a literature professor at Wheaton College, Illinois, USA, in his 1995 book *Redeeming the Time: a Christian Approach to Work and Leisure*, wrote that “There is no standard term for the ethical viewpoint that opposes the work ethic, but there clearly are individuals and societies that lack a work ethic. They are characterized by a high degree of idleness, low economic achievement, lack of pride in their work, low regard for the quality of work, tolerance of laziness, and a parasitic reliance on others to sustain their life” [20].

The theme of the present volume has been diligently (to use the word which will frequently appear throughout the chapters of this book) researched historically, sociologically, and theologically to provide a broad cultural scene as well as a moral and ethical perspective for approaching the Christian perception of work and wealth from the beginning of the European Reformation to the American Enlightenment. The concept of work and wealth is thus identified through, and measured by the Puritan and the original Protestant work ethic which, although not infrequently misrepresented even by eminent critics and scholars, provided our civilization with a rich heritage for Christian thinking on labor and acquisitiveness. Consciousness and identity, like their bearers, cannot be resurrected yet they can be restored and reconstructed through letters, diaries, journals, memoirs, autobiographies, commentaries, poems, testimonies, trial depositions, and testaments, alongside massive normative writings, such as statutes, decrees, treaties, prayers, meditations, sermons—both lay and ecclesiastical—and other instructions. They all offer abundant evidence of the daily lives, both private and social, of those contemporaries, and they record in detail their place and times as well as their material environment and multitude of settings which documented their attitudes to work because work not only produced and distributed goods but it also generated, transmitted, and stored information; it served functions crucial to society’s survival and well being as, according to Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, “Every one should put his hand to the work which falls to his share.”

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B.C.
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