

A Reflection on Labour

"Our churches have largely become reserves where their adherents retreat from the life and death battles against the forces of evil, having become slaves to their own passions and prisoners of their own learning. It involves all of us as we too, in many situations, become one-day Christians and six day pagans. Certainly to all intents and purposes we are limited to a Sunday gospel. We accept the formula and the values of enslavement and think they are good for us. We are in bondage to a sinful way of life - and this should not be"
(Robert N. Thompson, M.P.)

'Labour strife and problems have been in the news and will be for a long time to come. Shortly our attention will be focused on Labour Day. Workers across our country will be marching in support of the labour movement. Secularists will be speaking on the labour-management confrontation and strife based on a system of direct antagonism. Will evangelical Christians have a message on Labour Day, and will they be given a hearing?

When Wallace Spears wrote a few decades ago, for the *American Magazine*, an article entitled "Going to Work with God on Monday," he had no way of knowing how explosive the response would be. Letters poured in from all parts of the world, showing that the idea seemed novel. Fortunately the picture is changing. A Christian labour movement is now on the Canadian scene already for the last twenty years. The executive secretary of the Christian Labour Association of Canada explained in Ottawa to the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration that his organization is based on the belief that "all of life must be spent in the service of our maker and for the sake of our neighbour and we believe that should be done in obedience to what scriptures say about life and about 'man's task in creation. The movement is opposed to the philosophy of materialism, of bread and butter unionism, or of a ready cash unionism, or of all kinds of other isms which do not really approach the Biblical message for 'life.' The executive secretary said about his association: "We are not, a revivalist organization, we are an organization that in a very straightforward down-to-earth way seeks to apply these fundamental Christian principles to the workaday situation in which we find ourselves so that it becomes clearly evident that the Christian, gospel does have its own message for these situations."

The liberating gospel is not meant for the "soul" only. The gospel directs itself to every area of living, including labour. The liberating gospel must be proclaimed as so many go on all their lives in appalling bondage, with their self-respect becoming less and less with each succeeding year. So many workers in our technological society feel like cogs in a machine, for the real meaning of work is lost.

Much of our present labour strife is due to the dollar and cents issues. You get the impression that a raise in pay automatically assures more happiness, more meaning to work. A worker shortchanges himself if he thinks of his work merely as a product to be sold to the highest bidder. Work and its value cannot be measured solely with a

monetary yardstick. I want to take issue with the notion that more pay and shorter working hours are necessarily the sole good. True, most work in any modern industrialized society, far from seeming to be an adventure in God's creation, is felt to be boring. So many find no real challenge, no vision, no excitement in what they do for their daily living. Workers should try to revamp their workplaces in such a way that men can again meaningfully and joyfully work eight hours a day. Let the worker see again that his task is a holy calling, a vocation.

A Christian who sees his work in the light of the gospel will have the sense of joy that comes through the knowledge, that as humble as he is, he is a co-labourer with the living God, helping minutely in creation. The Bible begins with the emphasis on God as worker in making the world, and then stresses the creation of man in God's own image. On Labour Day we must go beyond bread and butter issues. The joy and meaning of work should be recaptured lest men and women will become no more than economic tools. The Bible has a high view of work,

If God is the Worker, then men and women, in order to fulfill their potentialities, must be workers, too. They are sharing in creation when they develop a farm, paint a picture, build a home or polish a floor." (Elton Trueblood)

Johan D. Tangelder
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