

A Labour Day Mediation (1980)

I have heard it said: "Christianity is a private affair. A Christian should not mix his faith with the daily issues of life." But such suggestions are contrary to Biblical teaching. The Bible compels us to relate our Christian faith to every aspect of life, including labour.

The Christian faith is not just a contemplative religion. It is not merely a vehicle to carry someone into heaven. It is all that and more. The Christian working man is someone who goes into his work and tries to act on his Christian view of life. He cannot be satisfied until he has seen the relationship between his faith and daily life. A Christian must take his faith along when he goes to work. He cannot leave it behind.

Man is not just a consumer, nor a thing, nor a economic animal, nor an extension of a machine. He is God's image bearer, and a worshipper. Worship is not limited to the praising of God on Sundays in church. Worship is simply giving God the worth due to Him. Man's infinite value can only be appreciated in relationship to his Creator. If worship is giving God His worth, it may not be limited to religious duty. Worship is a life-time activity.

But someone may object and say: "Isn't it overly idealistic to promote work as worshipping activity? How can a man or woman on the assembly line see work as worship? Don't these feed the family and have a few extras? And has work not become impersonal in so many places? The workers in the huge industrial complexes seem only a part of the tools. They see a part of the product but not the finished product. Aren't machines threatening to dehumanize industrial man?"

These objections and questions are understandable and soul-searching. But the Gospel message calls us back from mechanist drudgery to meaningful work. "Work," writes George Carey in *I Believe In Man*, "is not merely for slaves, neither is it merely a means to a an end; but it is the task assigned by God so that many may develop according to God's plan, expressing his response joyfully and freely."

This view of life creates problems for many Christian workers. They cannot be satisfied with the secularist approach of the major labour unions in Canada. Many Christian workers would like to join an organization which holds a Biblical view of and approach to labour. However, this is very difficult in our present system. Many are forced to join a union, whether they like it or not. Many have to sign a union card if they want to work at a certain place. They have to say "yes" to a humanistic approach to work.

In our country, there is a lack of freedom of association. Yet this freedom of association principle was advocated by Samuel Gompers, the founder of the American Federation of Labour. The introduction to his autobiography contains this very interesting statement: "He founded the American Federation of Labour on the bedrock of voluntarism. He believed with his own soul in personal freedom, in democratic

government and in the ultimate triumph of voluntary human co-operation over any form of compulsion or dictatorship."

This freedom of association principle is denied by secular labour unions. This is certainly opposed to the Charter of the United Nations (Article 1 and 55). Why should a Christian who wants to base his program on the Bible be forced to join a secular union? I believe in a pluralistic society. In a free society a man should be able to join (or not join) any organization of his choice.

In our complex industrial society, Christians don't come to labour issues empty handed. They come with the Bible. I believe that only a Biblical approach can bring healing and peace to the world of work.

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