

## **Work - Christian Service**

Strikes, threats of strikes and walkouts have marred the labour scene again. These problems will continue to be with us for years to come. As long as labour's emphasis is on the wage and fringe benefits, you will have tension. If we ever want to come to a satisfactory solution of what is ailing, we must consider the meaning of work.

The character of work is changing. Automatic machinery has taken away much of the burden of work, but also largely its fulfillment. How many workmen on the assembly line can still delight in the final product of their factory? Speed has replaced skill and initiative. Labour, joy and mass production quite often don't go together.

Dr. Paul Tournier finds that most people in our day do not love their work. In our urban technological culture most children don't see the fruit of their parent's labour nor do they have an idea of the relationship of work to the food they eat.

The changing character of work is well illustrated by slogans found on walls. From a sign beneath a clock in a sixth-grade classroom in New York, in 1930, the following was taken:

Work  
Thank God for the Might of It!  
The Glory, the Strength, The Delight of It!

And here are three 'non-inspirational mottoes' seen in business offices in recent years:

I May Look Busy, but I'm Only Confused.  
Your Call Has Climaxed an Already Dull Day.  
Time Is Valuable - Why Waste It Working?

This low view of work triggers the question: "Is America becoming a leisure oriented or consumer oriented society characterized by the decline of the 'Protestant Ethic', a general withdrawal from work, and an intensified search for substitute leisure commitments?"

The meaning of work should be re-thought. The Protestant work ethic has too long been based on "economic success." Financial success was considered as a symbol of man's worth. A Christian businessman said that "there is no inherent conflict between wealth and heavenly benefits, keeping one eye on Jerusalem, the other on Wall Street. First you get saved, he said earnestly. "Then you get wealth. That way you don't have to worry."

But the yardstick of man's worth is not based on 'economic success'. This is not Biblical at all!

Why work? Some young students have asked, "A person works hard for what? Only to die, the same as the person who didn't work at all." This is a legitimate question. The ancient Greeks and the Romans "saw work as a painful, humiliating necessity." In Old Testament times we find that all work, no matter how menial, is honourable and pleasing to God. Idleness and dishonourable work are considered as unworthy of man and offensive. The New Testament has also a high view of work. The church, however, soon developed a split level way of thinking through the influence of Greek philosophy. And until the reformation the church maintained this dichotomy "between religious piety, expressed in meditation and prayer, and worldly activity, expressed in labour."

The Reformers revived the idea that all honest work is honourable and pleasing to God. Christians should not divide life in the sacred and the secular. But many still have not rid themselves of this dichotomy. Recently I received a bulletin of a seminary which talks about "seminary students who will be engaged in fulltime Christian service."

We should forget about saying that a minister is in full time Christian service and a carpenter is engaged in secular work. In whatever vocation we find ourselves, we are in Christian service. Work is the exercise of our creative gifts in holy service to God. Work has meaning when it is considered this way.

Dorothy Sayers points to work as "a way of life in which the nature of man should find its proper exercise and delight and so fulfill itself to the glory of God." It is a creative activity that should be undertaken for the love of work itself.

"Man, made in God's image," continues Miss Sayers, "should make things as God makes them, for the sake of doing well a thing that is well worth doing. Work," she concludes, "is not primarily a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do." Work should give meaning and satisfaction to life. In the labour and management crisis of today, the question of the meaning of work and its purpose should have precedence over bread and butter issues.

The Christian view of work goes beyond dollars and cents questions. It speaks to the whole of man and his particular need. To give to the worker renewed purpose in his work is the best thing that could happen in our technological age.

"To help a worker discover a fresh attraction in his daily work," says Dr. Paul Tournier, "is to help live a fuller and very often a healthier life." I say Amen to that!

Johan D. Tangelder  
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