

WORK MUST LIVE!

If one looks at the work-is-dead thesis in the light of contemporary Catholic social teaching, their respective notions of work appear to be radically at odds with each other.

For the work-is-dead advocates, the only real problem in unemployment is lack of income. If we can rearrange the structures of society so that all have a more or less equal share of the national wealth, the problem of unemployment will be solved.

Taking Pope John Paul II's document on human work (*Laborem Exercens* - 1981), we find a different view: work is at the centre of human existence, since it fulfills a variety of other needs as well as that of providing an income for workers.

1. Work is basic to the human family in the Biblical vision, since it is through work that men and women "subdue the earth", developing its resources and transforming it so that it meets human needs (L.E. 4).
2. Every person needs work in order to develop as a human being. As the Pope puts it, "when a person works, not only are things and society altered, but one's own humanity develops as well" (L.E. 26). In other words, work is that activity which is most directly involved with human dignity; a life of perpetual leisure would be a trivialised, even meaningless, life.

3. People need work, not only for personal development, but also because of their innate need to contribute to the well-being of others; their immediate family, their community, their country (L.E. 16). There is a strong sense of moral obligation in people which makes them desire to give to others, and which joblessness frustrates.

4. Work, in contributing to the better ordering of human society, is "of vital concern to the Kingdom of God" (L.E. 27). By enduring the toil entailed in work, one can be sharing in the paschal mystery (L.E. 27).

Many of these themes are drawn together in the following words:

"When man works, he wishes the fruit of his work to be used by himself and others, and he wishes to be able to take part in the very work process as a sharer in responsibility and creativity at the work bench to which he applies himself." (L.E. 15)

The need to assert the human person's place in creation, the drive towards realising one's humanity in creative work, the moral urge to help others, "the christian possibility of sharing lovingly in the work that Christ came to do" (L.E. 27); all these are key elements in any analysis of the importance of work. ■