

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 57

Human Work – The duty to cultivate and care for the earth 2

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How many of us complain that we do not have enough hours in the day to do what we need to do, or that we work too hard? But we often bear work and grin because – for many of us, if we don't work, we don't eat or sleep.

Also many of us if we can find the time, attempt to deal with this “over work” by either attending some time management or stress management seminar or reading books on managing stress and time. And of course, there are those of us who actually seek out more work – because we just can't sit still, we get bored easily or are seeking to be super-human, or in a hurry to achieve, or unfortunately trying to escape from other problems.

The Compendium tells us that “Work has a place of honour because it is a source of riches, or at least of the conditions for a decent life, and is, in principle, an effective instrument against poverty (cf Proverbs 10:4). But one must not succumb to the temptation of making an idol of work, for the ultimate and definitive meaning of life is not found in work.

Work is essential, but it is God – and not work - who is the origin of life and the final goal of man. The underlying principle of wisdom in fact is the fear of the Lord. The demand of justice, which stems from it, precedes concerns for profit: “Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it” (Pr 15:16). “Better to have little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice” (Pr 16:8).”

Many of us work daily and do not see our work as a means, but rather as an end. Most persons when they choose their programmes of study, have their desired profession as the sole basis of their decision. There is often little thought of how this profession can help fulfill God's purpose for themselves.

Work can for all of us be an opportunity to further God's work and to fulfill God's purpose for our lives. If we thought of work in this way – work will take on a whole different meaning for many of us – we may be less stressed and look forward to work – rather than view it as the drudgery the vast majority of persons see it as.

Another crucial reason why we can be overwhelmed by work is the fact that many of us do not take sufficient rest. Many of us refuse to accept that we cannot be perfect all the time, or that we cannot be all things to all people, or that part of caring for our physical selves requires rest - after all, hard work never killed anyone.

“The apex of biblical teaching on work is the commandment of the Sabbath rest. For man, bound as he is to the necessity of work, this rest opens to the prospect of a fuller freedom, that of the eternal Sabbath (cf Heb 4:9-10). Rest gives men and women the possibility to remember and experience anew God's work, from Creation to Redemption, to recognise themselves as his work

(cf Eph 2:10), and to give thanks for their lives and for their subsistence to him who is their author.”

There are those of us, who because of scarcity of jobs and the inability to leave jobs as we would like, are in fact forced to work more than is healthy. Reference here is made to employers who abuse staff in terms of what is required.

The Compendium tells us that, “the memory and the experience of the Sabbath constitute a barrier against becoming slaves to work, whether voluntarily or by force, and against every kind of exploitation, hidden or evident. In fact, the Sabbath rest, besides making it possible for people to participate in the worship of God, was instituted in defence of the poor. Its function is also that of freeing people from the antisocial degeneration of human work.

The Sabbath rest can even last a year; this entails the expropriation of the fruits of the earth on behalf of the poor and the suspension of the property rights of landowners: For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild beasts may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard (Ex 23:10-11). This custom responds to a profound intuition: the accumulation of goods by some can sometimes cause others to be deprived of goods.”

Let us all seek to have the right balance of work and rest in our lives; and for those of us who have control over the work of others, we must in all good conscience ensure that they too have the right balance of work and rest to ensure that they too are able to fulfill God’s purpose for their lives.

Next week we look at Jesus a man of work.