

## COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 60

### Human work – The duty to work

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The awareness that the *form of this world is passing away* (1 Cor 7:31) is not an exoneration from being involved in the world, and even less from work (cf 2 Thess 3:7-15), which is an integral part of the human condition, although not the only purpose of life.

In Trinidad and Tobago there are complaints of a poor work ethic, in both the public and private sectors, and also among young persons. In fact, the poor work ethic associated with young persons is linked to high crime rates currently experienced here – persons do not want to work hard to achieve their goals.

While, we are cautioned that work in itself is not the sole purpose of life and we are not to be addicted to it, we must however not make this an excuse not to work. We are told, in fact, “no Christian, in light of the fact that he belongs to a united and fraternal community, should feel that he has the right not to work and to live at the expense of others (cf 2 Thess 3:6-12).

Rather, all are charged by the Apostle Paul to make it a point of honour to work with their own hands, so as to “*be dependent on nobody*” (1 Thess 4:12), and to practice a solidarity which is also material by sharing the fruits of their labour with “*those in need*” (Eph 4:28).

A key point made is that we must not be dependent on others, once we are able, we must work to earn our keep. This in itself can be a very fulfilling experience; many young persons in school cannot wait to be working, as this will enable them to achieve many of their goals, and also allow them to make a mark in the world, whether they are business manager, musician, sportsman or plumber.

We are also reminded of the need to share the benefits of our labour with others who are in need – there are many who have genuine reasons for not being able to work. We belong to a community, and do not exist independently of each other; hence our work is to benefit everyone we come into contact with.

The flip side of the coin is, when persons work they must be paid fairly for their efforts by their employers. “Saint James defends the trampled rights of workers: *Behold, the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts* (James 5:4). Believers are to undertake their work in the style of Christ and make it an occasion for Christian witness, commanding the *respect of outsiders* (1Thess 4:12).”

Some persons view work as servitude and slavery, and degrading; and even if they do not view all work in this way, many view particular jobs and types of work in this way; but “the Fathers of the Church do not consider work as an *opus servile* – although the culture of their day maintained precisely that such was the case – but always as an *opus humanum*, and they tend to hold all its various expressions in honour.

By means of work, man governs the world with God; together with God he is its lord and accomplishes good things for himself and for others.”

All work is meant to serve God’s purpose. Many persons look down on particular jobs such as persons who serve in restaurants and people who keep the environment clean. If there were not persons who worked for us in restaurants, many of us would not have been afforded an environment where we could celebrate and bond with loved ones.

If persons did not clean the drains, roads, our homes, many of us would be too ill to work to earn our keep. All jobs and vocations are part of God’s plan to accomplish this for himself and for others.

“Idleness is harmful to man’s being, whereas activity is good for his body and soul (*Acta Apostolorum Homiliae*). Christians are called to work not only to provide themselves with bread, but also in acceptance of their poorer neighbours, to whom the Lord has commanded them to give food, drink, clothing, welcome, care and companionship (cf Mt 25:35-36). Every worker, Saint Ambrose contends, is the hand of Christ that continues to create and to do good (*De Obitu Valentiniani Consolatio*).”

“By his work and industriousness, man – who has a share in the divine art and wisdom – makes creation, the cosmos already ordered by the Father, more beautiful (*Adversus Haereses*). He summons the social and community energies that increase the common good (*Orationes*), above all to the benefit of those who are neediest.

Human work, directed to charity as its final goal, becomes an occasion for contemplation, it becomes devout prayer, vigilantly rising towards and in anxious hope of the day that will not end. In this superior vision, work, a punishment and at the same time a reward of human activity, involves another relationship, the essentially religious one, which has been happily expressed in the Benedictine formula: *ora et labora!*

The religious fact confers on human work an enlivening and redeeming spirituality. Such a connection between work and religion reflects the mysterious but real alliance, which intervenes between human action and the providential action of God (*L’Osservatore Romano*).”

Next week we deal with the prophetic value of *Rerum Novarum*.