

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 63

The subjective and objective dimensions of work 2 – The social aspect of work

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Many of us when we are faced with people problems at work, such as unfair treatment at the hand of bosses or other co-workers and/or customers, often as a coping mechanism, say quite flatly “I don’t live here”, and we brush off inconveniences and our general displeasure. But is this a fair thing to do? The fact is that human work has an intrinsic social dimension.

“A person’s work, in fact, is naturally connected with that of other people. Today ‘more than ever, work is work with others and work for others’. It is a matter of doing something for someone else’ (*Centesimus Annus*).

The fruits of work offer occasions for exchange, relationship and encounter. Work, therefore, cannot be properly evaluated if its social nature is not taken into account: “For man’s productive effort cannot yield its fruits unless a truly social and organic body exists, unless a social and juridical order watches over the exercise of work, unless the various occupations, being interdependent, cooperate with and mutually complete one another, and, what is still more important, unless mind, material things, and work combine and form as it were a single whole. Therefore, where the social and individual nature of work is neglected, it will be impossible to evaluate work justly and pay it according to justice (*Quadragesimo Anno*)”.

This passage in the *Compendium* highlights the extreme importance of the social and relational aspect of work. How do we know that our work is successful? It must meet the needs of somebody or bodies. And, further, the success of our activities is dependent on the contribution of others, whether in a small way or a grand one.

This explains the need for adequate time being spent on organisational design and structures in the work place and even in service organisations where important work takes place. This aids employers in truly understanding jobs and their requirements, hence ensuring that adequate systems including compensation are put in place to support the nature of the work.

Significant attention must therefore be placed on improving relationships in the workplace. These include managers/leaders actively promoting initiatives that encourage team-building and healthy work relationships and interactions. Team-building retreats, staff functions and outings are therefore not to be scoffed at, but taken very seriously by both staff and management, as they emphasise that the worker is not an island or entity by him/herself. They remind us as the *Compendium* tells us that work is also “an obligation, that is to say, a duty on the part of man.” (*Laborem Exercens*).

Man must work, both because the Creator has commanded it and in order to respond to the need to maintain and develop his own humanity. Work is presented as a moral obligation with respect to one’s neighbour, which in the first place is one’s own family, but also the society to which one belongs, the nation of which one is son or daughter, the entire human family of which one is

member. We are heirs of the work of generations and at the same time shapers of the future of all who will live after us.”

Work confirms the profound identity of men and women created in the image and likeness of God: “As man, through his work, becomes more and more the master of the earth, and as he confirms his dominion over the visible world, again through his work, he nevertheless remains in every case and at every phase of this process within the Creator’s original ordering.

And this ordering remains necessarily and indissolubly linked with the fact that man was created, as male and female, in the image of God (*Laborem Exercens*). This describes human activity in the universe: men and women are not its owner, but those whom it is entrusted, called to reflect in their own manner of working the image of him whose likeness they are made.

Next week we look at Part three of Chapter 6b – The relationship between labour and capital.