

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 68

The dignity of work – Rest from work

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The issue of rest was dealt with in previous articles. Today, we look again at this issue of rest, in particular how it relates to the Church's Holy Days of Obligation and its role in our spiritual growth and renewal.

It is an unfortunate fact that in day-to-day living we do not realise the extraordinary importance of relaxation.

The Social Doctrine of the Church indicates that, "rest from work is a right (*Gaudium et Spes*). As God rested on the seventh day from all the work which he had done (Gen 2:2), so too men and women, created in his image, are to enjoy sufficient rest and free time that will allow them to tend to their family, cultural, social and religious life (*Gaudium et Spes*). The institution of the Lord's Day contributes to this (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*)."

On Sundays and other Holy Days of Obligation, believers must refrain from "engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, the performance of the works of mercy, and the appropriate relaxation of mind and body (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*)."

Family needs and service of great importance to society constitute legitimate excuses from the obligation of Sunday rest, but these must not create habits that are prejudicial to religion, family life or health.

The last point is very important. While family needs and service of great importance to the society provide legitimate excuses from Sunday rest, they indicate that this must not become habitual, to the point it negatively affects family life, health and religion.

There can be real debate as to what activities constitute a legitimate excuse. Many organisations have meetings on a Sunday, or plan events that require much preparation and hard work on Sundays on a regular enough basis.

Is this wrong? Some may think it is not, because many times when there are activities on Sunday, people are able to find a Church service that they can attend, which will still allow participation in other activities. But there are the obligations of family life and also respect for one's health.

"Sunday is a day that should be made holy by charitable activity, devoting time to family and relatives, as well as to the sick, the infirm and the elderly. One must not forget the 'brethren who have the same needs and the same rights, yet cannot rest from work because of poverty and misery' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*). Moreover, Sunday is

an appropriate time for the reflection, silence, study and meditation that foster the growth of the interior Christian life.”

This time for spiritual renewal is probably the one activity that people most neglect. Even if time is made for family activities, reaching out to the poor and relaxing, many persons do not think of reflecting and spending time in solitude with God – and this is an essential ingredient to making spiritual progress and deepening one’s relationship with Christ.

“Believers should distinguish themselves on this day too by their moderation, avoiding the excesses and certainly the violence that mass entertainment sometimes occasions (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

The Lord’s Day should always be lived as a day of liberation that allows us to take part in ‘the festal gathering and the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven’ (cf Heb 12:22-23), anticipating thus the celebration of the definitive Passover in the glory of heaven (*Dies Domini*).”

“Public authorities have the duty to ensure that, for reasons of economic productivity, citizens are not denied time for rest and divine worship. Employers have an analogous obligation regarding their employees (*Rerum Novarum*).

Christians, in respect of religious freedom and of the common good of all, should seek to have Sundays and the Church’s Holy Days recognised as legal holidays. ‘They have to give everyone a public example of prayer, respect and joy, and defend their traditions as a precious contribution to the spiritual life of society (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*). ‘Every Christian should avoid making unnecessary demands on others that would hinder them from observing the Lord’s Day’ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*).”

The issue of Holy Days of Obligation and public holidays, is topical here in Trinidad and Tobago. This last passage from the *Compendium* advises us that in the interest of ensuring that our society continues to be religiously/spiritually grounded, we should ensure that those days which are Holy Days of Obligation are kept as legal holidays.

Hence in this current debate in Trinidad and Tobago, it is the Church’s responsibility to ensure that those days, which are essential for us to observe religious traditions are in fact kept, and not the ones that are not Holy Days of Obligation.

Next week we move into Part IV of Chapter 6 – The Right to Work

Persons interested in purchasing the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, please contact the Social Justice Desk, Archbishop’s House at 622-6680.