

The Dignity of Manual Labor

The Labor Day Statement of Pope Paul VI, issued on Europe's Labor Day (May 1), and that of the United States Catholic Conference, prepared for our own September Celebration, express a common concern of the Church in a special way for the plight of the common laborer who earns his living by the toil of his hands and the sweat of his brow.



The Church's insistence on the dignity of manual labor has been voiced in countless Papal documents and theological treatises. It has received its inspiration from the example of Christ Who identified Himself with the ordinary workingman as He became known to all as the foster son of the Carpenter Joseph.

The dignity of labor is a theme that bears repetition in season and out of season. Msgr. George G. Higgins, secretary for research of the United States Catholic Conference, assures us that it is a most timely topic for the American scene: "It would be wide of the mark to assume that, because of our phenomenal progress in the field of technology and the rapid improvement in our standard of living, there is no need to be concerned about the dignity of labor in general and of manual labor in particular. To the contrary, there is mounting evidence that technological progress has created almost as many problems for a large segment of the working force as it has thus far managed to solve."

What seems to be the greatest unsolved

problem? Msgr. Higgins sees it as the sheer boredom and the meaninglessness of so many of today's dead-end occupations and the low esteem in which our society seems to hold these occupations. More and more aggrieved workers are making their feelings known. While they need higher wages and seek a fairer distribution of the national income, they want above all to find a sense of meaning in the work they are required to do and to be recognized by society as men of dignity and worth. As one frustrated worker summed it up: "What all of us are looking for is a calling, not just a job. Most of us have jobs that are too small for our spirit."

There are no easy remedies for this ennui which afflicts so many unskilled or semi-skilled workers, and certainly none at all for those who regard labor of any kind as a loathsome disease. But we must all work to make life worth living for those who are still interested in their personal worth and dignity.

Social justice demands that we work for a change in the system that has entrapped men, and fight personally and through association with others for the right order of values in society.

It would be helpful, too, for all — even those who complain of the boredom of work — to reflect on the dignity of all forms of work and develop for themselves a deepening sense of vocation. A Christian theology of work which derives from the Gospel message starts from the premise that people should work not merely to earn a living, not merely to develop their own personal growth, not merely to serve the

needs of their fellowmen, but more profoundly, because by their labor they become partners in the work of bringing God's creation to perfection. Such a sense of vocation can make even seemingly insignificant work a pleasant task.

Let me cite two stories which exemplify this sense of vocation:

1) Three men working on Church property were constructing a building. To the one question of a passerby, "What are you doing?", three answers were given: The first said, "I am earning three dollars per hour." The second: "I am squaring this stone." The third, with the great vision of the nobility of his task: "I am building a Cathedral." Only the third man had achieved the full sense of vocation.

2) A grave-digger from my home town who had acquired a sense of vocation even in his humble task stood proudly at graveside during every committal service, anxious for compliments for his fine work. The townsfolk generally considered him to have all his strength in arms and shoulders and nothing from the neck upward. One day he said to me: "Father, you have your work to do and I have mine." The temptation was strong to reply: "I wager I could learn yours much more quickly than you could learn mine." I did not succumb, thank God. He then offered his theology of labor with its challenges to personal dignity: "No two graves are alike. Each has to be a certain depth and width and the soil is never the same in two locations." How can we improve on that attitude? It is a Labor Day Message that we all need to hear.

The Slot Man

Mail . . . A Many Splendored Thing

By Carmen Viglucci

After a recent column about Babe Ruth I received in the mail an account of another episode in his life.



Taken from "Into Each Life" by C. M. Brisette, OSM, the story describes a memorial service for Knute Rockne between halves of a Notre Dame-Army football game just months after the football coach's death in an airplane crash.

Politicians and generals issued eulogies ranging from well-done to over-done then it became Babe Ruth's lot to follow the flowery rhetoric.

"I know I can't improve on all that has been said," the story quotes the Babe, "it's

raining in South Bend and no one kneels at Rock's grave . . . how about all you kids saying a Hail Mary for his soul, that's the only thing that counts now."

Also from readers:

Helen Schultz of Newfield sends along a clipping of an article by Dr. Gloria V. Heffernan which appeared in the Chicago Tribune and the Wanderer.

Dr. Heffernan has still another view of abortion seeing it the "final mechanical insult" to women. In "Abortion Exploits Women", Dr. Heffernan says that "the strange compulsion for abortion is in reality the ultimate exploitation of women by immature men: technocrats, generally, imbued with a myopic sense of social awareness and unable to interpret or control their own sexuality.

"The playboys of the Western world and the authoritarian 'adolescents' of the Socialist world sacrifice their women in order to preserve their dream of libidinal freedom. It is the woman who must go to surgery over and over again to insure this dream.

"It is no surprise," Dr. Heffernan continues, "that Playboy Foundation money is now competing with Rockefeller Foundation money to promote the concept of permissive abortion. The rich man's solution has become the puerile male's solution and the last vestige of responsibility and commitment has disappeared."

She concludes with an appeal to women to "say to puerile men that the game is over. You can no longer exploit our bodies either in your centerfold or in your hospitals."

Editorial

AMA Journal Poses Ominous Question

The latest Gallup Poll which says that 56 per cent of the nation's Catholics believe that the decision to terminate pregnancy should be made "solely by a woman and her physician" has drawn rebuttal from Msgr. James T. McHugh of the U.S. Catholic Conference Family Life Division.

Msgr. McHugh rightfully criticized the findings because the question placed the problem in the narrow perspective of a woman's health. He feels that if the poll asked people if they favor abortion on demand that the results would be diametrically different. (See story on Page 2).

While this latest testing of public opinion, and we wonder if it wasn't timed to help politicians with their campaigns, garnered headlines a more serious aspect of abortion has come to light through the

pages of the Journal of the American Medical Association.

In a letter to the editor, Dr. Morton A. Stenchever of the University of Utah College of Medicine says "a recent situation pointed out for me a possible abuse of prenatal chromosome evaluation of the fetus."

The doctor then described a case where a 38-year-old mother of a boy and two girls asked her obstetrician to perform an amniocentesis, a means of prenatal diagnosis of conditions associated with severe mental subnormality.

A chromosomally normal female was diagnosed.

"When the patient was given the news," says Dr. Stenchever's letter, "she stated that she did not wish to carry a female child and sought a therapeutic

abortion. It became obvious after discussing the matter with the patient and her husband that they desired another son and had decided on this course of action to insure obtaining this goal."

The doctor then points out that "this situation may well become a common occurrence as the public becomes aware of selecting infants of a desired sex."

The AMA Journal editorialized (July 24, 1972) about the case:

"The claimed fear about an abnormal infant was a subterfuge; the couple really wanted to know the sex of the fetus, being desirous of having a son.

"Abortion is called 'therapeutic.' What name should be given to the abortion demanded solely because the sex of the fetus displeases the parents to be?"