

The Most Important "Business" in the children

When John Paul II was speaking about the “gospel of work”, he was making us discover that work activities contain a supernatural horizon full of hope. Carried out with Christian meaning, that task is converted into a source of humanization for families, for business undertakings, for the whole of society

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Since the times of classical antiquity there has always existed a kind of dichotomy between the big story and the little story, between the extraordinary and the day-to-day. On one side there were the great feats – real or imaginary – of the kings and the heroes; on the other, the usual task, often tiring, that filled the greater part of the hours of normal people, with which they sustained their family.

It was habitual, also in Christian countries, to think of work as a punishment from God. People easily remembered that, when Yahweh drove our first parents out of the garden of Eden after original sin, he had said to them: “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread ..”; and they forgot, on the other hand, the divine mandate, when the Lord indicated to the man and the woman, made in his image and likeness: “Be

fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it;...”

For centuries work – especially (though not only) manual work – was considered as a reality lacking in dignity, from which anyone who was able to, by fortune, birth, or social position, freed himself. Nowadays, what injures human dignity is not work but its opposite: unemployment. In this sense, the change of perspective has a positive aspect. The social doctrine of the Church, beginning with the teachings of the Pontiffs of the 19th century, has had a lot to do with this transformation.

The life and writings of spiritual authors, which finds an interesting point of intersection with the social doctrine of the Church, has also had an influence. Several authors of the 20th century have dealt with this topic, and St. Josemaria Escriva, the

founder of Opus Dei, has done this in a specially significant way.

Commenting on the divine mandate to Adam to till the ground, he affirmed that work is something dignified and holy, “an indispensable means which God has entrusted to us here on this earth. It is meant to fill out our days and make us sharers in his creative power. It enables us to earn our living and, at the same time, to reap ‘the fruits of eternal life’ (Jn, 4,36)” {Friends of God, No. 57}.

Thanks to the change of evaluation which developed in the last century, professional tasks have been recognized as an ordinary activity that does not lower human dignity. Unfortunately, however, dedication to these occupations means for many the new dimension of the extraordinary, that which allows them to escape from ordinary life. Professional success at all costs occupies the centre of the new

scenario, where the epic – the dreams of great achievements - is what matters; and the ethical – the human and supernatural evaluation of the ordinary circumstances – frequently moves into second place.

Ordinary life has been reduced today, in practice to domestic life: the family presents itself to us, therefore, as the modern Cinderella, the great loser of this work fever. It is obvious, in effect, that a culture characterized by “stajanovist” workers, by fathers and mothers absent from the home, has very negative repercussions on the family.

Unfortunately, at times, it is easier today to break a marriage than to break a professional contract. But this is not the only good that is put in danger by the lack of moderation in work. In the face of the excessive growth in juvenile violence, for example, there is also a growing

number of those who suspect that the causes of the phenomenon has something to do with this reversal of values, with the predomination of the productive frenzy, which leads to the abandonment of the unifying strength of the family.

An absent father, more interested in his own career than in his children, ceases to be a firm point of reference. Similarly, the relationship with an absent mother ends up being, in fact, a dispensable relationship, no matter how much in the heart of hearts she is considered to be always necessary. A school, for example, that sacrifices the authentic human formation of the students to criteria of efficiency, does not help the young people to have a serene channel, an elaborated form, for the impulses of their sensitivity.

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making us discover that work activities contain a supernatural horizon full of hope. Carried out with Christian meaning, that task is converted into a source of humanization for families, for business undertakings, for the whole of society.

“The most important ‘business’ is the children”, St. Josemaria Escriva said on one occasion to a businessman, to dissuade him from an excessive dedication to work at the expense of the family.

St. Josemaria Escriva passed away thirty years ago, on 26 June 1975. Today his message fills us anew with hope. In the present day world, which is sending a continual barrage of questions to mankind, in a permanent quest for meaning, the message of St. Josemaria reminds us of that great truth which Benedict XVI has wanted to highlight once

again, when he proclaimed that the Church is alive. The church offers a treasure of hidden responses, which can be converted into lights that guide our existence.

The Guardian, Lagos, Nigeria,
by Bishop Javier Echevarriá

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