

Get the Word!

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There is a Word for us today, a Word that can regenerate our lives. But, that Word is not at our disposal. We cannot manipulate it and fit it into our scheme of things. We cannot turn it into our profit. Instead, God, by His Word, takes hold of us and subjects us to His Will. His Word, become flesh in Jesus Christ, puts us at *His* disposal. By this awesome Word, God judges our lives; and by this same word, God mercifully restores and heals us, if we surrender to its power.

Our ideas – about authority and freedom, about responsibility and submission, about private ownership and co-determination, about communal relationships and the nature of the modern business enterprise, and many more – are often a mixture of Scriptural insights and Humanistic beliefs. With respect to all these ideas the Word of God comes to us each day again and urges us: “Do not be conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)

Having our minds remade and thus our whole nature changed is not a matter of becoming more intelligent with respect to economic affairs, but of daily repentance and daily surrender. Only then shall we be able to deepen our understanding of modern labour and business problems, and only then shall we find the way in our own practices. To all those, both Christians and Non-Christians, who refuse to submit their economic practices to the judgment of the Word of God and who, to a greater or lesser degree, continue to live by the Spirit of secular Humanism, the command of Romans 12 can only be an offense. Tonight I would call your attention particularly to the scriptural Directive with regard to two fundamental problems in the area of labour, namely, to the meaning of our daily work and of our responsibility as workers. These two aspects of laboring are very closely interrelated.

To begin to see something of the radical nature and the far-reaching implications of God’s Directive, by which we can truly begin to discern and find our way economically and otherwise – the Word is not far off but very near! –we must first of all look at our present situation for a few moments. Our concern this evening could not be to arrive at a detailed, theoretical analysis of our current

social, economic, political situation. Others, much more qualified than I, have already begun this very necessary task. Rather, we must come to see clearly the *religious direction* which modern business and labour manifest today. The Word of God calls us to discern and to test the *spirits* that are at work in the economic sphere, for only then shall we be able to see the direction in which the spirit of God wants to lead us.

For some time the Chicago newspapers have been running an advertisement for a particular television program. It reads as follows:

Where does it say a news *show* can't have some *fun*? It's a serious consideration. Is a news *show* something you *endure*? Or is it something you *enjoy*? Should it present the *cold, hard facts* – and nothing but? Or should it inform and comment and enlighten *and entertain*? We let our newsmen decide for themselves by simply letting them be themselves. And what they happen to be -- besides *expert* news, sports and weathermen – are four really *pleasant guys*. Who *like* doing what they do. And who share a deep concern for what goes into their *show*. So that what comes out of their *show* is the most *enjoyable* style of news reporting that you've ever seen. So different, you won't see it on any other *show* but ours. Funny. But maybe that's why more and more Chicagoans aren't watching any other news *show* but ours. (Flynn-Daly Eyewitness News. Emphasis added.)

The advertisement shows four smiling characters who have a lot of he-man sex-appeal. Their broad smiles almost give you the impression that they are advertising Ultrabrite toothpaste, which the Colgate-Palmolive Company produces. These four pleasantly smiling guys put on quite a show and they are really entertaining. However, there is something deeply disturbing about this advertisement. More clearly than many other advertisements perhaps, it manifests a demonic spirit. Imagine for a moment the late-news program on television:

Ladies and gentlemen, here is the Flynn-Daly eyewitness news. First the highlights: today the death-toll of the Vietnam war rose above that of the Korean war; still no relief for the dying and suffering Biafran women and

children; a new crisis threatens the Middle-East; the Paris peace talks are still not under way because of disagreement about table arrangements; the crime rate for our nation has again risen above that of last year. Details of these highlights and other entertaining stories after this commercial.

The news is often unsettling; the cold, hard facts are something that you endure. This kind of news does not fit in very well with the other programs.

No trouble, however, the news can be dressed up. Four smiling characters, a friendly presentation and some hilarious incidents will go a long way in turning the cold, hard facts into an entertaining show. Why should anyone want to do this, to turn the news into a show, adding some fun? The answer is very clear. The cold, hard fact is that the news must sell! The larger the viewing audience newsmen can capture, the better the sponsors will like it. That way more people will watch the commercials and fewer people will be inclined to switch to another channel for a more pleasant show. The news, like any other show, must prove itself by its viewing audience. A business that is going to sponsor the news wants to know what the profits will be in terms of higher sales of its products. The Chicago newspaper advertisement quoted, more clearly than a detailed analysis perhaps, shows the direction business has taken. Every aspect of life is in the process of being swallowed up and sucked empty by modern business.

Hippies may protest, students may revolt, nothing matters. Business simply adjusts its fashions and its designs, incorporating the new slogans into its advertisements; and they sell more than ever. The slums may burn, the culturally deprived pupils may drop out of school, the people of India may die of hunger, (nude) sensitivity groups may try to recapture some genuine feelings – it all does not matter, for there is money in everything. The more gruesome, the more violent, the more sexy the pictures, the more copies *Life* magazine will sell.

Slowly but surely the economic sphere is beginning to dominate all other spheres of life. And, given that sphere's present religious direction, it must. To insure profits, business must be able to control the market. The mass production of all sorts of special products often takes years of careful planning. By the time these products are ready for sale, there must be a market. And the only way to

guarantee a market is to condition the taste of the people. The consumers must be made to like the product that is manufactured, regardless of whether or not they need the article. Thus tastes, needs, trends are artificially established by means of clever psychological advertising methods. A situation has been created which is slowly on getting out of control. Our North-American society – with Europe not far behind – has become the victim of its own scientific advances. We are caught in the treadmill of production and consumption.

Man, having declared himself self-sufficient and putting his trust in his own reason, had hoped that he could effectively control and manage this world. Through scientific planning and advanced technology many still hope to bring about prosperity and happiness for all, even though there are many others who have become quite skeptical about man's ability to take care of things. No longer bound by any norms, man's God-given authority to execute his task has turned into arbitrary power and irresponsibility. Man's ability to control and manage now no longer knows any boundaries. It has run rampant. In his desire to control, man has put his trust in scientific planning. As a result of this deification, scientific planning and technology have become a giant robot that slowly squeezes the life out of everything.

The attempt to control life has, in our days, led to a tremendous concentration and absolutization of economic power. The disastrous consequences of this deification of economic power are more and more becoming apparent. Under the pressure of scientific planning, resulting in an increasing specialization of tasks, human initiative and responsibility are slowly being taken over by an impersonal decision apparatus. The plan is taking over the man. The worker merely needs to take up the place allotted to him by some master plan. As a result, for many workers there is little more than the office, the foreman, the blueprint, the tools, the union dues, the pay cheque, and, last but not least, a lot of leisure time. But work itself has been robbed of its meaning.

Man's claim to autonomy has given the deathblow to responsibility. For to be responsible means that man is accountable to Someone; it means that he has a task and the freedom to execute that task according to the will of the Taskgiver.

When man declared himself to be autonomous – that is, his own lawgiver – responsibility slowly started to dwindle away. This decline in responsibility of the worker is one of the crucial issues of our times.

A situation has developed where it is almost impossible for a working man to take the initiative with respect to his job, even if he wanted to. Opportunities for bearing responsibility have been drastically reduced. Apathy, lack of interest, a feeling of futility, and a foreboding meaninglessness are the inevitable result. For millions of people, including Christians, work has been dehumanized. It is no longer a response to a divine calling, but merely a job. You have to eat and therefore you must work. For many labourers it is as simple as that. Or you work because of the good things it enables you to buy or enjoy. The job itself, however, no longer satisfies. It is often a necessary evil: the price you pay for a good and comfortable life.

Loss of accountability not only destroys the meaningfulness of work, but also the working community. During the previous century, this loss of accountability manifested itself in a merciless individualism and in our day it now comes to expression in a leveling collectivism. Relationships have become impersonal and there is little loyalty to the common economic enterprise. This is true for management, but it is just as true for the workers led by the big labour unions. For the present-day labour unions have become, just as much, supporters of the economic establishment as the stockholders. The only difference is that when they have triumphed over every other sphere of society, they may be found pulling at opposite ends of their common rope.

Not only has the absolutization of economic power robbed the worker of his responsibility, making his work meaningless; it has also given rise to a materialistic way of life. The profit motive controlling the mass media not only tends to degrade the news but many other areas of life as well. All our habits, all our relationships, all our institutions, all our likes and dislikes, all our values and our ambitions are being commercialized. Advertising works!

The direction economic life has taken during the last hundred years leads to a purely hedonistic way of life, which has as its only goal physical and emotional

self-gratification. The North-American way of life is fast becoming a life of superficial values, of empty religious customs, of moral laxity, of self-centered interests with little concern for the well-being and fate of mankind. In this degrading of life, business and the big unions together have taken the lead.

“What does it profit me?” business and the big unions ask. And in the process of making money, air and water are polluted, large areas of land are ruined and many resources are put to irresponsible use because of the choice of products by business and the concern only for wages and benefits of the unions. The profit motive, both in the past and in the present, has led to an open neglect by business of the real needs for the life development of its workers, the consumers, the people of the nation and of the world, many of whom even lack the necessities for daily life.

Slowly on, the contours of a picture are becoming visible: rebellion against God, human autonomy, deification of human reason, scientific control (particularly of the economic sphere), artificial conditioning of tastes and needs – all resulting in loss of responsibility, meaninglessness of work, and a hedonistic way of life. This is our situation and this constitutes the religious crisis of our times. “God is dead, in Science is our trust, and the great Society is just around the corner with prosperity and happiness for all,” business and its junior partner, the unions, tell us.

There are some threatening clouds that darken this vision of Utopia, even for the secular Humanist. Threatening clouds – like the fading Hippie movement, the student revolts, the anti-war demonstrators, the crime syndicate, and the burning ghettos. But perhaps these storm clouds will pass over, who knows. Better make the news a little more entertaining.

In the midst of this crisis the Word of God strikes down like a bolt of lightning, judging us and our culture. He that has ears let him hear. For that Word of God is also like a ray of light on an early spring morning, mercifully illuminating our way. There is a powerful and healing Word for our laboring and business world and for all modern man. That Word is not difficult to understand. It is very near us.

Through Jesus Christ and His Spirit, it is in our hearts and in our mouth to do it, if we only surrender our lives to it.

“The Word of God says: “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1). The Lord, He is the absolute owner of all things. Man is His servant. Man is called to develop and care for His creation, according to His will, for the benefit of all mankind. That is a great honour, but also a great responsibility. Each man personally and all men together are accountable to God for what they do with the earth and its resources.

Yes, the Word is very near to us and it is very concrete, if we would only listen to it. The mandate is very plain. A child can understand it. We have all sorts of problems today in the area of labour and management, also as Christians. But these problems exist, not because the Word is not plain, but because we are so hard of hearing. That is very obvious with regard to those two central issues that I called to your attention at the beginning, namely, the meaning of work and the worker’s responsibility.

There is a lot of debate today about the question of co-determination; that is, the voice of labour within a business enterprise. Although this is an involved issue – Troost, Goudzwaard, Vrieze and many others, including Humanists like Galbraith and Drucker, have already begun to subject the matter to an extensive analysis – the central point, however, should be very plain to all of us.

If many common labourers today are engaged in meaningless work, if they bear a minimum of responsibility and if there is next to no room for personal creativity, then we *know* that there is something radically wrong. For every person, each in his own unique way and place, has the responsibility to unfold and care for a part of God’s creation. That is his God-given calling, which no one may take away from him. To the extent this has happened in our society, we *know* that we are called to testify against this situation and wherever possible to reverse this process. Lack of responsibility can only lead to meaninglessness, irresponsibility, and hedonism; and it is only the Word of God that can restore man to his original position and restructure daily work to its original function.

Those, therefore, who plead for a greater voice of labourers in determining the affairs of a business enterprise, are basically on the right track. *Something* along this line must be done. That much is clear, even though the practical outworking may still pose many problems and concerned Humanists will never rise above their own mis-directed problematics.

Many Christians, however, have great difficulty with this matter, primarily, judging by the arguments presented, because of a less than Scriptural view of office and authority. Many believe that the owner or management has the sole authority and responsibility for the affairs of the shop or the factory or the business. Giving employees a voice in the affairs of a business would seem to them nothing less than revolutionary. In this context an appeal is often made to such passages of Scripture as Ephesians 6 verse 5: "Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ." Or to I Peter 2 verse 18: "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect." This line of thinking, however, manifests a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of office and authority.

For the special God-given authority of the employer must be used in such a way that each employee can truly respond to his God-given calling as worker. If authority is not used for that purpose, it becomes arbitrary power. The employer is not autonomous, but subject to the norms set by God for economic enterprises. A business is never an end in itself, and an employer cannot do simply as he wishes. A business enterprise is subject to God's mandate to cultivate the earth. It is called to make the most economical use of the limited resources available to supply the needs of *all* people (that is why the profit motive, taken by itself, is so deeply unchristian). Employers and employees together, as a community of responsible people, must execute this economic task. They are to co-operate in this business enterprise. Co-operation, however, does not exclude leadership. On the contrary, strong leadership will help the economic enterprise to fulfill its function and will make it possible for each worker to execute his particular responsibility. The employees must be given (back) the responsibility for, and be left the initiative in, their own direct sphere of competence. Management must

provide for this responsibility of all the workers, otherwise work will continue to be dehumanized and will become increasingly meaningless.

Just as the shareholders have a right to know what management has done with their capital, so the employees have a right to receive an account of what is being done with their labour. The employees have a right to a real voice in how their labour is to be used within the total corporation. They are not directly responsible for the total direction of the business enterprise – what resources are to be used for what purpose – as that is the direct responsibility of the employer. But the employees *do* bear direct responsibility for their part in the business enterprise. Moreover, they should at least be consulted with regard to the total direction of the corporation.

Within this context we can also do justice to the central religious meaning of such passages as Ephesians 6. Paul, the inspired writer, is not concerned there to instruct us about the particular authority of a master over his slave. From his letter to Philemon, it is quite plain that, whatever authority a master had, it could not then nor can it now be absolute. Rather, the master's authority must be, it is obvious, of a very limited nature.

If followed, this religious principle would have led to the abolition of slavery quite early in the history of Western civilization. But in Ephesians, Paul is not concerned about how a master ought to act toward a run-away slave; nor is he concerned about the relation between masters and slaves in general. Assuming the given situation, Paul has only one thing on his mind and that is that Christians should serve one another. "Be subject to one another out of reverence to Christ," he writes at the beginning of this section, not because one person is higher than another, but because everybody is subservient to Christ Who is the only true Master. All Christians are slaves of Christ and, therefore, all are alike before Him. And if all acknowledge His lordship, then it should not be hard to bow before one another and to serve one another: husbands as well as wives, parents as well as children, and masters as well as slaves. "As subservient to Christ" – that is how we must serve one another. This mutual subservience does not do away with specific responsibilities God has given to certain people. Paul, however, is not concerned

with that issue. His concern is that whatever our position, we all serve one another.

Serving one another so that we, all mankind, may better serve the Lord: *that* religious principle also holds for the complex, differentiated, modern business enterprise of today. Whatever position and whatever specific responsibilities a person holds within a corporation, whether he be the executive or the janitor, he must be subject to his fellow-worker and together they must serve Christ within the enterprise, each according to his own peculiar responsibilities.

Paul warns *all* members of the economic community, and of every other community, against wanting to be the most. In doing so, he echoes the words of Jesus when the disciples were arguing among themselves as to who was the greatest among them. "The kings of this world have power over their people, and the rulers are called 'friends of the people,' but this is not the way it is with you; rather, the greatest one among you must be like the youngest, and the leader must be like the servant. Who is greater, the one who sits down to eat or the one who serves him? The one who sits down, of course. But I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:25-27).

These words apply equally to employers and employees. In this manner we are to serve one another. And only by taking these words to heart can we overcome the class struggle between management and labour, bringing about a true economic community in which there is genuine commitment by all to a common calling. In the light of the Word, it should be obvious that the demand on the part of labour for a greater voice in the affairs of a business could never be for the sake of gaining more power or a greater slice of the profit, but only for the sake of restoring work to its original meaning and for the sake of creating a genuine working community.

Wherever each person's office is respected and honoured and wherever management provides for the employees to fulfill their calling, *there* work will no longer be meaningless, vain and empty, but rather it will be meaningful and rewarding. Wherever work is restored to its original purpose, there the questions concerning the total direction and goal of a business can also be raised again. And

wherever that is done, as the Lord may bring to fruition our efforts and our witness, *there* a new realization may come about that a business cannot exist merely to make more money, but that it must make the best use of the available resources to provide for the needs of all people. Then profit will come to be seen again, not as an end goal, but as an indication that things are truly done economically for the greater benefit of more people.

Where God's mandate is heeded, where the earth is developed, used and cared for according to God's will, there all people will receive what they stand in need of for their daily existence. Their life will flourish. The Bible has much to say about this, about caring for the poor and the needy and about social justice. Many Christians have closed their ears to these Words, confusing social justice with socialism. Perhaps if we understood better the nature and purpose of work we would also understand again that we must be ready every day and under all circumstances to make happy and voluntary renunciation of money and goods on behalf of those who are in need. (*Cf.* Troost on Acts 2 and 4.)

Then we would understand again that property and money are to be used for the well-being of all. (This point, however, we must leave for now. Dr. Troost has elaborated on this subject in his articles on the Eighth Commandment. We would do well to study them.)

It is with respect to these fundamental issues – the religious direction of the modern business enterprise, the responsibility of the labourer, the use that is made of our common natural resources, the concern for those in need throughout the world – it is with respect to these fundamental issues that it will become apparent whether or not we truly want to live in obedience to the Word of God in the economic sphere. For to act Christianly with regard to these matters also goes against our own flesh, against our old nature.

It has become plain that we need a total re-direction of the economic sphere. It seems to me that the Christian Labour Association of Canada must more and more direct itself to these fundamental issues, as it has already begun to do. In its testimony it may rightly expect to involve the entire Christian community, for modern business in its attempt to control and manage all of life not only concerns

the labourer on the job, but shapes our entire North-American way of life. We are all engaged in a total religious struggle. No one can delegate this battle to the CLAC as a nice hobby for a few. For the present-day trend seeks to capture the hearts of all people –Christians and Non-Christians – and sooner or later we will all be forced to choose whom we will serve, for no one can serve two masters: Mammon and God.

By concentrating on these fundamental issues it should become increasingly clear to the nation that the struggle for a free Christian labour union is not a matter of private interest of a group of fanatic Christians, but rather an obedient response to the Word of the Master, a fallible human response, to be sure, but nevertheless, a commitment to serve God in the economic sphere of life in a way that is of benefit to all mankind. In our struggle and in our witness, let us never forget this, we are engaged in a religious struggle. The CLAC as such, or any other Christian organization for that matter, is not important. We are to witness to, and we must seek to realize wherever possible, the Rule of Christ. That is the only thing that counts. And it is only in that context that it is meaningful and mandatory to struggle for a free Christian labour union. In opposition to a dehumanizing and hedonizing Humanism, we are to proclaim the freedom in Jesus Christ. In all these fundamental questions we are engaged in a religious battle. As Paul says:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. (Ephesians 6:12-17)

Blessed if we have heard the word and become doers of Word.

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