

## The Vocation and Temptation of Work in Dorothy Sayers' *The Zeal of Thy House*

"Let the Church remember this: that every maker and worker is called to serve God *in* his profession or trade—not outside it. . . .The official Church wastes time and energy, and, moreover, commits sacrilege, in demanding that secular workers should neglect their proper vocation in order to do Christian work—by which She means ecclesiastical work. The only Christian work is good work well done."—"Why Work?"

### Sayers' Theology of Work from "Why Work?"

#### "What is the Christian understanding of work? "

*"[W]ork is the natural exercise and function of man—the creature who is made in the image of his Creator."*

#### What are the Implications of this view of work?

- 1) "The first, stated quite briefly, is that work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It is, or it should be, **the full expression of the worker's faculties**, the thing in which he finds spiritual, mental, and bodily satisfaction, and **the medium in which he offers himself to God**.
  - a) [Consequence #1] "His satisfaction comes, in the godlike manner, from looking upon what he has made and finding it very good. **He is no longer bargaining with his work, but serving it.**
  - b) "Here is the second consequence. At present we have no clear grasp of the principle that **every man should do the work for which he is fitted by nature.**
  - c) "A third consequence is that, if we really believed this proposition and arrange our work and our standard of values accordingly, we should no longer think of work as something that we hastened to get through in order to enjoy our leisure; **we should look on our leisure as the period of changed rhythm that refreshed us for the delightful purpose of getting on with our work.**
  - d) "A fourth consequence is that we should fight tooth and nail, not for mere employment, but for the quality of the work that we had to do. **We should clamor to be engaged in work that was worth doing, and in which we could take pride.**
- 2) "My second proposition directly concerns Christians as such, and it is this: **it is the business of the Church to recognize that the secular vocation, as such, is sacred.** Christian people, and particularly perhaps the Christian clergy, must get it firmly into their heads that when a man or woman is called to a particular job of secular work, that is as true vocation as though he or she were called to specifically religious work.
- 3) "This brings me to my third proposition; and this may sound to you the most revolutionary of all. It is this: **the worker's first duty is to serve the work.** The popular catchphrase of today is that it is everybody's duty to serve the community. It is a well-sounding phrase, but there *is* a catch in it.

- a) “The first is that **you cannot do good work if you take your mind off the work to see how the community is taking it**—any more than you can make a good drive from the tee if you take your eye off the ball.
- b) “The second reason is that **the moment you think of serving other people, you begin to have notion that other people owe you something for your pains**; you begin to think that you have a claim on the community.
- c) “And thirdly, if you set out to serve the community, you will probably end by merely fulfilling a public demand—and you may not even do that. **A public demand is a changeable thing.**”

## Conclusion

*“[P]erhaps we may put it more shortly still: If work is to find its right place in the world, it is the duty of the Church to see to it that the work serves God, and that the worker serves the work.”*

## Discussion Question

How do Sayers’ principles concerning work express themselves in her play *The Zeal of Thy House*? Is William of Sens a good example of what she is talking about?

## Other Discussion Questions

1. What role does gender take in the play? What do you suspect Sayers is trying to show her audience?
2. The first act is comedic? But what type of comedy is it?
3. What role do the angels serve in the play? How necessary are they to it as drama?
4. What role do the scriptural and liturgical texts of the choir play in the drama?
5. What are some of the different manifestations of pride in the play?
6. What changes in character do the various roles undergo?
7. Why does Sayers end *Zeal* with Michael’s speech?