

Taking Christ into the Workplace

By Harold Burke-Sivers

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The Christian doesn't have to move an inch to help evangelize the world. Each person can serve God and spread the love of Christ in his place of work, no matter what his job is. At work, Christians can explain their faith to others confidently and give attractive examples of the Christian life—even in just doing their jobs well. Harold Burke-Sivers writes that in such activity Christians can imitate Christ and participate in the evangelizing mission of the Church during every day of work.

It's not easy being a Christian in the workplace. Secular ideology is so pervasive in the professional environment that we often have a difficult time fitting into the culture of the office. Many of us simply "go with the flow," choosing to participate in the promotion of secular thought and values rather than risk being ostracized and ridiculed by defending the absolute truth of Christianity and the moral certitude of the distinctively Christian vision.

It's easy to see why. How many times have you been involved in conversations with co-workers who staunchly promote the "great goods" of pornography, spousal infidelity, contraception, masturbation, in-vitro fertilization, sterilization, population control, euthanasia, abortion, etc., and you are the only one speaking out for the truth? One of two possibilities will result from defending the faith:

(1) We will be placed in a very uncomfortable position by those whom we see and work with everyday. We may suddenly find ourselves excluded from impromptu "water cooler" conversations or after-hours activities. We may even become the brunt of insensitive jokes and hurtful, sarcastic remarks made behind our backs; or

(2) We may stir something deep within one or two of our friends: Maybe the lapsed Catholic who has been struggling with how to talk to her daughters about sex, or the man whose obsession with orgasm is causing his marriage to suffer, or maybe even the relativist who's been contemplating the meaning of life. One of them may pull you aside, while no one else is around, and ask you a few questions about what you believe and, more importantly, how you are able—in the midst of such adversity—to faithfully live out what you believe.

In embodying a Christian spirituality at work, we become the evangelizing Church in the world and play a crucial role in the reconciliation and conversion of humanity. Our mission in the world, through which we derive our full identity as laypersons, is "to seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to the plan of God. Through baptism, the lay faithful are made one body with Christ and are established among the people of God. They are, in their own way, made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Jesus Christ" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 31).

Herein lies the essence of Christian spirituality in the workplace. The laity are united to Christ and share in his priestly mission through "the offering they make of themselves and their daily activities" (*Christifideles Laici*, n.14). This offering should be united to Christ's offering in the Eucharist "for their work, prayers, and apostolic endeavours, their ordinary married and family life, their daily labor, their mental and physical relaxation, if carried on in the spirit—and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all of these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 31).

The lay faithful share in the prophetic mission of Christ through "their ability and responsibility to accept the Gospel in faith and proclaim it in word and deed without hesitating to courageously

identify and denounce evil" (*Christifideles Laici*, n.14). Laity also exercise their kingship "above all in the spiritual combat in which they seek to overcome in themselves the kingdom of sin, and then to make a gift of themselves so as to serve in justice and charity" (*Christifideles Laici*, n. 14).

The proper role and vocation of the laity is found in their universal call to holiness, their state in life, and their vocation within the temporal order. "This is especially true in the primary areas of evangelization and sanctification" where laity provide "consistent witness in their personal, family, and social lives by proclaiming and sharing the Gospel of Christ in every situation they find themselves, and by their involvement with the task of explaining, defending, and correctly applying Christian principles to the problems of today's world" (*Instruction Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest*, Premise).

The prayer and sacramental life of the Christian, while prior to the active life, has to be intimately connected with it. Therefore, professional and family life, lived in the presence of God, should be the overflow of the interior life. "Awareness that man's work is a participation in God's activity ought to permeate ... even 'the most ordinary, everyday activities. For, while providing the substance of life for themselves and their families, men and women are performing their activities in a way that appropriately benefits society. They can justly consider that by their labor they are unfolding the Creator's work ... and contributing, by their personal industry, to the realization in history of the divine plan'" (*Laborem Exercens*, n. 115; cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 34).

Jesus calls us to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. This "perfection in Christ" that we seek in faith must integrate the spiritual and temporal dimensions of the human person. As such, lay people are to become as competent as possible in their individual disciplines and professions, bringing the truth of the Gospel and the natural law to bear on the temporal order. "The lay faithful must accomplish their work with professional competence, with human honesty, with a Christian spirit, and especially as a way of their own sanctification. Moreover, we know that through work offered to God, an individual is associated with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, whose labor with His hands at Nazareth greatly ennobled the dignity of work" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 67).

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