

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

The Hired Man

A hired man or woman has sold part of his or her life for money, and most people, at least for part of their life, have to do this. It isn't necessarily a bad thing; but it is open to a lot of abuses and evils, and we ignore these at our great peril.

Justice ...

It is certainly vital for an employer to bear in mind the degree to which he has "bought" his employee's service. Arrogant employers easily transgress boundaries in their thinking, and oppression, based on a monetary value we set on one another, takes the place of respectful, humane attitudes. Paid employment is certainly a better way of life than slavery; but it can't represent the real value of the man or woman who works, and the habit of expressing people's value in terms of salary is insidiously destructive. Some of the most precious people are unemployable and accounted as worthless on that scale. It's not as a carpenter that we remember Jesus.

...on both sides

It's equally vital for employees to refuse to accept *the commercial rate* in place of their real taste for humanity. The acceptance of a wage doesn't set my value, and I mustn't let myself think or feel that it does. The tendency to think like a hired person needs actively resisting. It's right that we should get what we need to live, and that we should feel valued for our work. But to use that as the ultimate yardstick for our lives is pernicious. A survey recently found that self-esteem in our University was expressed almost universally in keeping with the status the University accorded. The most highly-motivated and satisfied employees were the Professors and Readers. From thence, self-esteem deteriorated stage by stage to the lowly rate expressed by the hewers of wood and drawers of water, who felt the least valued and the least job-satisfied. Maybe this won't surprise us; but perhaps it should at least make us think. *Is it right that a cleaner should feel demeaned and undervalued?* I don't think so. Nor do I think that all the professors I know should feel particularly satisfied or highly-esteemed; I hope they have the grace to have salutary humility about their chairs. I hope they take a lead in treating those who serve them with real respect, so that the adverse messages which have robbed them of their self-respect may be contradicted.

Can't Buy Me Love

Jesus says that hirelings are poor shepherds, and their care is unreliable. That should warn us of another danger in which we stand. Our system of institutionalised care, once it has been quantified into financial terms, is undermined. I met a man recently who refused to let a resident into an old people's home after 9 45 pm on Easter Vigil Night because it is "after reasonable hours". He is the sort of "shepherd" we can expect from our financially-accountable system. It isn't that he is, in Jesus' words, *afraid of wolves*. It is because he has become one. He doesn't argue that finance is the bottom line; that's so widely accepted, that he doesn't need to. Those abusive persons who have masqueraded for years as caring for the young and the vulnerable are the wolves who have broken the fence and entered the fold, as Jesus predicts. We have quietly set in place a system of *payment*, for services which can only safely be fuelled and guided by love. The founts and sources of love itself have necessarily been left out of the account-books of the NHS, Social Services, and the education service. Nothing has replaced them except funding figures. No wonder the systems are labouring. In the end, nothing can take the place of the laying-down of life by the good shepherd who loves the flock. We must have that for the weak and poor; but it can't be commanded by finance. It can only be *commanded* by God.
Fr Philip