

The Sweetness of the  
**Continuous Constructive  
Work**

**FR. TADROS Y. MALATY**

Translated by  
**Salwa Wahba**

Edited by  
**Steve Assad  
Sarah El-Sakr**

*Go to the ant, you sluggard!  
Consider her ways and be wise.*

*(Prov. 6:6)*

Many times I stand astonished before God's exceeding love unto man, for He has created this amazing world for him so that he could enjoy it without feeling any need for a thing. In His wondrous honoring for mankind, God said: "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have power over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" [Genesis 1:26]. Other than the rest of the earthly creation, God granted him a wise mind and brought all the creatures for Adam to see what he would call them and whatsoever Adam called every creature, that was its name [Genesis 2:19].

Yet, with that great love, it was said: "the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to tend it and keep it" [Genesis 2:15]. Now, why did He put him in Eden **to tend it and keep it**? Why didn't He give him to eat, drink, and rest without having to work? Do the angels in heaven also work? This is what pushed me to seek **God's view towards work**, for many people relate working to tiredness, sweat, and even anxiety, finding happiness and pleasure in not having to work!

## **HOW STRANGE, HE IS THE WORKING GOD!**

How wondrous, for it was said: "God said, Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness... male and female He created them" [Genesis 1:26-27]. He is the working God! You may be surprised of this feature - which God actually does work, that you rarely concentrate on it. Daringly, I say that it is likely for the image to resemble its origin, adhere unto Him, and seek His grace so that it would carry the true image, whose **work** is one of its features!

## HIS PLEASURE LIES IN WORKING

After the Greatest Artist had created this beautiful and magnificent world for man, and after He had created man as a mighty king in his castle "the Garden of Eden," it was said: "God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." God was pleased with what He did, not because He needs it, but because He pours happiness and joy unto His beloved man!

God created us and put us in the Garden of Eden, and we did not need to work in order to eat, drink and have pleasure, but He wanted us to be like Him image by dressing and keeping the garden, where each one of us would give his brothers from the work of his hands so that we all would be happy with the joint work of love. It seems to me that if our early parents had not sinned, we would have been working now without tiredness, finding our pleasure in giving the work of love to those around us.

- ❖ In the beginning, God gave us a life that is **free from distress and exempted from exhaustion**, but we abused this gift, spoiled our rest, and lost the Paradise. This is why He made our life tiring... where laziness is spoiling us and causing us lots of troubles<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ In the beginning, you could have worked without exhaustion, because God Himself wanted that, but we did not allow this. God did not mix work with exhaustion. If man had experienced exhaustion from the beginning, he wouldn't have been suffering from it as a punishment. In fact, you can work without reaching the state of hard work, like the angels<sup>2</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

## GOD WORKS FOR HIS CREATION

Many times we work even if we were not in need of

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on John, 36:3.*

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on John, 36:3.*

work, but so as to increase our accounts, to obtain some kind of honor, or to secure the future of our heirs, especially our sons and daughters. As for the working God, it was said: "And the Lord **God planted a garden** eastward in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed" [Genesis 2:8]. God wants man to follow His lead, joyfully working for the sake of others, regardless of who they are!

Eng. Nabil Henein (the late Father Antonios) had told me about when he had started working in Los Angeles as an engineer, where he used a piece of metal. At the end of the day, he left the filings and was getting ready to leave. His manager asked him to clean the place from the filings, but he answered: "This is not my job as an engineer." The manager understood his position, smiled, brought the vacuum cleaner, and started to clean up, telling him: "In America we do not consider cleaning up the place as an insult."

This was on the world-level, so how much more should the children of God see the work – whatever type it is - as a divine gift that we happily and joyfully practice for the sake of God!

## **A JOINT WORK**

How wonderful is the statement of **St. Cyril the Great** about the work of God: "Every gift is from the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit." In more details, **St. Augustine** has spoken many times about the divine work, either the creation, the salvation, or the divine gifts, as a joint work of the Holy Trinity. Each Hypostasis has His own role that is not separated from the other two.

Therefore, it is common for us as we are following God's lead to find in the work an opportunity for a joint life in harmony amongst each other, not in bitter jealousy or in lethal competition, but in an open heart towards others!

## **THE DIVINE REST**

In America, some people find that working on Mondays

is very hard after the weekend of Saturdays and Sundays, as if resting is a claim for feeling how hard the work is.

On the other hand, it was said about God: "he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made; and God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it" [Genesis 2:2-3]. God's rest on the seventh day was not out of laziness, for He is always working: "**My Father works hitherto, and I work**" [John 5:17]. He completed the creation, but He did not give it His back, if one could say so, rather He continued to look after it with His divine care, attending the salvation of man who has defiled his nature.

Our rest is not in running away from work, but rather we enjoy the vacations to give rest to the body and the mind, yet we work even during our sleep and our rest through love.

We work with wisdom and balance in all aspects of our spiritual, mental, scientific, social, physical, and psychological life. Where man enjoys his creativity in what God has granted him in order to continue the work of his brethren from other angles.

## **WORK IS A HEAVENLY INVITATION**

Many times people grumble, saying: "I work as much as they reward me"; "My employer is abusing me." "There is discrimination and favoritism at work for those who have relatives or for those who flatter and pay compliments even at the expense of work."

Indeed, several countries have put certain work laws and regulations for the benefit of the employees and in order to protect them from abuse, and these rules are a must! However, it is likely unto the man of God to realize the following facts:

1. With St. Paul we say: "**For we are laborers together with God**" [1 Cor. 3:9]. We are always in God's company, working with Him, and He is not unrighteous to forget the labor of love. The world might be unfair unto us, but God will give us more than what we deserve

if we were honest and always in His Company! He might allow for injustice for some time, but at the right time He will give us more than what we deserve.

2. The greatest reward that we can get out of working hard is that we would bear the feature of honesty, so that we would be in **the image of the honest God and His honest angels.**

Every day we pray: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," that is to say: we do work here as it is done by the heavenly hosts. It was said about the angels: "Bless the Lord, ye his angels that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word" [Psalms 103:20].

Archangel Gabriel said: "Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me and I remained there with the kings of Persia" [Daniel 10:13]. In this way, the archangels work honestly together, supporting one another for our benefit.

The author of the book of the Heavenly Hierarchies (attributed to **St. Dionysius the Areopagite**) requires us to resemble the Seraphim, who are flared with a fiery magnificence, working with a powerful jealousy that is flaming with divine brilliance.

## **WORKING WITH THE SPIRIT OF JOY AND WISDOM**

There is a huge difference between the invitation to work before the fall, where man resembled his working Creator, and working as a punishment after the fall: "In sorrow you eat of it all the days of your life" [Genesis 3:17]; "**In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread**" [Genesis 3:19]. He became working as an outlaw that is expelled from Paradise: "Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken" [Genesis 3:23]. Man's understandings got spoiled and his weights unbalanced, thinking that his happiness lies in laziness, sluggishness,

and in playing, as well as in abusing others and giving orders. He deteriorated and became in need to learn even from the smallest insects. He was told: "Go to the ant, you sluggard, consider her ways and **be wise**" [Proverbs 6:6]. What the insects do by instinct, man ought to practice but with joy and with heavenly wisdom; therefore it was said, "be wise."

❖ Indeed, it is not shameful that He would send you to learn from an ant while you are honored with the mind<sup>3</sup>.

❖ Behold wisely how the ant behaves and how God has embedded in that little body the desire to work nonstop<sup>4</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

❖ Be wise and imitate the ant, for the Bible says: "Store in summer so that you do not fall hungry in winter." Collect what you will need in the future lest you would perish for being insensible and unwise<sup>5</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

Due to our weakness the apostle has said: "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" [2 Thessalonians 3:10]; but as ambassadors of our Lord Jesus Christ and representatives of heaven we ought to work so as to be wise, resembling the image of God and the heavenly fractions, as if work in the life of the believer is his opportunity to get trained for the honest heavenly life.

## **JESUS CHRIST AND THE CONSTRUCTIVE WORK**

As our Christ dwelled amongst us, He would have wanted us to work with His Holy Spirit. It is expected for us to tend towards the positive work in our lives more than towards the negative. The Judger Himself has come, not to

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<sup>3</sup> St. John Chrysostom: *Homilies on Matthew*, 7:7.

<sup>4</sup> St. John Chrysostom: *Concerning the Statues*, 12:5.

<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Psalms*, 49:12..

condemn or to criticize, but to save and deliver. The only group that He has criticized was the leaders, for they did not want to enter into the Kingdom and were preventing those who were entering.

He said: "I come not to judge the world, but to save the world" [John 12:47], and He told the sinful woman: "Neither do I condemn you, go, and sin no more" [John 8:11].

## **THE CHURCH AND THE CONSTRUCTIVE WORK**

The churchly life is an invitation to work so as to support the weak: "I have showed you all things, how that **so laboring you ought to support the weak**, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive [Acts 20:35].

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves" [Romans 15:1].

"To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak, I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" [1 Corinthians 9:22].

"Comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men" [1 Thessalonians 5:14].

"Let him that stole steal no more, but rather **let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good**, that he may have to give to him that needs" [Ephesians 4:28].

## **WE DO NOT KNOW A CERTAIN AGE TO STOP WORKING**

In the light of all this, we should not wonder that Ben Sira did not know a certain age to stop working, for he had said: "Be steadfast in your covenant, and be conversant therein, and wax old in your work" [Sira 11:21].

## **THE HONOR OF WORK AND THE PROFESSIONS**



It was said that Christ was a carpenter [Mark 6:3]; while St. Paul was described as a tent-maker [Acts 18:3]. It came in Christ's proverbs that the man that is capable of working will be ashamed to beg [Matthew 20:3-7; Luke 16:3].

St. Paul was uplifted that he was supporting himself and those that were with him through the work of his own hands [Acts 20:34-36]. In his epistle to the Corinthians [1 Corinthians 4:8-13], he made it clear that he was working hard, criticizing them for their laziness and sluggishness that made them think that they were kings that do not work.

**Tertullian** has responded in some details to the accusations filed against the Christians that they were lazy and unproductive<sup>6</sup>. He assured that the Christians are sharing the pagans in all their labors and that they do not despise any particular profession unless it spoils the spiritual life.

❖ Because we remember that we have to be thankful unto the Lord God, our Creator, we do not despise any fruit of His work; rather we use it moderately without any wrongful extravagance. Thus, we do not fail to go to the courtyards, the markets, the pools, the stores, the factories, the hotels, or to any of your work, and we seek to have all other kinds of relationships that express our lives with you in this world. With you we sail over the seas, participate in the military service, work in the field as merchants, and publicly sell what you use of our trade and products<sup>7</sup>.

#### **Tertullian**

**Origen** says there can be no lazy person in the house of the wise man<sup>8</sup>.

❖ In God's fear, let us meditate in the life of those saints. Indeed, we find that it was written about Moses and

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<sup>6</sup> *Apology 42: 1.*

<sup>7</sup> *Tertullian: Apology 42: 1-3.*

<sup>8</sup> *Origen: In Gen. Hom. 4: 1.*

Aaron that they have worked and lived with men that acted likewise, like Joshua Son of Nun<sup>9</sup>.

(*So-Called Second Epistle of*) **Clement of Rome**

**St. Clement of Alexandria** believes that whosoever works to become rich is, in fact, working for a non-Christian purpose<sup>10</sup>.

## **A WORK JOURNEY IN GOD'S COMPANY**

Some may think that labor occupies man away from contemplating in God. God is pleased to be in the company of those who work and not of the lazy ones.

**St. Basil the Great** declares that there is no excuse for the lazy person that lives idle while he is capable of labor. He ought to emulate the fish that amazingly migrate between the seas looking for food<sup>11</sup>. [As much as possible, we have to work in order to share the resources with those that lack them<sup>12</sup>.]

- ❖ Everyone has to mind his own private work, willingly caring for it and completing it without blame, but with jealousy, activeness, care, and vigil as if he was doing it before God<sup>13</sup>.
- ❖ Interdicting the excess care for our physical needs does not imply at all the prohibition of caring and working, for we still have to work for ourselves, not for the meat which perishes but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life [John 6:27], and not for our physical needs only but also to help and support our brethren [Ephesians 4:28].

God will tell us on the Judgment Day: "For I was an hungry, and you gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink etc." [Matthew 25:35]. He will punish

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<sup>9</sup> *The So-Called Second Epistle of Clement, 14:1.*

<sup>10</sup> *Paedagogus 1: 12.*

<sup>11</sup> *Hexamaeron 7:5.*

<sup>12</sup> *Hexamaeron 7:5.*

<sup>13</sup> *Reg. Brev. Question 41.*

those who did not work to support the weak and to serve their brethren [Acts 20:4, 35], and will send them to the eternal suffering [Matthew 25:41-46] <sup>14</sup>.

#### **St. Basil the Great**

- ❖ Everyone ought to live by the daily work of his own hands, as we have to turn to the commandment of love that the apostle had asked us to follow, preventing the rich to support the lazy by saying: "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: if anyone will not work, neither should he eat" [2 Thessalonians 3:10].

These are the words of St. Anthony that he has spoken unto that man, and he has taught us that in his example<sup>15</sup>.

#### **Fr. Ibrahim**

### **THE FATHERS' QUOTATIONS ABOUT THE JOYFUL, POSITIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE WORK THAT IS FILLED WITH LOVE**

**St. Epiphanius of Salamis** has written that it is widespread unto the Christians not to be lazy, idle or to eat at times that are not specified for eating, but rather they ought to work with their own hands<sup>16</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom** has continuously attacked the rich, not because they were rich, but because they were lazy and without work. He clarified this in his homily "*In Inscriptioem Altaris*"<sup>17</sup>. When he talked about the poor, he meant the travail workers; and thus when he praised the poor, he praised them not because they were poor. but because they struggle and work hard, living by the work of their hands, and because they work so as to support their families.

**St. Jerome** sees in the verse "Take therefore no thought

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<sup>14</sup> *Reg. Brev. Question 207.*

<sup>15</sup> *Cassian: Conferences, 24:12..*

<sup>16</sup> *Contra Haer. 80: 4: 1- 5.*

<sup>17</sup> *In inscr. Altaris, 2 PG 51: 69.*

for the morrow" (Mat. 6:34) without saying: "Take thought for today" an encouragement to work and to struggle now without being dependant, as he says: [He that prevents us to think about the future might allow us to care about the present, for the apostle had said: "laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you" [1 Thessalonians 2:9<sup>18</sup>.]

- ❖ The good worker daringly accepts the reward for his work, while the lazy or the careless worker does not dare to look in the eyes of his boss<sup>19</sup>.

**St. Clement  
of Rome**

- ❖ Be occupied with what is for the Lord or with your work, but do not stay idle<sup>20</sup>.

**The Didascalia apostolorum**

- ❖ "Let him that stole, steal no longer" [Ephesians 4:28]. This does not take away the sin, so how could it be removed? If they worked and practiced love relations with others! He does not just want us to work, but rather to work and to weary so as to have good relationships with others, for the thief has his own work as well, but it is evil<sup>21</sup>.
- ❖ The bee is honored more than the other animals, not because it works, but because it works for the sake of others.
- ❖ In the matter of righteousness, work is more useful and beneficial unto us than laziness and sluggishness.

**St. John Chrysostom**

- ❖ Go to planting if you are a farmer, but know God while you are working in the fields. Sail if your job is to sail,

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<sup>18</sup>In Matt. 6:34.

<sup>19</sup>1 Clem 34: 1.

<sup>20</sup>Didascalia apostolorum, P. 129 (Connolly).

<sup>21</sup>In Eph. hom 14

but pray always unto the heavenly Sailor. If you work in the army, does knowing God occupy your first priority? Good, then look upon the captain that gives you orders to do what is fair<sup>22</sup>.

- ❖ When water is drawn out of a well, it comes out purer, while the well that no one draws water from becomes moldy. Using steel materials makes them brighter, while unused materials become rusty. In short, working brings health unto the soul and the body.

**St. Clement of Alexandria**

- ❖ If we were unable to work due to some disease or because we are busy, He will feed us as He feeds the birds that do not work. However, if we were able to work, we should not try God, because what we can do we actually do through His gift. Our life on earth is His gift, as He grants us the capability to live<sup>23</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

- ❖ It came in the quotes of the Early Fathers in Egypt that the monk that works is attacked by one devil, while the one that doesn't is attacked by uncountable evil spirits<sup>24</sup>.

**St. John Cassian**

- ❖ The strength of the mind and the body becomes sluggish without work.

**Minicus Felix**

- ❖ Labor is an effective cure.
- ❖ When there is work, there is joy.

**Tertullian**

- ❖ Our Lord God detests the lazy. It is not fit for anyone who has dedicated himself to God to be sluggish.

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<sup>22</sup> *St. Clem. Alex. Id. Protr. 10 PG 8: 216.*

<sup>23</sup> *On herec. c. 23.*

<sup>24</sup> القديس يوحنا كاسيان: المؤسسات لنظام الشركة، 10 في روح الضجر أو الملل، 23.

- ❖ Laziness brings famine.
- ❖ Do not be a lazy person that wanders around in the streets.

### **The Didache**