

## Roll on the Weekend !!

In his recent address to their Annual Assembly, the incoming president of the Baptist Union, Revd. John Weaver reminded delegates of a well known workplace acronym “**POETS Day**” - **Push Off Early Tomorrow’s Saturday**. (I must confess that my days of working on the shop floor of a shipyard introduced me to a slightly different



attachment to the letter “P”). In doing so he reflected on a trend in modern culture, to view work as a pretty negative experience, something to be escaped from; a necessary evil rather than an expression of vocation and a means of fulfillment.

He went on to highlight that that when the Church fails to connect with the working lives of its congregations, we reflect that self same attitude. For most of us, our major engagement with church takes place at the weekend - that time we celebrate as “work free”.

A delve into virtually any era of pop-music will find a fair repertoire extolling the virtues of the weekend as against the tedium of Monday to Friday. Whether it be the Bangles chart topping “Manic Monday” or the traditional folkie “Whiskey on a Sunday”; work it seems is that necessary evil that stands between us and the next great escape into freedom and leisure.

And the world of employment seldom fares better in the popular media. Take the example of when some lucky individual gets an unexpected windfall or becomes the latest lottery winner. The inevitable question that follows is “when are you going to give up your job?” Those who choose to remain in work despite the removal of any financial necessity to do so, tend to be viewed as something of a novelty!

So why do we feel so bad about work? Well of course many will point to the reality of low wages, mundane duties, unfair distribution of generated wealth and argue that the world of work deserves just about all the criticism we can send its way. But does the answer to such difficulties simply have to be one of escapism, to count down the days until the next work-free period comes along? Should we not be seeking to reclaim the world of work as something that offers purpose and fulfillment, and enables human beings to engage together in a creative community, just as we were made to be?

When the church seeks to engage in issues related to the world of work, we are not simply encouraging individual Christians to live out their faith values

between nine and five, (or whatever shift pattern we find ourselves operating to) we are asking questions of a society that too easily reduces work to an unwelcome necessity.

It might be argued that such an attitude has its source in the Judeo-Christian way of viewing the world. Was it not God Himself who ordained that one day should be set aside as “holy” - free from the defilement of work? Did he not institute this reality when he Himself chose the seventh day as the one in which He rested from the labours of creation?

This may indeed be true, but the institution of the Sabbath was not in itself a condemnation of work. God described the labours of creation as “good” His Sabbath rest was an opportunity to affirm work by resting in the joy of its completion. One of the key issues of controversy between Jesus and the teachers of the law was His understanding of the Sabbath. He healed, he allowed his disciples to pick corn - it was a day on which to do good and enjoy community by fulfilling the life-task that he had been called to.

In reality, work and worship belong together. The earliest rituals of the Old Testament, invited working people to bring to the altar the first-fruits of the harvest, to sacrifice those beasts which were without spot and blemish. These were the products of their working lives, a celebration of the best of their craft. Even a task as practical as improving and maintaining the quality of houses fell within the oversight of the priest, and once the building was restored to a habitable condition, an act of worship was ordained to immediately follow.

Of course we can’t ignore the fact that for many of us the workplace is a source of stress, tension and pressure. Work is often the tool through which the powerless are exploited and manipulated, and for those caught up in such a reality, a place of respite is essential. But this abuse of our working capacity will always remain unchallenged as long as Christian people perceive it detached from their faith and practice. When the people of God recognise that their worship cannot take place in isolation from their working lives, then restorative action becomes inevitable. It is precisely for this reason that the church has played such a defining role in the fair-trade movement.

So whether our inclination is to “Get Fresh at the weekend” or we simply “Love to boogie on a Saturday night”, when work is simply the means of financing our preferred leisure pursuits, we have lost sight of an aspect of our humanity. The mission of the Church is to participate in the work of Christ to “reconcile all things” which includes what we do on Monday morning, and for that matter, Friday afternoon!