

Is it working?

Two interesting challenges have raised their heads recently on the subject of work. John McDonnell, the Shadow Chancellor, has said that, if elected, Labour would introduce a four-day, 32 hour working week. "We should work to live, not live to work," he told the Labour Party Conference. On the same lines, but less radically, there were calls for the clergy six-day working week to be reduced by the introduction of a second day off once a month: three weeks of six days, and one of five days.

Both these challenges raise important questions about how we see work – indeed, how we understand life itself, and our purpose and meaning here on earth. I am responding to the second of them in one of my occasional letters to our clergy and lay ministers (Letter to Clergy 27 on our Diocesan website).

To John McDonnell and his aspiration to reduce further the working week, I would say this: I fully understand, and readily accept, that some workplaces and working conditions can be brutalising, exploitative or dehumanising. The Christian struggle for good factory acts and the banning of child chimney sweeps is never done. In our day, various forms of exploitative labour practices and modern slavery are still present and shame our 'civilised' society.

On the other hand, work can and should be noble, good, creative,

relational, healthy and enriching. The story of creation in Genesis makes clear that God works; and that we, in his image, were created for work (and for rest). When John McDonnell says "We should work to live, not live to work", I want to tell him that work is part of life, and should be a good part of it. Work and life are not contrasts or opposites. Working is part of being in the image of God.

Yes, let's make the workplace as good as we can. I heard recently from someone who works in a call centre that she is told not to rush callers, but to chat and engage well with them, and that her success is not about a quota of sales, but of resolving her callers' problems and leaving them happier than when they called. She finds that work fulfilling. That sounds to me like a good workplace – a positive part of life.

Let's seek to do our work – and to enable others to do their work – to the glory of God.

With best wishes



+Donald
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