



Minding the Gap - March 2017

A Faith and Work Publication

Welcome to *Minding the Gap*, a monthly thought about faith in the workplace!

"Caught in the Middle"

Recently there has been a TV program entitled *"Malcolm In The Middle"*. It's about a teenage boy who is almost the middle child of a four-brother family, and his struggles around being who he is. This seems to be a very apt metaphor for us as people of faith caught in the middle of attempting to live out the mandates of our faith (**love God totally and our neighbor as our self**) in the midst a world of work which says: "maximize profit"; "be efficient" and "use people" - Caught in the Middle!!!

In scripture, Paul recognizes our 'caught in the middle' situation when he writes in Romans 8:21-22: "that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay...We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains...and not only the creation, but we ourselves...groan inwardly while we wait for...redemption". The Catholic writer Thomas Merton even more specifically recognizes our situation when he states: *"One of the great problems of our time is the lack of reliable and serious information and of sound perspective in political and social affairs"*. Then Jeff VanDuzer, Provost of Seattle Pacific University speaks of the world of work as living in the "messy middle" where we live in the present but not fully present Kingdom of God - the *"already but not yet"*. He sees this time as a time of waiting (including being faithful to loving God totally and our neighbor as ourselves) - **waiting, not in despair, but in hope and confidence because of what we know.**

So, how are we to be and do in the world-of-work? Of course we live in trust of God's presence with us and fall upon his grace, but here are three things we might remember.

- In **relationships**, we remember they are not meant to be transactional where we use others; but rather, transformative where we act as 'agents' of affirmation and challenge. That is, 'agents' where we enable our coworkers to experience work as "...a deeply human and satisfying activity in itself, not only bringing in a just wage and contributing to the support of a family, but also fulfilling certain fundamental spiritual and psychological needs of the human person." ("Life & Holiness", T. Merton)
- In the **stewardship of materials** - the material world matters to God! We are to 'use it, not abuse it'. God has intended for us to 'partner' with His creation; to advance His purpose (making life abundant/full) thru work. We are challenged to be wise in how we steward His creation. As II Corinthians 5:20 indicates, "...we are ambassadors for Christ"; this world is the context for being that; and we are challenged to use it well.
- **Wealth** is a wonderful and vital element of work...if it is of the proper nature. If your work setting is one where as Merton observes: "...human labor, which should serve the good of man, became an instrument of strange perversion: for, dead matter leaves the factory ennobled and transformed, where men are corrupted and degraded."; then, any resulting wealth is not as it should be. As Michael Naughton states: "Good wealth is the result of a setting where the product or service helps humankind, and is done in a manner which 'ennobles and transforms' its workers."

Let's remember that though we find ourselves "caught in the middle" where life and living are not as we believe God would have it be, we may find hope in the realization that *"...the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words"*(Rom 8:26).

Blessings in your world of work.

- Jim Grubs