

DOROTHY SAYERS AND E.F. SCHUMACHER

WORK AND VOCATION

QUESTIONS: Sayers and Schumacher are very concerned about the “right attitude toward work.” They are very critical of what they see: distorted attitudes of work in economics, education, and the church. Do you think their critique is correct? Does it apply to UST? What criticisms might you have of their arguments?

INTRODUCTION TO DOROTHY L. SAYERS

Dorothy Sayers (1893-1957) was born in Oxford as the daughter of the Rev. Henry Sayers, the director of the Christchurch Cathedral Choir School, and Helen Mary (Leigh) Sayers. She was very gifted from the early age in languages, learning Latin by the age of seven and French from her governess. In 1912 she won a scholarship to the Oxford women's college Somerville, and in 1916 she published her first book, a verse collection titled *OP I*.

Sayers is best-known for her stories about the amateur aristocratic detective hero Lord Peter Wimsey, who made his breakthrough in the novel *Whose Body?* (1923), wearing a top hat like Fred Astaire. With such writers as G.K. Chesterton, Christie, and Fr. Ronald Knox, Sayers founded the Detection Club in 1929. After the late 1930s, Sayers wrote no more detective novels, but concentrated on theological dramas, radio plays and verse.

A devout Anglo-Catholic, Sayers was for many years a friend of the Oxford writers known as the Inklings. In *The Mind of the Maker* Sayers tried to explain the Trinitarian nature of God, the Divine Creator, by analogy with the three-fold activity of the creative artist—involving idea, energy, and power. With few exceptions her plays were religious dramas, among them *The Zeal of Thy House* (1937), set in the twelfth century and based on an incident that had occurred during the burning and rebuilding of the choir at Canterbury, and *The Devil to Pay* (1939).

In 1950 Sayers was awarded a Litt.D. by the University of Durham. Her last major work was a translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The work was finished by Barbara Reynolds after Sayers's death on December 17, 1957 from a heart failure.

WHY WORK?

DOROTHY L. SAYERS¹

I have already, on a previous occasion,² spoken at some length on the subject of Work and Vocation. What I urged then was a thorough-going revolution in our whole attitude to work. I asked that it should be looked upon—not as a necessary drudgery to be undergone for the purpose of making money, but as a way of life in which the nature of man should find its proper exercise and delight and so fulfill itself to the glory of God. That it should, in fact, be thought of as a creative activity undertaken for the love of the work itself; and that an, made in God's image, should make things, as God makes them, for the sake of doing well a thing that is well worth doing.

It may well seem to you—as it does to some of my acquaintances—that I have a sort of obsession about this business of the right attitude to work. But I do insist upon it, because it seems to me that what becomes of civilization after this war is going to depend enormously on our being able to effect this revolution in our ideas about work. Unless we do change our whole way of thought about work, I do not think we shall ever escape from the appalling squirrel-cage of economic confusion in which we have been madly turning for the last three centuries or so, the age in which we landed ourselves by acquiescing in a social system based upon Envy and Avarice. A society in which consumption has to be artificially stimulated in order to keep production going is a society founded on trash and waste, and such a society is a house built upon sand.

It is interesting to consider for a moment how our outlook has been forcibly changed for us in the last twelve months by the brutal presence of war. War is a judgment that overtakes societies when they have been living upon ideas that conflict too violently with the laws governing the universe. People who would not revise their ideas voluntarily find themselves compelled to do so by the sheer pressure of the events which these very ideas have served to bring about. Never think that wars are irrational catastrophes: they happen when wrong ways of thinking and living bring about intolerable situations; and whichever side may be the more outrageous in its aims and the more brutal in its methods, the root causes of conflict are usually to be found in some wrong way of life in which all parties have acquiesced, and for which everybody must, to some extent, bear the blame. It is quite true that false Economics are one of the root causes of the present war; and one of the false ideas we had about Economics was a false attitude both to Work and to the goods produced by Work. This attitude we are now being obliged to alter, under the compulsion of war—and a very strange and painful process it is in some ways. It is always strange and painful to have to change a habit of mind; though, when we have made the effort, we may find a great relief, even a sense of adventure and delight, in getting rid of the false and returning to the true.

¹ From an address delivered at Eastbourne, England, April 23, 1942. Reprinted by special permission. *Letters to A Diminished Church*, Dorothy Sayers, 2004, W Publishing, a division of Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee. All rights reserved. pp. 49-72.

² At Brighton, March, 1941. The major part of the address was printed in *A Christian Basis for the Post-War World* (S.C.M. Press).