



## **The Sweat of Your Brow — Work in the Vincentian Tradition —**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the meaning of work within the Vincentian tradition, drawing deeply from the life and teachings of St. Vincent de Paul while engaging contemporary developments in Catholic social thought. Rooted in Vincent's conviction that love of God must be expressed "with the sweat of our brow," the article affirms the centrality of hard work in service of the poor. At the same time, it highlights Vincent's clear warnings against "indiscreet zeal"—an undisciplined enthusiasm that harms health, community, and mission. Through biblical reflection, vivid examples from daily life, and pastoral wisdom, Vincent presents work as participation in God's creative and redemptive action, always balanced by prudence and charity. The article then traces significant horizon shifts since Vincent's time, especially through modern social encyclicals, which emphasize the dignity of labor, the rights of workers, and the need for rest. Together, these perspectives invite the Vincentian Family today to embrace work that is generous yet disciplined, apostolic yet humane, and always oriented toward the service of Christ in the poor.

Cet article explore la signification du travail dans la tradition vincentienne, en s'inspirant largement de la vie et des enseignements de saint Vincent de Paul, tout en tenant compte des développements contemporains de la pensée sociale catholique. Ancré dans la conviction de Vincent que l'amour de Dieu doit s'exprimer « à la sueur de notre front », l'article affirme le rôle central du travail acharné au service des pauvres. Dans le même temps, il met en évidence les avertissements clairs de Vincent contre le « zèle indiscret », un enthousiasme indiscipliné qui nuit à la santé, à la communauté et à la mission. À travers une réflexion biblique, des exemples vivants tirés de la vie quotidienne et une sagesse pastorale, Vincent présente le travail comme une participation à l'action créatrice et rédemptrice de Dieu, toujours équilibrée par la prudence et la charité. L'article retrace ensuite les changements d'horizon significatifs depuis l'époque de Vincent, notamment à travers les encycliques sociales modernes, qui soulignent la dignité du travail, les droits des travailleurs et la nécessité du repos. Ensemble, ces perspectives invitent la Famille Vincentienne d'aujourd'hui à embrasser un travail généreux mais discipliné, apostolique mais humain, et toujours orienté vers le service du Christ dans les pauvres.

Este artículo explora el significado del trabajo dentro de la tradición vicentina, basándose profundamente en la vida y las enseñanzas de San Vicente de Paúl, al tiempo que aborda los desarrollos contemporáneos del pensamiento social católico. Arraigado en la convicción de Vicente de que el amor a Dios debe expresarse «con el sudor de nuestra frente», el artículo afirma la importancia fundamental del trabajo duro al servicio de los pobres. Al mismo tiempo, destaca las claras advertencias de Vicente contra el «celo indiscreto», un entusiasmo indisciplinado que perjudica la salud, la comunidad y la misión. A través de la reflexión bíblica, ejemplos vívidos de la vida cotidiana y la sabiduría pastoral, Vicente presenta el trabajo como una participación en la acción creadora y redentora de Dios, siempre equilibrada por la prudencia y la caridad. A



continuación, el artículo traza los importantes cambios de horizonte que se han producido desde la época de Vicente, especialmente a través de las encíclicas sociales modernas, que enfatizan la dignidad del trabajo, los derechos de los trabajadores y la necesidad del descanso. En conjunto, estas perspectivas invitan a la Familia Vicenciana actual a abrazar un trabajo generoso pero disciplinado, apostólico pero humano, y siempre orientado al servicio de Cristo en los pobres.

**Keywords:** Sweat of brow, Vincentian Family, Vincentian Tradition, Zeal.

Hard work runs in the genes of the Vincentian Family. I have lived with countless followers of St. Vincent who labored tirelessly. Vincent himself was renowned in his lifetime, and still is today, for his unceasing work in the service of the marginalized. He was incredibly active. The Academy-Award-winning film “Monsieur Vincent” captured his spirit when, in one of its final scenes, the Queen asks him what else he would like to have done during his long lifetime. “*Davantage,*” he responds. “*More.*”

So, let nothing that I write below be interpreted as meaning that we should not be hard workers. Still, experience attests, as does Vincent himself, that some work too hard, to their own detriment and ultimately to that of others. He called this “indiscreet zeal”<sup>1</sup> or “undisciplined enthusiasm.”<sup>2</sup>

In this article, let me offer a few brief reflections on 1) work in the life and writings of St. Vincent; 2) some horizon shifts since the time of Vincent; and 3) a perspective on work in the Vincentian Family today.<sup>3</sup>

## I. Work in the Life and Writings of St. Vincent

### a. *The Importance of Hard Work*

The title of this article is a phrase taken from Vincent’s oft-quoted statement about work: “Let us love God, brothers, let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows.”<sup>4</sup> He used similar words on many occasions.<sup>5</sup> Vincent’s most extended treatment of the topic came in a conference with the Daughters of Charity held on November 28, 1649, entitled “Love of Work.”<sup>6</sup>

Vincent’s thoughts on the topic were not original; rather, he employed a framework that was much used at that time and adapted it to the sisters’ circumstances. But he spoke eloquently. The focus of the conference was narrower than the title “Love of Work” indicates. Vincent was encouraging sisters who had time left over, after serving the poor and teaching children, to use skills like sewing, knitting, and weaving to earn money to support their local community and its works. As he gathered momentum in

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<sup>1</sup> CCD:I:79; X:539; XIIIb:359. He also used the phrase “imprudent zeal” (CCD:XIIIb:439).

<sup>2</sup> Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission, XII, 11.

<sup>3</sup> A complete study of this topic, which a short article like this does not permit, would appropriately begin with an analysis of work in the scriptures. This might include, from the Hebrew scriptures, a treatment of: God as Creator; the commandment to rest on the seventh day; work as painful after the fall; rest and confidence in God: “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it ... the Lord give to his beloved in sleep” (Psalm 127). From the New Testament scriptures, this longer treatment might treat Jesus (Mark 6:3) and Joseph (Matthew 13:55) as carpenters; the apostles as fishermen; Martha and Mary; Paul as a tentmaker; “Those who do not work shall not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10), etc.

<sup>4</sup> CCD:XI:32.

<sup>5</sup> CCD:XI:32; XII:400; IX:382.

<sup>6</sup> CCD:IX:379f.

addressing the topic, he offered a rich array of ideas, ranging from biblical sources to ants and bees.

At the beginning of the conference, the sisters shared their thoughts, as usual. Vincent then emphasized “that God has expressly commanded us to earn our living by the sweat of our brow,” by hard, painstaking labor. He stated: “This commandment is so definite that no one can be exempted from it, and the work such that, by the grace of God, it serves us as a penance by the fatigue it causes the body. God didn't simply say, ‘You shall labor with the powers of your mind to earn your bread,’ but ‘you shall labor by the sweat of your brow.’”

He gave examples:

“The peasant we see going to his plow to till the soil and to produce the grain that will feed people fulfills this commandment, for his body suffers from it and toils at it, with the result that sweat often pours down his face.”

“The Sister from the Charity who goes out morning and evening, carrying her soup pot in hot and cold weather, not for herself but for some poor person who can't go to her for it and who would languish from need if she didn't take it to him, that Sister also fulfills this commandment, dear Sisters.”

After that – this was unusual in a conference with the Daughters – he launched into a survey of the biblical teaching about work. He described God’s work “ad intra” in eternally generating his Son and spoke of how the Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son’s unceasing dialogue and love. He then turned to God’s work “ad extra” in creating and continually conserving the universe in existence. Finally, he talked about God’s work in every creature, stating that God shapes all things to make them beautiful, like an artisan in his workshop.

Then, as Vincent often did in speaking with the sisters, he used picturesque examples, recalling how ants and bees work during their whole lives for the good of the communities of which they are members.

Vincent added the examples of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, emphasizing especially that Jesus worked in a carpenter’s shop. He stated expansively: “He worked to earn His living by the sweat of His divine brow. His trade was that of a carpenter. He was a hod carrier,<sup>7</sup> an unskilled laborer, and a bricklayer's assistant. From His youth, He worked from morning till night and continued until He died. Heaven and earth blush with shame at the sight of such a spectacle.”<sup>8</sup>

He spoke of Paul, who earned his living as a tentmaker: “In the midst of his heavy labors, his important ministries, his continual preaching, he took time, either by night or by day, to be self-sufficient so as not to have to ask for anything from anyone.”<sup>9</sup>

During the conference Vincent encouraged the sisters to work even in their spare time, so that, “should you happen to have more (income) than you need, you know that the surplus is used to form other young women who will one day render service to God as you do and will serve their neighbor.”<sup>10</sup> He added: “Would to God that I could do the same, I who am unworthy of the bread I eat. Would that it were permissible for me to

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<sup>7</sup> A hod carrier is a laborer in the construction industry who assists bricklayers, masons, or plasterers by carrying materials like bricks, mortar, and cement in a hod, which is a portable trough.

<sup>8</sup> CCD:IX:385.

<sup>9</sup> CCD:IX:386.

<sup>10</sup> CCD:IX:387.

earn my living and to be able to serve my neighbor without possessing anything or being dependent on anyone!”<sup>11</sup>

His remarks and his lively imagery made it clear that he abhorred idleness and regarded it as the root of multiple evils, as did many of the sisters who spoke during the conference. As he did in several other contexts,<sup>12</sup> Vincent used forceful rhetoric in condemning idleness: “When our Sisters are comfortably established and don't have enough to do, they'll neglect the work they do have and won't bother going to visit the poor. Then we'll have to say good-bye to the Charity. It's no longer the Charity. It's buried. Then we'll have the funeral of the Charity.”<sup>13</sup> On many other occasions, he attacked sloth, laxity, and lack of fervor or sensitivity.<sup>14</sup>

As readers might imagine, Vincent also spoke frequently with his confreres about work. He emphasized that their works, especially the missions, should be offered “free of charge,” so that the poor could benefit from them without worrying about paying anything for the confreres’ services. One of his most famous sayings (stressing *sweat* again) was uttered in that context: “We live on the patrimony of Jesus Christ, on the sweat of poor people. When we go to the refectory, we must always think: ‘Have I earned the food that I’m about to eat?’”<sup>15</sup>

### *b. Indiscreet Zeal*

On many occasions, in speaking and writing to his Family and particularly in his contacts with Louise de Marillac, Vincent contrasted healthy hard work with indiscreet zeal or undisciplined enthusiasm.<sup>16</sup> He offered many examples of this:

- endangering one’s health by overworking<sup>17</sup>
- exposing oneself or others to danger unnecessarily<sup>18</sup>
- remaining too long with one sick person to the prejudice of another<sup>19</sup>
- being rigorous and overbearing with people<sup>20</sup>

A Jesuit who was working with the confreres wrote to Vincent upon the death of Germain de Montevit: “*Your men are flexible and docile about everything except the advice they are given to take a little bit of rest. They believe that their bodies are not made of flesh, or that their life is supposed to last only a year.*”<sup>21</sup>

He urged Louise de Marillac especially: “I am really afraid that you are doing too much ... Be careful about this, I beg of you, Mademoiselle. Our Lord wants us to serve Him with common sense, and the opposite is called indiscreet zeal.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Robert P. Maloney, C.M., “The Company Will Cease to Exist Unless ...”, *Vincentiana* 59, # 1 (2015), 43-57.

<sup>13</sup> CCD:IX:389.

<sup>14</sup> CCD:IX:170; X:35; XI,15.

<sup>15</sup> CCD:XI:190.

<sup>16</sup> CR XII,11. Cf. CCD:I:79; X;539; XIIIb:359. He also used the phrase “imprudent zeal” (CCD:XIIIb:439).

<sup>17</sup> CCD:I:79.

<sup>18</sup> CCD:IV:128.

<sup>19</sup> CCD:X:539.

<sup>20</sup> CCD:IX:100.

<sup>21</sup> CCD:II:30.

<sup>22</sup> CCD:I:79.

## II. Some Horizon-Shifts Since the Time of Vincent

### a. *The Social Encyclicals and their Statements about Work*

Pope Leo XIV's choice of name serves as a reminder of the Catholic Church's "social teaching," which is often described as beginning in 1891 with Leo XIII's "[Rerum Novarum](#)." A long string of similar documents have followed: "[Quadragesimo Anno](#)" (1931), "[Mater et Magistra](#)" (1961), "[Pacem in Terris](#)" (1963), "[Populorum Progressio](#)" (1967), "[Laborem Exercens](#)" (1981), "[Centesimus Annus](#)" (1991), "[Caritas in Veritate](#)" (2009), "[Laudato Si](#)" (2015), and "[Fratelli Tutti](#)" (2020). They are all, in a way, descendants of Leo XIII's 1891 text. Two of them, "Quadragesimo Anno" ("Forty Years") and "Centesimus Annus" ("Hundred Years"), make that explicit in their titles.

The social encyclicals have increasingly emphasized:<sup>23</sup>

- the human person as the image of God (*imago Dei*) shaping the earth
- the dignity of labor
- the priority of labor over capital
- the right of laborers to organize
- the right to private property
- the dangers of rising socialism and atheistic communism
- the dangers of unfettered capitalism
- the right to land, labor, and lodging
- the right to rest
- the call to care for the earth as our common home

Catholic social teaching is not just an academic matter. As Pope John Paul II stated in *Centesimus Annus*: "To teach and to spread her social doctrine pertains to the Church's evangelizing mission and is an essential part of the Christian message."<sup>24</sup> The long string of papal documents since Leo XIII has helped re-shape how we look at labor.

### b. *A Re-Examination of the Relationship between Work and Leisure*

Within roughly the same timeframe, several outstanding philosophers and theologians have written extensively on work and rest.<sup>25</sup>

Josef Pieper's *Leisure the Basis of Culture*<sup>26</sup> re-examined Aristotle's and Aquinas' analysis of the relationship between leisure and labor. Pieper emphasized that leisure is not merely a "break" or a restorative time-off from work so that we can then, after re-fueling, work better. Rather, leisure has value in itself. It is a time and space in life for thinking, creativity, prayer, worship, relationships, and love. Paradoxically, we do not rest so that we might work better; rather, we work so that we might enjoy leisure and its opportunities for human growth.

The existentialists saw the work of our hands as an extension of our spirit. Ideally, we pour ourselves into our work and give ourselves and the product of our work to others, leaving our imprint on the future.

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<sup>23</sup> Robert P. Maloney, C.M., "Ten Foundational Principles in the Social Teaching of the Church," *Vincentiana*: Vol. 43: No. 3, (1999), Article 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Centesimus Annus*, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. K. Rahner, S.J., "Sunday, the Day of the Lord," in *Theological Investigations VII*, 205-10; J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens, a Study of the Play Element in Culture* (London: Paladin, 1970); Josef Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* (Ignatius Press, 2009); Hugo Rahner, S.J., *Man at Play* (Cluny Media LLC, 2019).

<sup>26</sup> Josef Pieper, *Ibid.*

c. *Emphasis on the Balance between Action and Contemplation*

Today we describe Vincent as a “Mystic of Charity.” Action and contemplation coexisted harmoniously and nourished each other throughout his life. I have written on this topic at length elsewhere,<sup>27</sup> so I will not develop the theme further here.

Of course, this is not a new theme, though it is a newly emphasized one. Vincent himself stressed it, as do the Constitutions of the groups that he founded.

### III. A Perspective on Work in the Vincentian Family Today

a. *The Importance of Working Hard*

Vincent often spoke of zeal. He listed it as one of the five missionary virtues that should characterize members of the Congregation of the Mission. He spoke eloquently about it: “*If love of God is a fire, then zeal is its flame. If love is the sun, then zeal is its ray.*”<sup>28</sup> “*When charity dwells in a soul, it takes full possession of all its powers. It gives it no rest. It is a fire that is constantly active. Once a person is inflamed by it, it holds him spellbound.*”<sup>29</sup>

Hard work is an ideal that can be very attractive. Even a cynic like Voltaire, looking back, mused about Vincent’s works with admiration: “My kind of saint is Vincent de Paul.”<sup>30</sup> George Bernard Shaw wrote: “I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no ‘brief candle’ for me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.”<sup>31</sup>

Martin Luther King’s sermon “The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life” contains one of the best-known tributes to the dignity of labor. King argued that this dignity does not depend on how much we earn or on the status that our work gives us, but rather on striving “untiringly to achieve excellence in our lifework,” even if our job is routine or menial:

*Not all men are called to specialized or professional jobs; even fewer rise to the heights of genius in the arts and sciences; many are called to be laborers in factories, fields, and streets. But no work is insignificant. All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence. If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the host of heaven and earth will pause to say, “Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.”*<sup>32</sup>

Over the decades, King’s street sweeper has often been featured in presentations on career advice and the dignity of everyday work. But now, in a different era, a nagging doubt arises: Is this really what most people’s jobs are like? The average worker today isn’t honored for “painstaking excellence” but, rather, is often regarded as a replaceable “human resource” who depends for his or her livelihood on the whims of employers and market forces. King’s sermon promised workers a sense of self-worth in performing low-

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<sup>27</sup> Robert P. Maloney, C.M., *Mystic of Charity* (Society of St. Vincent de Paul, 2019).

<sup>28</sup> CCD:XII:250.

<sup>29</sup> CCD:XI:203.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Voltaire, in a letter of January 4, 1766, to the Marquis de Villette: “Mon saint à moi, c’est Vincent de Paul.”

<sup>31</sup> This statement, used by Shaw in various forms, comes from his *Man and Superman*, “Epistle Dedicatory” (1903).

<sup>32</sup> King preached this sermon many times in various versions and then published it in his book [Strength to Love](#) (Beacon Press, 1963).

status labor. But low-paying jobs may become a useful tool for employers to manipulate manageable workers into squandering their precious treasure of “four thousand weeks” of lifetime labor, to use Oliver Burkeman’s phrase.<sup>33</sup>

*b. Working with Love*

While the title given to Vincent’s conference with the Daughters on November 28, 1649, was “Love of Work,” it is also extremely important to “work with love.” Of course, one’s religious outlook influences how we view our work. Thomas Merton once wrote, “The peculiar grace of a Shaker chair is due to the fact that it was made by someone capable of believing that an angel might come and sit on it.”<sup>34</sup>

If so much of our time is spent in working, how important it is, especially in a Christian context, that we work with love.

*c. Balance is Crucial.*

Labor, rest, relationships, prayer, worship, and study are all essential in life: “There’s a time for every purpose under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

While the Lord calls us to work hard as servants do, he wants us to rest too (cf. Ps 127:2; Ex 20: 8ff). As a matter of fact, he commands us to rest (Deuteronomy 5:12-15)! He calls us to recognize our limitations as creatures and to know that not only does he work through us, but he also works without us. People who are worn out and discouraged often experience exhaustion and bitterness. They are readily prone to problems with fidelity and chastity. Difficulties that they might more easily have handled at other times become insurmountable problems. It is important for overall health to listen to one’s body, to know when tiredness is sapping our strength, to recognize the signs of irritability or anger or poor judgment that signal exhaustion. As mentioned above, Vincent often warned Louise de Marillac to beware of “indiscreet zeal.”

*d. Some Practical Implications*

➤ The Use of Social media

Ubiquitous cell phones, tablets, laptops, and other instruments of communication have changed our lives. We live in an information society, where news reaches us “live,” where friends can contact us immediately by texting or Facebook or Instagram, and where artificial intelligence can answer many questions faster than we can.

Useful as the media are, they pose a series of challenges: how can we live healthily in this rapidly changing era? what boundaries must we create so that we might have the leisure to pray and think creatively? how can we foster personal relationships and intimacy when so many virtual stimuli are constantly competing for our attention?

Might I suggest something akin to “fasting” or the “Sabbath rest,” which the Judeo-Christian tradition has repeatedly emphasized (though neither fasting nor Sunday rest is particularly popular today)? Might we “fast” from texting or emailing on Sundays, except in cases of urgent need? Might we value Sundays or evenings as a time to be truly

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<sup>33</sup> Oliver Burkeman, *Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Thomas Merton’s introduction (p. xiii) to Edward Demming Andrews in *Religion in Wood* (Indiana University Press, 1966). This citation is further developed in a recent publication: Thomas Merton, *Seeking Paradise: The Spirit of the Shakers* (Orbis Books, 2003).

“free”? Limiting one’s time on social media opens up time for other forms of human interaction.

Might I also suggest, as have many others, the need for an “etiquette” regarding the use of media? Once, many years ago, a Patriarch from an Eastern Church came to visit me in my office in Rome. In the middle of our conversation, he took out his cell phone to answer a call. His courageous secretary snapped at him: “Your Beatitude, put that phone away!”

What are the rules of courtesy or of good order? Surely phones should be silenced during liturgical services and, in religious communities, during common prayer. Might families insist that they be turned off during meals? I once had dinner with a friend’s aunt, who was a successful businesswoman. Seating herself opposite me, she placed two phones on the table about two feet from me and answered calls on both during the meal. One phone, on which she spoke authoritatively, was for business; the other, on which her tone was sweeter, was for friends! Those of us at the table with her were apparently less important than either of those two categories.

How often people violate the privacy of others by posting photos or sharing people’s personal information, without consent, on social media!

#### ➤ The Need for Holistic formation

This is a huge challenge. For those preparing for priesthood in my own country, six successive editions of the “Program for Priestly Formation” have highlighted four pillars (or axes) of formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. All are crucial. In addition, not long before his death, Pope Francis emphasized the importance of literature and poetry in holistic formation.<sup>35</sup>

Poets in every era have sung of work, but their songs have varied. Here, let me highlight just three. Their view of work illustrates the complementary values that a healthy attitude toward work embraces: 1) Robert Frost; 2) Henry Van Dyke; and 3) Kahlil Gibran.

In his poem “Two Tramps in Mud Time,” Robert Frost (1874-1963) sang:

My object in living is to unite  
My avocation and my vocation  
As my two eyes make one in sight.  
Only where love and need are one,  
And the work is play for mortal stakes,  
Is the deed ever really done  
For heaven and the future’s sakes.<sup>36</sup>  
Similarly, Henry Van Dyck (1852-1933) wrote:  
Let me but do my work from day to day,  
In field or forest, at the desk or loom,  
In roaring market-place or tranquil room;  
Let me but find it in my heart to say,  
When vagrant wishes beckon me astray,  
"This is my work; my blessing, not my doom;  
Of all who live, I am the one by whom  
This work can best be done in the right way."

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<sup>35</sup> July 17, 2024. Cf. [Letter of the Holy Father on the Role of Literature in Formation \(17 July 2024\) | Francis \(vatican.va\)](#)

<sup>36</sup> Cf. [Two-Tramps-in-Mud-Time-Poem-Text.pdf](#)

Then shall I see it not too great, nor small,  
To suit my spirit and to prove my powers;  
Then shall I cheerful greet the labouring hours,  
And cheerful turn, when the long shadows fall  
At eventide, to play and love and rest,  
Because I know for me my work is best.<sup>37</sup>

In *The Prophet*, [Kahlil Gibran](#) (1883-1931) took up the theme of working with love expressly:

And what is it to work with love?  
It is to weave the cloth with threads drawn from your heart, even as if your beloved were to wear that cloth.  
It is to build a house with affection, even as if your beloved were to dwell in that house.  
It is to sow seeds with tenderness and reap the harvest with joy, even as if your beloved were to eat the fruit.  
It is to charge all things you fashion with a breath of your own spirit,  
And to know that all the blessed dead are standing about you and watching.<sup>38</sup>

#### ➤ The Dangers of Indiscreet Zeal

The two extremes which Vincent contrasted with zeal have contemporary forms that it may be helpful to say a word about.

1) The existentialists noted that the great problem of modern men and women is inattentiveness. We live in a world filled with noise. So many sounds and stimuli break in upon us that at times it is difficult to distinguish the more important ones from the less important. As a result, people's sensitivities can be dulled. They can become blind to the glaring problems that exist, especially the enormous disparity between the rich and the poor and the continuing expenditure of human and financial resources on the production and sale of arms. "Inattentiveness" can be the modern form of what Vincent described as "laxity, lack of fervor and sensitivity, sloth."<sup>39</sup>

2) Indiscreet zeal still shows itself in overwork and in what is often called "burn-out." It is quite as important today, as it was in Vincent's day, for us to know our limitations, accept our creatureliness, and develop a balanced lifestyle that includes sufficient rest and recreation. It is also important that we stay in good physical condition so that we will have the energy which characterizes zeal and enables us to work hard.

## A FINAL WORD

If hard work runs in the genes of our Vincentian Family and occupies so much of our time, then it is pivotal for our relationship with God and with those around us that our work be an act of deep love. Otherwise, a significant portion of our lives may become empty.

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. [Work By Henry Van Dyke, Famous Sad Poem](#)

<sup>38</sup> Cf. [On Work by Kahlil Gibran - Poems | Academy of American Poets](#)

<sup>39</sup> CCD:XI:89.

The great English poet Thomas Gray wrote lyrically of a worker with a “heart once pregnant with celestial fire” whose epitaph would state:

*Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,  
Heav'n did a recompense as largely send:  
He gave to Mis'ry all he had, a tear,  
He gain'd from Heav'n ('twas all he wish'd) a friend.<sup>40</sup>*

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