

BODO, John R. dr. theol.
professor
Born? 1920, Bp (Hung. Whetel) 47
Son of Rev. Charles Bodo, was
Pastor of First Presb. Church
in Princeton, N.J.
Kiribb: San Francisco, Cal.

Consumption Without Production

IN A THOUGHTFUL article showing concern for human betterment, Professor John R. Bodo in *Survey Graphic*, September 1967, argues that every citizen should have "a decent minimum income as a matter of right." He sums up the position of those who share his views: "Everyone has a right to a decent life just because he is a human being."

Apparently Professor Bodo is acting on the assumption that the production of wealth is a kind of automatic process which can be turned on and allowed to flow until everyone has enough. If this were true, what the professor says would make sense, but it is far from true. A great deal of hard work is still necessary, and in the foreseeable future will continue to be necessary, to produce the goods and services we all need. Even in these cybernetic times, we cannot automate teachers, bus drivers, doctors, lawyers, ministers, accountants, clerks, barbers, housekeepers, truck drivers, airplane pilots, navigators, engineers, architects, street sweepers, assembly-line attendants, chemists, physicists, miners, farmers, dairy workers, delivery men, millers, bakers, steel and auto workers, copywriters, printers, editors, reporters, musicians or all the things that most of us do.

Certain manufacturing processes can be automated, but the time is at least not foreseeable when large numbers of men and women will not be needed to carry on the process of producing goods and rendering the great variety of services that we need. Even as fewer might be needed in manufacturing, more will be needed in the service trades and professions. It is very dangerous to promulgate the idea that work is not essential. It is and it probably always will be.

Moreover, there is danger in the concept that every citizen has a right to a minimum income whether he does anything to earn it or not. In plain words, this means that people are entitled to consume without producing.

If some may have more than they produce, it means that others must have less than they produce. Who will decide who shall have more and who shall have less? How much more? And how much less? There is room for a vast amount of strife and ill will in the effort to reconcile men's differing views of this matter.

If God, in His infinite wisdom, made some men more diligent and more productive than others, do men have the right to seize a large portion of the results of their efforts and give it to other men? Doing that by the force of law is far different than cultivating a sense of trusteeship whereby such men would gladly share with the unfortunate as a matter of Christian charity.

There are many who share Professor Bodo's thinking that "everyone has a right to a decent life just because

he is a human being." Did Adam have that right? Did our ancestors have it? Did our grandfather have it when, at the age of eighteen, with an axe, a gun and a change of clothing he mounted a horse and rode across the Allegheny Mountains into the Ohio River Valley? Obviously, that kind of "right" did not exist in those days. Do "rights" change from time to time?

One man works very hard and produces abundantly. His brother is an idler and a wastrel. Does the latter have a right to share the wealth created by his thrifty brother? His brother may feel a certain filial responsibility to help him and it would seem to be his Christian duty to do so. But to say that the wastrel has a right to the fruits of the labor of the diligent is a different matter.

For the foreseeable future, with all the cybernetics and automation that can be brought into play, wealth will still be scarce and labor will be required to produce it. Professor Bodo's conclusion that a person has a right to "a decent life just because he is a human being" seems to be based on the assumption that wealth can be created as easily as turning a faucet and allowing the water to run. If that were true, there would be some justification for his position. But, when the implementation of his proposal means, as it does mean today, the seizing of the wealth of some for distribution to others, it cannot be carried out without both coveting and stealing.

If we adopt the philosophy that some are entitled to more than they produce and others to less, and start dividing the wealth on that basis (even as we are already doing), we shall end up by creating a much greater scarcity and a lower standard of living than exists today. To prove this we have but to observe standards of living prevailing in the communist lands of our times.

When some are deprived of a large portion of the fruits of their labor, they become discouraged and their efforts decline. Conversely, those who are allotted more than they produce soon learn to depend upon others and to produce less and less themselves. Consequently the stream of production tends to dry up as ill will develops between the thrifty and the competent on the one hand and the wastrel and less competent on the other. That way lies strife, disaster and lower living standards for all. The better way is more Christian charity for those in need while extending to them all the help we can to enable them to overcome their inabilities and to upgrade their skills so that they become more productive.

When we violate the moral law that men must live by the sweat of their own brows we are heading for big trouble.

