

METANOIA

Engineers rule the world.

by John Valk (Campus Ministry)

Engineers Rule the World

That's a bold statement. Is it true? Most debates on the matter are likely to end where they began. That's because a long-standing rivalry exists on university campuses between the "Engies" and the "Artsies". Much of it is just "good old natured" fun, and we can still use healthy doses of that. Some of it, unfortunately, is not. Offensive language is used, as derogatory remarks and accusations become standard fare. Care and concern gives way to animosity and antagonism.

Our world would be a different place without engineers. They are responsible for the development of the numerous conveniences, comforts and accessories few would want to do without. That our world is dependent on engineers needs hardly to be discussed.

Is our world a better place because of people who study Arts? Again, the answer is clearly obvious. A study of our humanity, past and present, is necessary to under-

stand who we are and what we hope to become as people. Those who fail to study the past are doomed to repeat its mistakes.

To argue that one vocation is "better" than the other is really to miss the point. To insist that, for example, "engineers will make more money than most arts students so engineering is a better vocation" misses the point even further. Measuring the value and benefit of something by the sole criterion of money is really indicative of an impoverished cultural mentality. Yet it is done. To the extent that our educational system perpetuates or even permits such a notion to exist is the extent to which it has also become impoverished.

What makes a vocation worthwhile? If we use the criteria of status, money and power, then the vocation itself is given no merit of its own. Small wonder that only one-third of those employed seem very committed to work, as a recent survey revealed.

What *does* make something worth doing? To answer that we need to reflect on the beliefs and values we hold. We need to be critical of the "world and life" view

we have accepted. Not least, we need to ask what we consider most important.

We frequently measure all things in terms of the "here and the now", with little sense of the past and even less appreciation for the future. Is that out of ignorance? If we restrict our awareness or knowledge only to our own small world, we have a limited framework by which to assess, compare, even judge that which we do. If we remove our secular North American blinders perhaps we can get a better appreciation of what is worthwhile, and avoid the pitfalls that are slowly suffocating our "advanced" society.

At one point in the not too distant past university students were not considered educated until they had a good grounding in the Liberal Arts (General Arts and Science). That meant that all students were required to take courses in the humanities and sciences: religion, history, philosophy, literature, social sciences, maths and sciences. Only when a solid grounding was achieved in these did specialization take place in a student's area of interest.

We have done away with this type of education. Today our ears ring with the question "why should I have to take...". And the simple answer is obvious to many. We have opted for expediency, and so we produce only highly specialized by narrowly focused people. That may come back to haunt us, if it hasn't already. We are beginning to reap the environmental and social devastation we have sown in our mad rush to become "prosperous" nations.

Education is to broaden our horizons by increasing our awareness of the world we inhabit. When it fails to do that we become impoverished, and that is reflected in our conversations.

And so we return to where we began. Do engineers rule the world? Hardy. But, neither do the Artsies. You see, it is God who rules the world. Not so long ago we all accepted that. We also firmly believed that people were to be agents of God, and there in lies their freedom. They are to be caretakers and caregivers of the earth and all things within it.

In taking care and developing (not ruining) the earth, we

are to use (and hone) our skills, including our engineering skills. To be an engineer, therefore, is to be an agent, that is, to use the "properties of matter and the sources of energy in nature" to the benefit of all humankind, not a select (Western) few. Only when we are appreciative of this larger picture (world view) can we know why engineering is so important, as is the humanities.

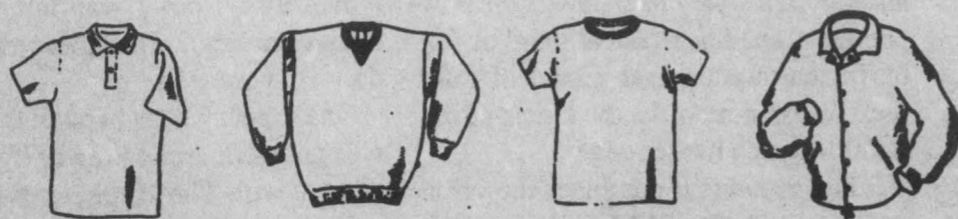
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