

ON HUMAN WORK - *Laborem Exercens* (1987) POPE JOHN PAUL II

EXCERPTS FROM THE ENCYCLICAL:

* *[This first excerpt is from Part IV, Ch.16, as cited in the SFO Constitutions]*
While work, in all its many senses, is an obligation, that is to say a duty, it is also a source of rights on the part of the *worker*. These rights must be examined in the broad *context of human rights as a whole*, which are connatural with man, and many of which are proclaimed by various international organizations and increasingly guaranteed by the individual States for their citizens. Respect for this broad range of human rights constitutes the fundamental condition for peace in the modern world: peace both within individual countries and societies and in international relations, as the Church's Magisterium has several times noted, especially since the Encyclical *Pacem in terris*. The *human rights that flow from work* are part of the broader context of those fundamental rights of the person.

* Human work is a key, probably the essential key to the whole social question... And if the solution- or rather the gradual solution - of the social question which keeps coming up and becomes ever more complex, must be sought in the direction of "making life more human," then the key, namely human work acquires fundamental and decisive importance.

* Man's life is built up every day from work, from work it derives its specific dignity, but at the same time work contains the unceasing measure of human toil and suffering, and also of the harm and injustice which penetrate deeply into social life within individual nations and on the international level.

* The Church considers it her task always to call attention to the dignity and rights of those who work, to condemn situations in which that dignity and those rights are violated, and to help to guide the above-mentioned changes so as to ensure authentic progress by man and society.

* The Church is convinced that work is a fundamental dimension of man's existence on earth.

* Man is the image of God partly through the mandate received from his Creator to

subdue, to dominate, the earth. Each and every individual, to the proper extent and in an incalculable number of ways, takes part in the giant process whereby man " subdues the earth" through his work.

* Man has to subdue the earth and dominate it, because as the "image of God" he is a person, that is to say, a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself, and with a tendency to self-realization. As a person, man is therefore the subject of work. As a person he works, he performs various actions belonging to the work process; independently of their objective content, these actions must all serve to realize his humanity, to fulfill the calling to be a person that is his by reason of his very humanity.

* Understood as a process whereby man and the human race subdue the earth, work corresponds to this basic biblical concept only when throughout the process man manifests himself and confirms himself as the one who "dominates." This dominion, in a certain sense, refers to the subjective dimension even more than to the objective one; this dimension conditions the very ethical nature of work, In fact there is no doubt that human work has an ethical value of its own, which clearly and directly remains linked to the fact that the one who carries it out is a person, a conscious and free subject, that is to say, a subject that decides about himself.

* The fact that the one who, while being God, became like us in all things devoted most of the years of his life on earth to manual work at the carpenter's bench constitutes in itself the most eloquent "Gospel of work" showing that the basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person. The sources of the dignity of work are to be sought primarily in the subjective dimension, not in the objective one.

* This does not mean that, from the objective point of view, human work cannot and must not be rated and qualified in any way. It only means that the primary basis of the value of work is man himself, who is its subject. This leads immediately to a very important conclusion of an ethical nature: however true it may be that man is destined for work and called to it, in the first place work is "for man" and not man "for work."

* In fact, in the final analysis it is always man who is the purpose of the work, whatever work it is that is done by man - even if the common scale of values rates it as the merest "service," as the most monotonous, even the most alienating work.

* Work is a good thing for man. It is not only good in the sense that it is useful or something to enjoy; it is also good as being something worthy, that is to say, something that corresponds to man's dignity, that expresses this dignity and increases it.... Work is a good thing for man - a good thing for his humanity- because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed becomes "more a human being." Without this consideration it is impossible to understand the meaning of the virtue of industriousness and more particularly it is impossible to understand why industriousness should be a virtue: for virtue, as a moral habit, is something whereby man becomes good as man.

* Work constitutes the foundation for the formation of family life. Work is a condition for making it possible to found a family, since the family requires the means of subsistence which man normally gains through work. Work and industriousness also influence the whole process of education in the family, for the very reason that everyone "becomes a human being" through, among other things, work, and becoming a human being is precisely the main purpose of the whole process of education.

* In fact, the family is simultaneously a community made possible by work and the first school of work, within the home for every person.

* We must emphasize and give prominence to the primacy of man in the production process, the primacy of man over things. Everything contained in the concept of capital in the strict sense is only a collection of things. Man, as the subject of work, and independently of the work that he does - man alone is a person. This truth has decisive and important consequences.

* Work is an obligation, that is to say, a duty, on the part of man. This is true in all the many meanings of the word. Man must work both because the Creator has commanded it and because of his own humanity which requires work in order to be maintained and developed. Man must work out of regard for others especially his own family, but also for the society he belongs to, the country of which he is a child and the whole human family of which he is a member, since he is the heir to the work of generations and at the same time sharer in building the future of those who will come after him in the succession of history. All this constitutes the moral obligation of work, understood in its wide sense.

* As the Second Vatican Council says, "throughout the course of the centuries, men have labored to better the circumstances of their lives through a monumental amount of individual and collective effort. To believers, this point is settled: considered in itself, such human activity accords with God's will. For man, created to God's image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all that it contains, and to govern the works with justice and holiness; a mandate to relate himself and the totality of things to Him who was to be acknowledged as the Lord and Creator of all. Thus, by the subjection of all things to man, the name of God would be wonderful in all the earth."

* The word of God's revelations is profoundly marked by the fundamental truth that man, created in the image of God, shares by his work in the activity of the Creator and that within the limits of his own human capabilities, man in a sense continues to develop that activity, and perfects it as he advances further and further in the discovery of the resources and values contained in the whole of Creation.

* Awareness that man's work is a participation in God's activity ought to permeate, as the Council teaches, even "the most ordinary everyday activities.... They can justly consider that by their labor they are unfolding the Creator's work, consulting the advantages of their brothers and sisters, and contributing by their personal industry to the realization in history of the divine plan."

* Especially in the modern age, the spirituality of work should show the maturity called for by the tensions and restlessness of mind and heart. Far from thinking that works produced by man's own talent and energy are in opposition to God's power, and that the rational creature exists as a kind of rival to the Creator, Christians are convinced that the triumphs of the human race are a sign of God's greatness and the flowering of His own mysterious design. For the greater man's power becomes, the farther his individual and community responsibility extends. People are not deterred by the Christian message from building up the world, or impelled to neglect the welfare of their fellows. They are rather more stringently bound to do these very things.

* The knowledge that by means of work man shares in the work of creation constitutes the most profound motive for undertaking it in various sectors. "The faithful, therefore," we read in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* "must learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation, and its orientation to the praise of God. Even by their secular

activity they must assist one another to live holier lives. In this way the world will be permeated by the spirit of Christ and more effectively achieve its purpose in justice, charity and peace. Therefore, by their competence in secular fields and by their personal activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them work vigorously so that by human labor, technical skill, and civil culture created goods may be perfected according to the design of the Creator and the light of the World."

* The truth that by means of work man participates in the activity of God Himself, His Creator, was given particular prominence by Jesus Christ - the Jesus at whom many of His first listeners in Nazareth were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? Is not this the carpenter?" For Jesus not only proclaimed but first and foremost fulfilled by His deeds the "gospel" the word of eternal Wisdom, that had been entrusted to Him. Therefore this was also "the gospel of work" because He who proclaimed it was Himself a man of work, a craftsman like Joseph of Nazareth. And if we do not find in His words a special command to work- but rather on one occasion a prohibition against too much anxiety about work and life - at the same time the eloquence of the life of Christ is unequivocal: He belongs to the "working world" He has appreciation and respect for human work. It can indeed be said that He looks with love upon human work and the different forms that it takes, seeing in each one of these forms a particular facet of man's likeness with God, the Creator and Father.

* A person is more precious for what he is than for what he has. Similarly, all that people do to obtain greater justice, wider brotherhood, and a more humane ordering of social relationships has greater worth than technical advances. For these advances can supply the material for human progress, but of themselves alone they can never actually bring it about.

* All work, whether manual or intellectual, is inevitably linked with toil. The Christian finds in human work a small part of the Cross of Christ and accepts it in the same spirit of redemption in which Christ accepted His Cross for us.