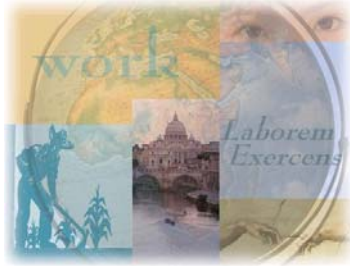


Work as Key to the Social Question

The Great Social and Economic Transformations and the Subjective Dimension of Work



When Work Becomes

Scarce :

What Does the Church Have to Say?
A Response of the Catholic Church in
France «In the name of human
dignity» 1993

by Sister Geneviève Médevielle, S.A.

Professeur de théologie morale

à la Faculté de Théologie et de Sciences Religieuses
de l'Institut Catholique de Paris (France)

Introduction

On the existential level, "when work becomes scarce" [1], a cruel reality in our regions that were once the veritable industrial and economic force of the old Europe, a whole array of suffering, poverty and social exclusion makes itself felt once more. This situation could not fail to have an effect on those institutions concerned with the life of the men and women of today. The extent of this crisis was noted in 1981 in the Encyclical *Laborem exercens*. The rise in unemployment and its persistence in our western societies becomes a powerful indicator of the historic evolution of the social question in the midst of the capitalistic system. The work "that one has or that one does not have" seems clearly to be one of the important keys for understanding the social question of our day insofar as exclusion from the professional world most often causes not only the impoverishment of those involved, but also their marginalization both in society and in relationships.

But today, when the volume of wealth produced is largely unrelated to the quantity of work because of organizational changes in businesses [2], we begin to realize that the employment crisis is not the result of a temporary malfunction of the economic system and that it will not be overcome except by social programmes that go beyond the economic sector in the strict sense of the term. Thus, twenty years after *Laborem exercens*, we must take notice that **work appears to be a value on its way to extinction**. The controversies stirred up in 1995 by the work of Jeremy Rifkin [3] are significant in this regard. The "society of work" according to Hannah Arendt or the "wage-oriented society" according to Michel Aglietta, as it had been experienced since the nineteenth century, is in death throes [4]. The kind of work that corresponded to this society is disappearing. "Socially shaped,

validated, legislated, legitimated, defined by learned abilities, certified, with fixed rates: this vanishing type of work corresponded to objective demands that were functions of the economic engine." [5] Even as this evolution progresses, although it remains true that professional life still has a significant place in our lives, as the sociologist Robert Sue remarks in his book *Time and Social Order* [6], time dedicated to work in one's life is decreasing in order to make room for free time. Looking at a ten-year span, whereas in 1980 the time spent at work represented 18% of waking time for an average individual in French society, in 1990 it is closer to 14%. For the entire population over fifteen years of age, the average time spent at work each day was estimated at two hours and thirty-one minutes in 1986 [7].

Faced with this evolution in the workplace in our western societies, we are witnessing a veritable social debate where **the central and unprecedented question becomes that of the very necessity of work** [8]. Whereas some people generously suggest the sharing of work to reduce unemployment, and while French law advocates 35-hour work-weeks, others — economists and political experts — recommend putting an end to this value and recognizing that work should no longer occupy the central place that it has taken in the lives of men and women.

But we should note that to speak of "work", as I have just done up to this point, presumes the adoption of a certain paradigm. As André Gorz remarked in his book of 1997, *Misères du présent. Richesse du possible* [9], destined to become a reflection on the obsolescence of a wage-oriented society, it is not a question "of work in the anthropological or philosophical sense. It is not a question of the work of giving birth to ideas, or of that of the sculptor or the poet. It is not a question of work as 'autonomous activity of the transformation of resources', nor of work as a 'practical-sensorial activity' through which the subject externalizes himself by an object that is his creation. It is undoubtedly a question of the specific 'work' that belongs to industrial capitalism: the work that is at issue when one says that a woman 'does not have a job' because she dedicates her time to raising her children; or when one says that she 'has a job' because she dedicates but a very small part of her time to the raising of other people's children in a day-care centre or nursery school." [10] What then happens to the relevance of the vision of work and of the right to work presented in *Laborem exercens* in order to deal with the present social question, when economists, ethicists and theologians do not speak the same language and when full employment is nothing more than a completely misleading expectation with regard to reality? We should recall too that the Encyclical hardly took into consideration the structural changes of the labour market, since at that time no one had yet realized what was happening.

Torn between the demand for immediate responses and the need for a more in-depth reflection on the meaning of work in human existence, the Churches — and the Catholic Church in particular — joined the public debate [11]. In France, with the number of unemployed surpassing two million in 1982, the Permanent Council of French Bishops proposed a technical solution to this difficult situation with a work-sharing ethic. Ten years later, in 1993, the thinking of the Social Commission of the French Bishops changes in

order to confront the fundamental question underlying the structural crisis in employment: **is it acceptable to relativize so utterly the place and role of work in human existence?** Let us take note: it is when work becomes scarce that we realize the important place that it still holds in our lives. There is the time that we spend working or looking for work, the energy that we expend in keeping our job, with its armloads of projects and concerns. Work most certainly occupies more than 35 hours weekly in our lives. Most of the time, it is still the means for earning a living, but it is also the crucible of our identity. A person's identity is so tied to his professional status that the lose of this status is dreaded like a social death [12]. Where then do we find ourselves when the mechanism runs wild and the number of unemployed in France in 1993 is just over three million, without counting those in precarious work situations? Is there another way to be socially recognized other than through a paying job?

In this brief contribution, I shall deal especially with the response given by the Church in France to **this question of the relativization of the place of work in human existence**. I shall do so by starting with a very short text from the Social Commission of the French Bishops, *Au nom de la dignité humaine* (In the Name of Human Dignity) of 1993 [13]. I believe that we have here an original approach to the problem, connected on the one hand to **the evolution of the social debate since *Laborem exercens*** and on the other to **the light of Christian faith on what gives worth to human life**. I am well aware that the example taken from France in the 1990s is very simple and some people may object that it is already dated. Nonetheless, I believe it is helpful in measuring the evolution of the Church's thinking on work since John Paul II's Encyclical on work in 1981, in connection with the evolution of the social-cultural debate in our western societies. At the time of *Laborem exercens*, the unemployment crisis, appearing as an economically-conditioned job crisis, was looking for a technical resolution in the classical manner, a solution brought about by a recovery of production and sales as well as by eventual policies of deregulation of the right to work. Now, with unemployment that is structural, widespread and persistent [14] — affecting young people above all and now involving two generations — we realize that the situation prompts not only a search for technical solutions to the problem but also the posing now of fundamental philosophical questions heretofore rarely discussed: should work occupy the place it has had in the lives of men and women since the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century? Should the social and civil integration that a paying job makes possible always be connected with employment?

I shall first situate the Church's position within the context of the French debate in order to understand better the uniqueness of this Declaration of the French Bishops. Then, I shall discuss how the employment-work distinction gives rise to a change in the paradigm concerning work, starting with the desire to face the crisis of social and cultural integration. This crisis has been particularly emphasized in France with the problem of the relevance of the "Guaranteed Minimum Income for Social Inclusion" (*Revenue Minimum d'Insertion*) when long-term unemployment is firmly entrenched. A national survey was taken from 1990 to 1992, before the 1992 vote in Parliament was supposed to decide whether or not to maintain this Minimum Income first approved in 1988. Now, if the debate focused on the demands of distributive justice for every human being regardless of his "social usefulness",

the beneficiaries of the Guaranteed Minimum Income, "minimum-incomists" as they are called in France ("*RMIstes*", from the abbreviation RMI, for "*Revenue Minimum d'Insertion*"), emphasized **their desire to become a real part of social life**, not only in becoming consumers once more because of their income, but because they are valued for the recognized contribution that they make to life in society. Later on, I shall point out how, with a theological option, this reflection on work deals systematically with the problems of citizenship in our western democracies. Lastly, in concluding, I shall evaluate the relevance of this line of thinking from the point of view of the evolution of work-related problems since *Laborem exercens*.

The context of the debates on structural unemployment

At the end of the 1980s, unemployment was not unique to France [15], even if some countries seem to manage it better and are able to create new jobs in such areas as food services, real-estate security services, personal care services, etc. [16]. **If there is a French characteristic**, it must be sought primarily in the tradition of strong social legislation; in a well-defined, multi-level workforce in which the marks of failure or success are not easily confused; and in the attitude of the unemployed with regard to the jobs offered to them, which can be called an "honour mentality". This would serve to explain the importance of "frictional" unemployment and the qualitative discrepancies between job offers and demand. To be more specific, in order to be no longer unemployed it is often necessary to accept a job that is lower-paying or that requires less skill than one's previous job. Now, worker attachment to their position in the labour hierarchy, the refusal to accept a lower level, is much more prevalent in France than in Anglo-Saxon countries. In France it is difficult to change a skilled textile worker into a newspaper vendor. This is a well known fact, connected to responsibilities that are too narrowly defined and to distinctions between social classes that are often very subtle that make it difficult to move from one position to another. On the other hand, new job opportunities no longer appear as places where one can establish a growing professional and social identity that is able to replace identities of the past. All of a sudden, as B. Perret and G. Roustaing have noted, "the degree of compatibility between roles that are culturally esteemed or accepted and roles that are linked to a certain profession is becoming a truly key variable in job dynamics" [17]. That means that in France employment and social integration really go hand-in-hand insofar as one's social identity is largely dependent on one's work.

Whatever one's particular experience of unemployment may be, which in differing degrees depends on the various manners of civil coexistence in a given society, France faces questions that are similar to those found in practically all Western countries, questions that require a solution. Since the 1980s, for the majority of economists seeking to reduce the crisis, because of its persistence in different economic contexts, unemployment shows the characteristics of a dysfunctional structure. As E. Malinvaud observed in a seminar on employment organized by the Saint Simon Foundation in 1988, "the proper functioning of this system should result in the full use of the job market". According to this way of

thinking, unemployment must be seen as a pathological breach in full employment. Where economists differed, however, was in the remedy to be adopted in relation to the different philosophies regarding the State's role in the economy. But in the end, these analyses of the employment crisis in terms of job market imbalances proved to be unsatisfactory for understanding the reality experienced under the form of a paradox [18]. The paradox is that of emphasizing the centrality and necessity of work for living and consuming, while work itself is becoming scarce, precarious, temporary, flexible, intermittent, independent [19]. Even when people are willing to make concessions and to accept loss of prestige, to tolerate faithlessness and competition in order to keep a job, they realize that under the actual conditions, work ceases to be a foundation upon which they can build a life project because there will no longer be any guarantee of a paying, stable and full-time job for everyone. One of the most troubling prospects is the difficulty for less skilled young people to become a stable part of the workforce.

In the end, the persistence of the unemployment afflicting old Europe for the past twenty years has motivated the involvement of economists and sociologists who have contributed to animating the public and political debate on work. It is possible to classify this involvement along two lines of argumentation. The first, represented for the most part by economists and a few political theorists who are fascinated with the dynamism shown by the United States, investigate the fact that certain developed countries are spared by unemployment. Numerous studies have attempted to give a response to this question by measuring the impact of social protection policies on employment. For some of these countries, the price paid for improving the employment situation would mean giving up certain advantages offered by social security and making employment policies more action-oriented, that is, limiting the expenditures for unemployment benefits in order to increase those destined for training courses and programmes that encourage the unemployed to find jobs. The second line of argumentation, often more sociological, investigates "wage-oriented society" and the transformations that it undergoes. It considers contemporary deregulation as well as the signs of cultural modifications that call for rethinking the relationships existing between humanity and work. This unfinished debate has the advantage of showing that the question is more complex than was thought twenty years ago; that it is not only economic, but also social, political and cultural. Undoubtedly, the social and political discussions on the new right to a Guaranteed Minimum Income [20] has highlighted the fact that the social recognition of the right to subsistence no longer depends only on a person's having a paying job but on the demands of distributive justice for every human being. The new and radical discussions on "universal distribution" or "subsistence income" of the 1990s bear witness to an evolution of the debate on work in our societies. **We move from a "right to work"** broadly affirmed by John Paul II and the Church's social teaching **to a "right to income"**. "In affirming a right to income" — wrote the philosopher Jean-Marc Ferry [21] — "it is a matter of detaching income from the constraints of work and, in so doing, of thinking more of the right to work as such, that is, as a right and not a duty imposed from without by the need to earn an income, which is not always the object of an independent right".

In this climate, aware of the resurgence of poverty and of the precariousness to

which a population is exposed in its normal social dealings — that is, not in the extraordinary cases of accident or of particular handicaps — the Bishops' Social Commission is indebted to these debates. Two ideas lie at the base of the French attempt to renew the debate on work. The first is that the legitimate questions that should be raised in the public debate as to the place, meaning and future of work in our modern societies are often obscured both by their being dealt with only in a technocratic, economic and political manner, and by their being discussed on the level of convictions without a grasp of the concrete reality. It is not merely a matter of showing solidarity to the unemployed in the name of their dignity nor of discerning whether unemployment will be better overcome by this or that solution. The French Bishops drew a lesson from the position that they had taken in 1982. When the number of unemployed surpassed the critical threshold of two million for the first time, the Permanent Council of French Bishops published the document *Pour de nouveaux modes de vie* (For New Ways of Living). The text was very poorly received at the time; on one hand because it avowed a belief in growth and, on the other, because of "its lack of realism" when the ethical solution should have been more technical. In fact, noting the growing number of marginalized persons and the creation of a "two-speed society", this document prompted Christians to look at their life-style and to embark upon a solution, that of work-sharing. Nonetheless, the text laid out a fundamental intuition that took more than ten years to be accepted: **marginalization is not merely a matter of money, it also concerns people's being socially recognized.** It was the structural lack of work in the 1990s together with widespread persistent unemployment in different sectors that would lead the French Bishops to take up once more, and in a more fundamental manner, the question of social recognition and that of the identity of work and employment, because **it is the very status of work in our societies that is called into question.** This is the second idea that this document was going to consider very seriously.

Work is not employment: the need for a change in paradigms in order to understand the situation

With its Declaration "*Au nom de la dignité humaine*", the Social Commission of the French Bishops invites Christians from the outset not to be satisfied with talk of convictions or to remain filled with ethical indignation concerning unemployment, which spares no family or neighbourhood. Rather, Christians should try to understand the underlying principles at work in what comes our way so that we can react according to our responsibilities. "Today it is not enough to cry out against unemployment. We must become aware of the logic that brings it about. We must address the causes that enter into our area of responsibility or over which we are to acquire some mastery. We have arrived at the end of a certain line of thinking; the bases upon which our society is built are also those that have led to the present situation. The solution to unemployment will remain merely palliative until we inquire about the type of society that we would like to build, for the good of men and women. In the name of human dignity" [22]. **In recording the end of a certain line of thinking, it becomes clear that in order to understand work, the place of work and the necessity of work, another kind of approach and a different**

methodological model is needed, something other than what has prevailed since the beginning of the 1980s. It is not a question of finding a technical solution to the lack of work but, from a phenomenological approach, to the lived experience of being marginalized because of unemployment, of discerning the end of one world and of discovering what is being born. This is the reformulation of the possible connections between the social integration and the social fruitfulness of human work, against the background of the affirmation of the dignity of persons, which opens the way to understanding that work and employment must not be confused, as they had been in the previous texts. This means paying attention to history and to the public debate as much as to the lived experience that leads, in the Bishops' text of 1993, to the reaffirmation of the necessity of work as an anthropologically fundamental dimension, as found in *Laborem exercens*, all the while confirming that a paying job is just one historical form of work.

This is where the search for a new paradigm takes place, because the pattern of paid work or a job as the source of social integration does not allow us to see what is being born culturally. No one can deny that conceptions of work are conditioned by the culture, social organization and economy of a particular period [23] and by a spirituality [24]. It is necessary then to note that the industrial revolution signaled a break in the way that work was lived and represented. With **paid work or a job**, people are no longer important except in the contribution that they make by their individual work, and their life and social integration often are strictly dependent on their salary [25]. "The efforts that were allowed for more than half a century have put work at the centre of human life as the driving force of social recognition and a paying job as a sign of a worker's productivity. Living conditions were so harsh that work was identified with a job 'for earning one's living'. It is clear that earning something to live off of is indispensable. But life, with its proper guarantees, extends well beyond time spent at the job" [26]. Today, "work can no longer be identified solely with a paying job. Nor is it connected solely with the production of consumer goods. A broader definition for it must be found" [27].

This is why the text distinguishes between **a job**, which it relativizes, and **work**, which has a broader meaning and which is recognized as a true right. "A job is certainly an important component of a person's life. There is no doubt that our culture has placed excessive value on it, for it is neither the centre of life nor, at this time, the most important component. It is itself placed at the service of an overall life project of the person. Social identity is acquired also in places other than on the job: in the family, in human relationships, in cultural, group and political life" [28]. In this definition, a job is defined as a social activity intended to be part of the social and economic exchange of society. As André Gorz emphasized, the fact that it is connected with a wage is evidence of this role that it plays, but it is not the most essential aspect: "what is essential is that 'work' fulfill a socially identified and normalized function in the production and reproduction of all that is social. And in order to fulfil a socially identifiable function it must itself be identifiable by socially defined competencies that it puts into practice by socially determined procedures. In other words, it must be an occupation, a profession" [29]. Now, none of these conditions are met by the work of an artist or the work of a mother in the home. We see that in choosing to distinguish job from work the Social Commission of the French Bishops comes

straight to the point in the philosophical and sociological debate of their day. It recognizes that we have experienced, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a very strong idealist and personalist tradition touching upon the anthropological meaning of work as an expression of self [30], while we have at the same time been experiencing a kind of wage-earning work dependent on industrialization and on the market that permits the subject to be integrated into society. This type of "civilization of work", by which we make a living and acquire social status, is deserving of criticism when it no longer provides for **the integration of everyone into society**.

In fact, in relativizing employment, that is, a paid job, the Social Commission is merely following the nuanced perspectives of the Church's social documents that came before it. *Gaudium et spes*, in no. 67, affirmed that: "By his work a man ordinarily provides for himself and his family". Thanks to the term "ordinarily", this leads us to believe that remuneration by a salary was not, or had not always been, the only way for providing for oneself and participating actively in the life of society. It is possible then, with regard to the debate on "subsistence income", to accept a certain separation between work and guaranteed subsistence, if subsistence is guaranteed by social solidarity independent of work that nonetheless remains necessary, and if that is what the human development of persons is about. But we do well to note in all this the subtlety of thought. When we speak of the relativization of work, we do not devalue its present importance. In the change that has been experienced, work can hardly be dispensed with as a condition for an autonomous social existence. Because it is the only "work" socially actualized, it still represents the prevalent way for acquiring recognition within society. The assessment of the Guaranteed Minimum Income put this in its own way when it recognized that the marginalized, so they will not have to depend on welfare assistance, wish *en masse* to work and that this desire to work is not reduced to the need to have money. The French debate on the Guaranteed Minimum Income brings the awareness that the social question raised by unemployment is not merely a question of distributive justice [31], it is a question of dignity and of the active participation of everyone in society. "Work", as it emerges from the concerns of the "minimum-incomists", is therefore the activity that permits men and women to engage in self-development, to participate in the life of society, to be a part of that life and to play their part in it. It is necessary in this regard because it permits man and society to build themselves up. "Human society is always in need of being built up: this is the primary work of every person, work that expresses his human dignity. Everyone has something to offer to the building up of society... Through his activities with other men, every person builds his own personal inner structure through his work and thus acquires a recognized social existence. The right to work is therefore the right to engage in an activity that expresses human participation in the building up of society" [32]. Consequently, our text reads: it is necessary "from the time of one's education in school to that of retirement **to think of work not only in terms of a paid job but in its function of bearing fruit in society**" [33]. Thus, massive and destructive unemployment requires that all of us respond with immediate action and with **cultural innovation**. "The question is no longer a matter of merely knowing how, in the current state of affairs in our society, to provide employment for more people. It is more a matter, in ensuring that everyone receives their due recognition, of how to make our society evolve" [34]. Creating human work and creating a

human society, this is the construction project to which we are all invited. "A humanizing work bears fruit in society. It contributes to ensuring the goods and services that are necessary for society, it creates social bonds; in like manner it humanizes the one who engages in work... Human society is always in need of being built up: this is the primary work of every person, work that expresses his human dignity" [35]. In this regard, our French text, even if it makes distinctions between work and employment, stands as an extension of *Laborem exercens* (no. 4) insofar as "work", as in the Encyclical, has an ethical nature, on the one hand because it belongs to the humanization of man [36], and on the other because it reveals the state of justice in a society.

It is continuing along these same lines that in November 1996 the Social Commission made a solemn appeal in a new document: "*L'écart social n'est pas une fatalité*" (The Non-Inevitability of Social Marginalization) [37], inviting Christians to **develop this other conception of work**. "Without putting it off any longer, we shall change people's way of thinking by creating examples of bearing fruit in society, in tasks dedicated to serving the quality of life, in the participation of everyone in the common building up of society" [38]. The goal to be achieved is not only that of work for everyone, but also work that is "worthy" of everyone. In these texts, we should note that the right to work for everyone is not the right to full employment. There is room for other forms of activity in solidarity that bring meaning to people and that create social cohesion, forms other than employment, that is to say, forms that bear fruit in society. **To speak of bearing fruit in society means to see human activity as a specific contribution of the person to the community, since it is in community that there is found a social and political freedom that demands to be expressed.**

Together, the question of work and that of citizenship form a system

In the end, a whole theological anthropology is at the basis of the position taken with regard to work as the bearing of fruit in society. An anthropology that brings out the dignity and primacy of the human person over economic functions and mechanisms. "It is proper to consider the respect for every person and for the whole person as a goal" [39]. This principle offers a critique of all ideologies that de facto encourage the marginalization of certain people from life in society and makes an appeal to oppose individualism.

As René Simon saw it, the concept of human dignity found in this text highlights three characteristics: "the intrinsic value of the person, the call to respect every person in virtue of this value, an inescapable priority" [40]. But if the term "human dignity" has the great advantage of constituting a "common forum" for anthropological understanding between believers and non-believers, we must not be misled by its different meanings [41]. Not all of them are compatible with the anthropological theology presumed by this Declaration. In fact, in this text, if human dignity can be affirmed with vigour and presented as a requirement demanding to be put into effect in society, it is because it is justified by a theology of creation and incarnation. For Christians, every human being, since he is created

in the image of God [42], commands unconditional respect. This reference to the *imago Dei* establishes a dignity that does not flow from specifically human qualities or aptitudes such as freedom, autonomy, reason, future prospects, language, memory or social usefulness [43]. It is connected to the creaturely condition of the person, who in his nakedness, stripped of everything — including when he has lost "every human appearance" — still remains a man in his constitutive relationship with God and his brothers and sisters in humanity. Those who have not yet gained access to language, or who have lost the use of it; those whose freedom is stifled or diminished by psychological or physiological causes, or by moral causes; those whose humanity seems to have atrophied because of depravity or because of an inadequate or troubled up-bringing; those who have become "socially useless": the Christian recognizes in all such people, despite all of these conditions, a brother or sister in humanity who must be respected unconditionally. There is something extreme in this kind of affirmation of human dignity. This is the meaning of the parable of the Last Judgment (*Mt 25*) and it is the meaning found on the face of the Crucified One. If it is true that, by contrast, dignity is revealed in the hunger of those who have no bread, in the thirst of those who have to water with which to quench it, in the nakedness of those who have nothing with which to clothe themselves, in the shackles of those deprived of freedom, then we can understand **why** the defense of human dignity is a social undertaking and how it can be fostered in a "right to a subsistence income", including for those who could not be integrated into society by means of a paying job.

But it is here that our Declaration becomes more subtle, and, unquestionably showing the effects of the French debates on the Guaranteed Minimum Income for Social Inclusion [44], where "inclusion" functions as a counterbalance to income, since, as a condition for fostering human dignity, it marks the difference between the acquired rights of social security and the welfare assistance that excludes people "unjustifiably from taking part in the progress of society as a whole" [45]. From a political point of view, acquired rights in the area of social protection imply a social citizenship that calls for equal treatment of possessors of similar rights. In order to have a right to social remedies, an individual must be a citizen and must be identified as being in an "at risk" category that entitles him to public intervention. This right is not dependent on the merit of the citizen, nor on his behaviour; it is inscribed in his objective situation. Now, in concrete policies, those who suffer long-term unemployment and young people whose future insertion into the job market is uncertain, episodic or impeded, are treated in a completely different fashion than the non-habitual, short-term unemployed. While the latter appear as possessors of rights that will be honoured by the protection ensured within the framework of a particular service sector, the former move towards social assistance. In France, the Guaranteed Minimum Income for Social Inclusion is the rejection of the simple welfare assistance that would mean resigning oneself to the fact that a certain segment of the population, which is recognized nonetheless as having the right to live, is chronically excluded from social exchange. But we know that in reality, inclusion is most often a vain word when society does not really make use of the "minimum-incomists", failing to assign them any tasks whatsoever. Personal status and inclusion are then limited to having access to money. This is no small thing, however, because being able to pay instead of using food vouchers or clothing vouchers changes the image that one has of oneself and changes the way that one is

looked at by others. But it is not the full expression of a freedom and of a status as a person that contribute to the building up of society. We understand that, without engaging in criticism of this unanimously adopted system, the Bishops call for vigilance over anything that even hints at welfare assistance and they guide Christians towards a quest for what will contribute to giving once more a place, a status to everyone in society. This concern brings us well into the realm of citizenship.

The problem, then, is to be understood in the context of citizenship. For there is a paradox. At the political level, the fact remains that it is still a job that gives people access to economic or social citizenship. As André Gorz noted, "the fullness of economic rights (the right to unrestricted income), of social rights (right to social security) and of political rights (right to action, to representation, to collective organization) remains tied to jobs alone, which, stably filled by full-time personnel, are becoming ever more infrequent" [46]. Now, for the Church's social doctrine that underlies the thinking of the Social Commission, it is human dignity that is the foundation of social citizenship and of respect for social rights. What holds fundamental civil, political, economic and social rights together in the framework of *Pacem in terris* [47] is the norm requiring that human dignity be respected. But his dignity is not abstract. It reveals itself in the concrete conditions of personal, social, economic and political life. These are, in the end, the conditions for bringing about this dignity that can be called "human rights". This is why it is not surprising that, even if *Pacem in terris* is close in style to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the list of rights is not exactly the same nor presented in the same order [48]. The defense and promotion of human dignity does not depend only on fulfilling fundamental human needs, but also on protecting fundamental human freedoms. Societal institutions and political authority must be oriented to the protection of personal dignity. This is why the problem of marginalization and its solution are, for our text, first of all political and cultural. The solutions are to be found in the choice for a society of solidarity, of multi-activity; a society that moves beyond the creation of social ties to relationships of cooperation governed by mutuality, reciprocity, respect, and no longer by simply by the market; a society in which each person can earn his status and the respect of others no longer primarily because of the job he has or the money he earns, but because of his many activities, work that is recognized and made use of in the sphere of society in ways that are not monetary. The question of "work" in the broad sense, of "the right to work for all" that corresponds to it, comprises a system with the question of social citizenship whenever it is a matter of participating in and building up civil life in society. This is the question of "civil coexistence" and of the integration of everyone into the life of society, which becomes the social question dealt with in this text and is no longer a simple duty of distributive justice of the right to employment. And in suggesting a new form of social unity by putting into practice active policies of close solidarity, we can catch a glimpse of an inclusive economy that will allow participation in changing the salary-oriented society that has been in crisis for the past twenty years.

Conclusion

There remains now but to conclude and to evaluate the ethical relevance of the Church's position with regard to the problem that is the focus of our colloquium. I shall make four points.

First, the pastoral duty of the local Church to offer clarifications concerning social life in light of the demands made by the Gospel oblige it to have a clear and critical grasp of the changes currently taking place in society. The social question did not stop evolving according to place and time after *Rerum novarum*. It is therefore not surprising if, in contact with immediate local realities, the Bishops together with lay experts who work for the Social Commission discern new problems that are harmful to their society, the need for respect of the human person and the justice that should govern all relationships among people. Thus, for France, it is not work as such that represents the new social question, rather it is **social exclusion** in all its forms, primarily induced however by unemployment. The development of two small documents published by the Social Commission is exemplary because we move from a text on unemployment in 1993 to a declaration on social exclusion in 1996. Work, above all when it becomes scarce, is therefore an important indicator of the crisis of social and cultural integration that exists in our society. **In this regard, the subject of research of this colloquium is adequate when it identifies work as the "key" for understanding and interpreting the social question.** Yes, the status of wage-earning work is in itself a central question for our western societies, as pointed out by *Laborem exercens*, because it constitutes one of the essential dimensions, one of the foundations of these societies, and because it is a matter today of recognizing the nature of the crisis of the scarcity of work, but also of deciding what type of society we would like to build together.

But if it is true that work is an important indicator of the social question, we see — and this is my second point — that the Social Commission of the French Bishops had to perform **a feat of judgment on the proper meaning of work, thus coming in part to a deeper and renewed understanding of the problems presented in *Laborem exercens*.** In order to do this, it did not hesitate, on an epistemological level, to have recourse to a multidisciplinary analysis, going from philosophy to the human and social sciences; it does this without neglecting the technical aspects of the problems and while making use at the same time of a phenomenological reading of the experience of unemployment. It is this multifaceted approach to the reality of the world of work that made it necessary to introduce the distinction in vocabulary between employment and work, which is not found in *Laborem exercens*. All sorts of indications showed that the capacity for integration by work in the sense of employment had been strongly eroded. Thus, between the needs of the market economy and the concern for the dignity of persons and for their identity, it became more and more difficult to make the necessary adjustments. Or still more, the development of the service sector, of "small jobs" and of temporary, flexible work are in fact signs of the end of the symbiosis between social integration and an economic activity that is above all production-oriented. With this distinction between work and employment, the Social Commission provides itself with some tools for interpreting historical manifestations of work, that of a paying job being merely a recent social innovation that made its appearance

with the advent of big industry in the nineteenth century. All at once, it understands better why, without abandoning the "right to work for everyone", "full employment for everyone at a full-time job" is once again called into question, not because of simple selfishness or a lack of imagination on the part of economists incapable of restarting the economic engine and making under-employment disappear, but because we are experiencing a true cultural transformation. In this regard, the Social Commission makes a hermeneutical choice concerning the situation: we are leaving the "labour society" denounced by Hannah Arendt, the society that still forms the backdrop of the Encyclical *Laborem exercens*.

From here, it remains to be seen — as a third point — whether the Social Commission's outlook is convincing. For in positing a difference between work and employment, it seems to have fully adopted the thesis put forward by Rifkin or André Gorz, according to which the wage-oriented society is coming to an end. The consequences are not insignificant. Full employment, broadly recommended in many social documents of the Church including *Laborem exercens*, can no longer be considered the norm. The timid desire to "save employment" would mean falling into an "ideology of work", work understood in the historical sense inherited from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On the other hand, the ethical urgency becomes the integration of everyone into society, for that is what humanization and the dignity of every person is about. Some people have raised questions about the desire to set imagination free by calling for a veritable cultural revolution thanks to a new idea of work as the bearing of fruit in society. We shall have traded one "ideology of work" for another. Nonetheless, we should note that when the Social Commission speaks of the end of one way of thinking or admits that full employment such as we have experienced it in the past can no longer exist, this does not mean rejecting the idea of the necessity of work for everyone in the anthropological and philosophical sense of the term. Here we see the great subtlety of the distinction between work and employment that permits the Commission, on the one hand, to maintain a vision of the human fruitfulness and necessity work as contained in the Church's social doctrine, especially in *Laborem exercens*, and, on the other hand, to liberate this vision from the historical forms of employment that come to prevent us from seeing what is going on in the crisis-transformation that we are experiencing. If, wishing to uphold the necessity and permanence of work in the anthropological sense, we resist admitting that the concept of salaried work-employment is coming to an end, we end up affirming the opposite of what we wish to prove, because it is precisely in the sense of self-fulfillment, of humanization, in the sense of the creation of an intellectual work, of its social fruitfulness that work most quickly fades into the virtualized realities of the present economy. If we wish to save the full sense of a humanizing and necessary work for everyone, in the sense in which *Laborem exercens* spoke of it, then we urgently need to recognize — as the Social Commission does — that socially fruitful work does not consist, at least not exclusively, in the job that one has. By changing this paradigm, it is undoubtedly true that the Church's position has moved to a utopia in the sense of Paul Ricoeur, that is, a utopia whose function with regard to the existing concrete reality is to provide the distance that enables us to judge what we are doing in the light of what we should be doing.

As a fourth point, then, we should comment that what has been central in the

discernment of the Bishops' Social Commission, obliging it to change its paradigm of work, is not so much the persuasiveness of current theories present in the public debate as **the attention and concern shown to the marginalized in the very name of their dignity**. For, in the eyes of faith, it is neither what we do nor the profits of our work that provide justification for our existence. It is the belief that in the eyes of God, each of us has value, an inestimable value. A value that invites each of us to respect others in their dignity regardless of their social usefulness and to treat them justly. A value that invites the Church to speak out with conviction and in protest on behalf of the wounded, the rejected and the poor of this world. Yes, the array of distress, suffering and social exclusion that accompany the labour crisis and the profound transformations that people can expect must not leave the Church silent because, each time, it is the future and the quality of human life that is at stake. From this perspective, the Church's theologically grounded intervention, even if it does not propose concrete suggestions as is the case in these texts, appears as a service to freedom and is an aid to discernment in sorting out the ambiguities of interests and concerns, a task that is undertaken in a faith that straightforwardly confesses brotherhood in Christ, the dignity and transcendence of the human person, called to communion in the Kingdom that we look forward to each day.

ENDNOTES

[1]. Notwithstanding the similarity with the title of the book by B. Guggenberger, *Wenn uns die Arbeit ausgeht*, Hanser, 1988, our purpose is rather that of a subtitle, that is to say, to evaluate a position of the Church on unemployment.

[2]. Cf. Jean-Paul Maréchal, "Révolution informationnelle et mutation du travail", *Esprit*, August-September, 1995.

[3]. Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1995).

[4]. Many voices have tried to make themselves heard since the end of the 1980s, declaring that we were in the process of leaving behind a model that had been with us since the eighteenth century. In 1985, in his book *Le Discours philosophique de la modernité*, Habermas announced "the historically predictable end of the society founded on work" (French edition, Paris: Gallimard, 1988, p. 97). Claus Offe, a German sociologist, wrote at the same time an article on "the implosion of work categories", in *Les Temps modernes*, 1985, no. 466, pp. 2058-2095. In France, reflections of this type were put forth principally by André Gorz, *Métamorphoses du travail. Quête du sens* (Paris: Galilée, 1988). We can also consult the work of Jacques Robin, *Quand le travail quitte la société industrielle* (Paris: Groupe de réflexion inter et transdisciplinaire, 21 boulevard de Grenelle, 1994-1995, two volumes).

[5]. André Gorz, *Misères du présent. Richesse du possible* (Paris: Galilée, 1997), p. 96.

[6]. Robert Sue, *Temps et ordre social* (Paris: P.U.F., 1994).

[7]. These statistics would require an expert and complicated commentary, because the numbers given concern people of different ages, with the number of retirement-aged individuals and senior citizens increasing.

[8]. The year 1995 produced a particular abundance of books and articles on work and the necessity of work. Cf.: Daniel Mothe, "Réfraction du travail des mentalités", *Esprit*, August-September, 1995. We note also the question of "citizen" integration through salaried work discussed in particular by Dominique Schnapper, *La communauté des citoyens* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), and by Bernard Perret, *L'avenir du travail* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1995). With this last book, the philosopher Dominique Méda, in his book *Le travail, une valeur en voie de disparition* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1995), with the background of discussion on the place of economism in our culture, discusses the type of social integration that salaried work has played since the industrial revolution and shows how much this role is called into question today. To this question on the necessity of work, which can be understood as both philosophical and anthropological, we must add the research concerning solutions such as the reduction of work hours or of "subsistence income", called also "universal allocation", as found in Jean-Marc Ferry, *L'allocation universelle* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1995).

[9]. André Gorz, *Misères du présent. Richesse du possible* (Paris: Galilée, 1997).

[10]. André Gorz, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[11]. We recall the exemplary debate initiated by the Catholic Church in the United States in the 1980s on the theme of "Economic Justice for All" (1986), a public discussion of unemployment and of economic justice that had not been seen since the Great Depression of 1929 and Roosevelt's New Deal.

[12]. In fact, curiously, each time that we are asked who we are — and this happens in religious life too — we always begin by talking about what we do, and if we neglect this rule, we are reminded of it by the question: "what do you do?".

[13]. Declaration of the Bishops' Social Commission, "Face au chômage, changer le travail. Au nom de la dignité humaine", 27 September 1993, Paris: Bayard, *La Documentation catholique*, 17 October 1993, no. 2080, pp. 895-897.

[14]. As far as the most recent numbers available for France are concerned, we may note that on 31 July 2001 the latest rise in unemployment recorded a total of 2,077,100 unemployed persons, which was 8.8% of the active work population. This level peaked at 12.6% in 1997 and, since that date till May 2001, the unemployment rate continued to decrease before starting to climb again very recently (statistics from the Ministry of Labour). The evolution of the international economic context marked by a downturn in American growth, by a slowdown in German activity and the lower revised French industrial forecasts resulting from that, all call for prudence in making pronouncements

about the unemployment prospects in France.

[15]. See the report of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development that summarizes the changes in unemployment levels during the period from 1980 to 1990, *Perspectives de l'emploi* (Employment Perspectives), July 1992.

[16]. See C. Hakim, "Restructuring of British Workforce", *L'évolution des formes d'emploi*, Paris: La Documentation française, 1989, p. 180 ff, on the example of Great Britain, where 35% of total employment was considered "unconventional".

[17]. Bernard Perret and Guy Roustaing, *L'économie contre la société. Affronter la crise de l'intégration sociale et culturelle* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), p. 135.

[18]. See Philippe d'Iribarne, *Le chômage paradoxal* (Paris: P.U.F., 1990).

[19]. In 1992, nearly half of those registering with the National Employment Agency were coming from limited-time contracts.

[20]. The example of the Guaranteed Minimum Income for Social Inclusion is interesting, because a characteristic of this allocation is precisely the fact that it makes a break from the traditional scheme of economic and social relationships by establishing a right to income that is not connected to work and that does not rely on traditional motivations for institutional assistance (age, handicaps, family situation, etc.).

[21]. Jean-Marc Ferry, *L'allocation universelle* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1995), p. 46.

[22]. Declaration of the Bishops' Social Commission, "Face au chômage, changer le travail. Au nom de la dignité humaine", *Documentation Catholique*, 17 October, 1993, no. 2080, § 1 b, p. 895.

[23]. In this regard, the book by Dominique Méda of 1995 (*op. cit.* in note 8) is a very interesting philosophical genealogical essay on the notion of work in our culture.

[24]. Pierre Vallin, "Les spiritualités du travail", *Christus*, no. 161, January 1994, pp. 57-67, and "Travail", *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 15, Paris: Beauchesne, 1991, particularly columns 1208-1244.

[25]. In effect, work marked by the birth of big industry is more and more determined on the basis of a contract connected to the changes in the market of supply and demand. We are then far from the medieval atmosphere that relativizes the place that work occupies in life lest it distract man from his spiritual concerns. In medieval times, there were 141 non-working holidays and the historian E. Dolléans estimates that people worked barely more than half the year. 1[26]. Declaration of the Bishops' Social Commission, "Face au

chômage, changer le travail. Au nom de la dignité humaine", *Documentation Catholique*, 17 October, 1993, no. 2080, § 3, p. 895.

[27]. *Ibid.*, *Documentation Catholique*, 17 October, 1993, no. 2080, p. 895.

[28]. *Ibid.*, *Documentation Catholique*, 17 October, 1993, § 5 d, p. 896.

[29]. André Gorz, *Misères du présent. Richesses du possible* (Paris: Galilée, 1997), p. 14.

[30]. Concerning the vision of work embraced by the idealist German philosophy, one can consult the book of Henri Arvon, *Philosophie du travail* (Paris: P.U.F., 1961), as well as the genealogy of the notion of work in the previously cited book by Dominique Méda. For Hegel, in *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, work brings man to the fullness of culture, which entails the consequence, according to P.-J. Labarrière and G. Jarczyk, that "depriving man of work, like depriving him of speech, means uprooting him from the place where he is recognized, the place that controls the awareness of his identity and the expression of his freedom" (*Hegeliانا*, 1986, p. 232).

[31]. This reminder allows us to note some reservations concerning the simple establishment of a subsistence income paid out without any corresponding participation in the life of society.

[32]. Declaration of the Bishops' Social Commission, "Face au chômage, changer le travail. Au nom de la dignité humaine", *Documentation Catholique*, 17 October, 1993, no. 2080, § 4-5 b, pp. 895-896.

[33]. *Ibid.*, *Documentation Catholique*, 17 October, 1993, no. 2080, § 10 a, p. 897.

[34]. *Ibid.*, *Documentation Catholique*, 17 October, 1993, no. 2080, § 5, p. 896.

[35]. *Ibid.*, *Documentation Catholique*, 17 October, 1993, no. 2080, p. 895.

[36]. If work has an ethical nature, it is because "the one who carries it out is a person, a conscious and free subject, that is to say, a subject that decides about himself" (*Laborem exercens*, 6).

[37]. Declaration of the Bishops' Social Commission, "L'écart social n'est pas une fatalité", Lourdes, 4 - 9 November 1996, Paris: Bayard, *La Documentation Catholique*, 1 December 1996, no. 2149, pp. 1013-1015.

[38]. *Ibid.*, *La Documentation Catholique*, 1 December 1996, no. 2149, p. 1015.

[39]. Declaration of the Bishops' Social Commission, "Face au chômage, changer le travail. Au nom de la dignité humaine", *Documentation Catholique*, 17 October, 1993, no. 2080, § 9, p. 897.

2[40]. René Simon, "Le concept de dignité de l'homme en éthique", in A. Holderegger, R. Imbach. R. Suarez de Miguel (editors), *De Dignitatis Hominis. Mélanges offerts à C.-J. Pinto de Oliveira* (Fribourg/Paris: Editions Universitaires de Fribourg/Cerf, 1987), pp. 267-278, especially p. 266.

[41]. Cf. Jean-Michel Breuvert, "Le concept philosophique de dignité humaine", *Le Supplément. Revue d'éthique et théologie morale*, no. 191, December 1994, pp. 99-129.

[42]. Declaration of the Bishops' Social Commission, "Face au chômage, changer le travail. Au nom de la dignité humaine", *Documentation Catholique*, 17 October, 1993, no. 2080, § 2, p. 895.

[43]. At the present time we see philosophers in the debate on euthanasia and abortion take a position on the definition of human dignity by stripping it of its content when a person no longer shows faculties of reason, memory or language skills, or when he has no further plans for the future. Cf. Peter Singer, *op. cit.*, 1997.

3[44]. An independent commission was named to evaluate the adoption of the Guaranteed Minimum Income in 1991-1992. *RMI. Le pari d'insertion*, Paris: La Documentation Française, 1992.

4[45]. Declaration of the Bishops' Social Commission, "Face au chômage, changer le travail. Au nom de la dignité humaine", *Documentation Catholique*, 17 October, 1993, no. 2080, § 5, p. 896.

[46]. André Gorz, *Misères du présent. Richesses du possible* (Paris: Galilée, 1997), p. 108.

[47]. With great clarity the American theologian David Hollenbach has shown, twenty years ago, the consistency and logic of the proclamation of rights and duties, indomitably at the centre of which is respect for human dignity. David Hollenbach, S.J., *Claims in Conflict* (New York, Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1979), especially the re-presentation of a study and diagram by D. Christiansen, R. Garet, D. Hollenbach and C. Powers, "Moral Claims, Human Rights and Population Policies", *Theological Studies*, vol. 35, p. 102.

[48]. Cf. the comparative study by René Coste, "La première charte ecclésiale des droits de l'homme", in René Coste, Michel Dagrás, Gérard Mathon, Christian Mellon and Raymond Mengus, *Paix sur la terre. Actualité d'une encyclique* (Paris: Centurion, 1992), particularly pp. 107-111.

