

# Work as Participation in the Life of the Trinity

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## I. Introduction:

I would like to begin by first taking a few moments to express a concern that underlies the aim of this paper and to discuss what I think is fundamentally at stake in these proceedings. One would have to have been asleep for the last several years not to be aware of the great interest that has developed in spirituality, both in general and in relation to particular aspects of life, including business, leadership and management, and work itself. There are countless popular books on the care of the soul, on healing the soul, on leading with soul, all of them in one way or another alerting the reader to the dangers of living a fragmented life and offering advice on how to integrate the spiritual and the ordinary. University curriculum committees consider offering courses on spirituality, while Eastern mystics sell videotapes, and management gurus and poets give public lectures on a question that, it must be admitted, suddenly feels new and full of promise: How can I bring my whole self to work?

That the question is an important one cannot be denied. In fact, it may be *the* question at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as we begin to grasp the role that work and the institution of business is playing and will likely continue to play in our lives and communities. The caution I have about it is two-fold, one for the community of management scholars and practitioners, and a second one for the theologians and all those working to forge the linkages between faith and work. First, if the field of management science is to undertake a serious consideration of the role the transcendent can play in our working lives, we had better be aware of and sensitive to the unspeakably important effort this represents. This is not just another interesting possibility among other, equally interesting possibilities for motivating the workforce. This is not a management program to be attempted and discarded in two or three years. It cannot be some kind of fad that appears on the horizon and disappears when it no longer interests our clients or our students, or when it has been shown to have no impact on the profitability of the firm or the sustainability of competitive business organizations. We have embarked on something that not only calls for a profound respect for the human person, an impulse that relatively few people can claim consistently, but for the recognition that it is, in fact, the *sacred*, in every sense of

that word, that we are attempting to engage and understand. If we are not absolutely committed to establishing this as a persistent inquiry, accompanied by serious, interdisciplinary scholarship and research and the development of management systems that embrace it, we should stop right now, for there will be no going back. It is one thing to create cynics in the working world with the constant flux of new management recipes for success; it is quite another to encourage people to "bring their whole selves to work," whatever we think that means, only to discourage it in a few years because it does not appear to have utility.

Theologians need to be aware that this is a real risk. They should refuse to participate if it seems that the interest in any way issues solely from an expectation that it will result in greater efficiency or in higher returns to shareholders. The focus of this endeavor must be on not only the development of the human person, but ultimately on the possibilities for his or her conversion and salvation through his or her work. Perhaps more concretely, theologians need to be aware that the general tenor of the discussion on "bringing the whole self to work" has taken on the sense that somehow the 'last frontier' in human resource practices is to allow for the spiritual dimension of the human person to surface in the workplace. While it is not always clear what is meant by this or how it would work, I would simply point out that there is a great deal of room still left in most organizations for bringing the "whole person" to work at the most fundamental, the most basic level, in his/her essential and diverse humanity. A spirituality of work cannot become a new management theory, overlaid on top of other management theories, but must result in a new and concrete understanding of who the human person is and what the role of the firm is in promoting his or her well-being and development, spiritual and otherwise. Thus what is needed is not a discussion of how to bring prayer into the workplace, but an understanding of in what sense human work could be a form of prayer. What is needed first of all is an understanding of what it means to be human and what it would mean to bring the whole *human* person to work, in the complete meaning of that term, a finite being ordered not only toward the good, but toward the transcendent.

This brings us to the aim of this paper. It represents the beginning of an exploration of the relationship of the human person *as the subject of work* to the Trinitarian God of Christian revelation. What I hope to establish first is that it is fundamentally through our humanity that we participate in the spiritual dimension of work, and that this participation moves toward completion through a process of continual conversion at three levels: the religious, the intellectual, and the moral and thus becomes a means of salvation when it is properly understood. Further, I will suggest, in solidarity with St. Augustine, although along slightly different lines, that there is a way in which we both reflect the image of the Trinity and participate in the its life, while at work and through our work.

## **II. The Role of Work in Human Life:**

First it might be wise to consider the role that work actually has in human salvation and whether or not it is a relevant topic for the consideration of the religious person or theologian. That it is germane is verified in Scripture, specifically the Book of *Genesis*. In his 1981 encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*, John Paul II points to *Genesis* to support the

Church's teaching that "work is a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth." Before Adam and Eve's fateful choice, "God blessed them, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.'"

The activity of work is to be seen as a reflection of the fundamental nature of the human person and of the fact that men and women are made in the image of God who creates. We work, not as punishment for the fall, but because we are made to collaborate in the on-going creation of God's design. Work only became the burden it seems after the fall, when its role in human life along with human nature itself, became muddied by original sin. Of course, the reality of Christ on the Cross helps us to understand the place that suffering has in the life of a believer, suffering that certainly includes work as a vehicle for salvation.

Work is not an incidental activity in human life, but is in part constitutive of it. It is not a necessary evil engaged in only to allow for the freedom to do the things that really count, but is *in its very nature* both a way to participate in the life of God, and a means to return to him, a way of salvation. Here I would point out once again that the question under consideration is not simply an interesting one, but a recognition of the place that work already occupies in our relationship to God. Thus the demand for understanding and for allowing that understanding to inform our organizational lives has fundamental importance for all who seek to grasp and to find completion in the mystery of salvation.

This call to work and to participate in the process of creation is at the same time universal, embracing all human beings and generations, and individual, taking place within each conscious human subject. But it is a complex reality that includes both the inner exigencies of the human person and the external objects of his or her work. It involves both he/she who works, the tools used, and what that work creates. In this regard, John Paul differentiates between the objective and subjective dimensions of work. The 'objects' of work are its tools and the products or services that are created through work efforts, but the 'subject' of work is the human person, "a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself and with a tendency to self-realization." The dignity and importance of work is not found in the kind of work someone does, in the place it holds in society or in the remuneration received for it, but in the fundamental dignity of the subject of work, the human person. It is to this reality that we will next turn our attention.

### **III. The Subject of Work:**

It is important to clarify that when we speak of the subject of work we are not speaking strictly of "the worker" or of "labor" usually referred to in the Catholic social tradition. Rather, we are speaking comprehensively of anyone who works, including mothers engaged in the work of raising a family, CEOs and owners of business organizations, managers, college professors, writers and gas station attendants. The alienation that is felt in the modern era due to the hollow place work occupies in human life is not limited to a particular job family or profession. When Marx spoke of the alienation of labor, he was referring to a real human condition but he was mistaken to claim it as unique to the

factory worker. It is an existential problem that resides within the subject and which can only be mediated through his or her intentional effort to become to become the *subject* of work in the fully human sense of the term, that is, self-consciously, authentically, fully human.

Although the influence of Hegel, Kierkegaard, Buber and others has led to a greater emphasis on the subject in contemporary philosophy, management science does not refer to philosophical understandings or categories and has not been apprised of these developments. And I would argue, along with Pope John Paul II, that it is the subject that has been neglected in our understanding of how to organize human work and to what ends it should be directed. What is at stake here is not another training program that enables the person to perform an external task, that is, to excel at the objective dimension of work. What is at stake is *being* and the conscious and intentional operations that constitute the levels of human cognition.

Here we come to the extraordinary contribution of the Jesuit philosopher and theologian, Bernard Lonergan, to our understanding of the subject and the operations of human knowing, and to his transcendental precepts: Be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible. Each of these precepts represents a distinct level in human consciousness and intentionality; each level is accompanied by a particular human occurrence. The first level is the empirical level on which the subject is *experiencing* his or her world, attending to the data of sense and experience. At the second level, the intellectual level, we are engaged in *understanding*. Here is the operation of human intelligence, where we attempt to grasp the meaning in the data, to express that meaning, to work out the implications of it. The third level is the rational level on which operates our reason, where we are *judging* the truth or falsity of what we have come to understand. And finally, the fourth level is the level on which we become responsible, on which we are *deciding* not only what is true, but what is good and what action must be taken to bring the good to life in our world. Each level asks further questions and calls for a new and more conscious intention. Each level is a part of the whole that constitutes the materially and formally dynamic structure of human knowing and of our conscious intention, of our being.

It is not my aim to convince you here of the objective merits of Lonergan's cognitional theory, but only to illustrate the incredible complexity of the operations of human knowing that he points to and about which we can perhaps agree. More important to my purposes is the distinction he makes between these operations as intentional and as conscious. The subject is not just a thinker, not just a will or an intellect. He or she has the possibility of fully intending each of these levels, of experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding about his or her own cognitional operations and the decisions that result. These operations, especially when fully intended by the subject, are already a movement toward God. For as soon as you ask: Is it so? Is it true? Is it good?, your questions are concerned with being. This is the dynamic structure of human knowing, which by its very nature intends being, and it is the wish to know being, ultimately to know God, which is the originating drive of human knowing. The eros of the human

spirit is to seek to know without restraint, a quality that turns us toward ourselves and toward our God at the same time.

What is at stake in neglecting the subject at work is the human freedom to seek the transcendent in every moment of human life. For "the subject is capable of an intentional self-transcendence, of going beyond what he [sic] feels, what he imagines, what he thinks, what seems to him, to something entirely different, to what is so." In neglecting the subject at work we have cut ourselves off from the movement toward the transcendent that is contained in our wish to know, an intention that is unrestricted, that points beyond the finite to the infinite. We have thought of work as contained within the objects it creates and neglected ourselves as the conscious beings who participate freely in the act of creating, for to be fully the subject of work we must be conscious of ourselves and know ourselves. To know the subject one must study oneself by attending to one's operations, and to "their center and source which is the self." The neglected subject does not know him or herself, does not attend to the self, and cannot open the self to the full range of human intentionality and consciousness which is contained in human knowing and free and responsible human doing. It is only when the human subject is free to act responsibly that he makes himself what he is to be. In fact, he makes himself what he is to be precisely when his acts are the free and responsible expressions of himself. Management systems that prevent this development cut the subject off from him or herself *and from the source of his or her conversion*

We become subjects in the full sense of the word by degrees. This is a process that can take place in the course of a moment, of a day, or of a lifetime. When we are sleeping, our subjectivity is only potential. Then we awake and we begin to experience our world, to become subjects at the level at which we can perceive impressions, follow impulses or instructions, move or operate machinery. Next, we may progress to the intelligent level of conscious intentionality where we begin to inquire about our experience and work to understand it. In connection with our topic, we not only perform the operations of the job, we begin to ask questions about it: Why is it done this way and not some other way? The next level is the level at which we begin to reason, to weigh the evidence and draw conclusions. Extending our example, we begin to make judgements concerning what is true about how the job is being done and how it could be done. And last, we are free to operate responsibly, to make a decision to leave the job as it is or to change it for the better. These are the operations that inform our work as a subject. What promotes the subject through these levels is the desire to understand, and further, to understand truth and reality correctly. This intention becomes finally that of intending what is of value, of intending the good. For the subject as an existential reality must be distinguished from the subject as *good*, and the choices that the subject makes not only determine what he or she is, but further will make him or her good – or not. This question cannot be considered apart from that of the world and the design of its creator. The only way it makes sense for the subject to move in the direction of the good is if creation is the work of a God that exists, is omnipotent and is good, for it would only serve to further alienate the subject from his or her world if he or she intends the good in a universe that is not. And here, finally, we come to the ground of our being – the Triune God, and to human authenticity and conversion.

#### **IV. The Subject and Conversion:**

Perhaps we can take as our starting point the possibility that conversion of the human subject may be three-fold: intellectual, moral, and religious. Each of these is a process of self-transcendence, calling for an authentic movement toward a state free of biases, wrong choices, finite masters, and unworthy ends.

Intellectual conversion involves a process of continually facing the fact that knowing is not just looking and drawing conclusions, but is a complex, dynamic structure that includes experiencing, understanding, judging, deciding. It requires continual checking and rechecking of the judgments and decisions that have been made, either by the individual or the community, as new data are sought and new experiences present themselves. It requires the subject to go beyond the bias that can exist when an individual or group decides what is true without all the available facts or without an openness to emerging facts. It requires him or her to go beyond what he or she believes or assumes, to what is so. It requires an "ethics of thinking."

Moral conversion involves reconciling the tension between the recognition of the good and the acting on it. It consists in deciding what is good, choosing the good and taking steps to achieve it, shifting the "criterion of one's decisions and choices from satisfactions to values." It involves recognizing and struggling with the conflict that Paul so well describes: "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it." In concrete terms, it calls for a process of human integration as the body learns to agree to carry out the instructions that the mind gives. It requires an ethics of action, which presupposes an ethics of thinking.

Religious conversion is the gift of grace. It can be described as a kind of falling in love, "a total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations" which orders all subsequent acts to an act of service to the God who is loved. Religious conversion is the ground of all self-transcendence, whether it be the intellectual pursuit of truth, or bodily sacrifice to pursue the good. It is the reconciler of the tension because it brings the force of love to the conflict, "promoting the subject from cognitional to moral self-transcendence," yet goes beyond even this to a state in which the subject is embraced by a love so powerful, so immense, so complete that the ultimate reason for human life is manifest.

The human person at work must be free to love, to pursue what is true, and to act for what is good for the spiritual dimension to have meaning in organizational life. This freedom can lead to a process of continual intellectual and moral conversion as the subject is encouraged to ask questions and to act on his or her conclusions, only if his or her self-transcendence is understood to find completion in participation in the life of God.

#### **V. Work as Participation in the Trinity:**

The development of a theological framework that could show how work might be a participation in the life of the Trinity can take several directions. We know that we are "a

people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." The Trinity as it reveals itself in salvation history shows us that all human activity is redeemed and sanctified through the eternal missions of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; human life itself is a participation in the life of the Trinity, and work would have to be as well. These are aspects of the question that must be pursued also. But my main interest here is in understanding the human person as the *subject* of work and in the question of how, at a fundamentally human level, the subject *qua* subject might participate in the life of the Trinity. What I would like to do now is to give some indication of the direction that will be taken next in attempting to understand how the human person reflects the image of the Triune God and what that could mean for human work.

In a sense, the three levels of conversion involve three psychological aspects of the human subject, readily observable and verifiable in human experience. The human person is a subject who thinks, feels, and acts, and, if our interest is in bringing the "whole self" to work, then, at a minimum, these three aspects of being human are what must be engaged in the workplace. Work systems must be designed to invite the participation of all three of these aspects for the full humanity of those working to flourish. In an environment that truly respects the subject *qua* subject, all workers at every level and in every function are called on to *think* about the work, who it is intended to serve, how it should be done and can be improved, and how each part fits into the larger whole. In such an environment, all workers are expected to *act* in accordance with right reason, exercising their independent judgment while in collaboration with others. And lastly and perhaps most importantly, each worker should be given the chance to *feel* something about the work, to find meaning in it, to participate in a vision of service to fellow workers and the customer that not only does not ask him to betray his deepest instincts, but calls him to self-transcendence in service to the common good. "Absolute finality is to God," but a human organization can choose to be ordered toward a "vertical finality" which points to and participates in the divine life.

Now because our nature is damaged by original sin, conversion is necessary to bring this right order to our thinking, feeling, and acting. An orientation toward the divine requires a continual movement toward human authenticity, an unrelenting openness to new data about oneself and one's world. The integrity of the human person moves toward a unity of thought, feeling, and action, ordered toward the good, without inner contradiction or struggle. The fullness of human subjectivity consists in his or her engagement in these inner operations as both conscious and intentional.

Is it not possible that in this very fundamental way, the image of God in which the human person is made is revealed? Does not the mystery of the human person, a finite being whose self-transcendence can be shown to consist of conversion in the thought, the feeling, and the body, point to a participation in the life of grace made possible by the relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? When we speak of the need for grace in order to bring human nature to its rightful completion in God, is not that nature constituted by a subject who thinks, feels, and moves? "There must be a Christian way of being human, and being human must be a condition for being Christian... We are Christians when we answer the call of God who has invited us in his goodness to

participate in the life of the Trinity. But the call is addressed to a man [sic] who in order to answer it, must strive to be greater than he is, rather than deny his humanity."

We are all aware that the history of Trinitarian theology includes attempts to understand the way in which the psychological aspect of the person is a reflection of the Trinity. We may also all be aware of the risks and pitfalls associated with such speculation and surely any new attempt must avoid them and find its roots in both Scripture and Tradition. But we need to realize that these attempts were made primarily by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, before psychological introspection became a "thematized technique", preventing attention to its results and acknowledgement of its relevance. We now have a more differentiated understanding of the human person and, while we must hold steadfast to the recognition that God is absolute mystery, we cannot ignore the need to find the aspects of human life and living that point the way to him.

In the ninth book of *De Trinitate*, Augustine suggests that the most perfect created image of the Blessed Trinity is the mind, in its knowledge of itself and its love of itself. In the tenth book, he explores a second image within the mind, that of memory, understanding and will. Lonergan refers to this treatment, and to that expressed by Thomas Aquinas as well, as informed by "faculty psychology," a psychology of the human person that thinks "in terms of potencies, or faculties, that [are] not among the data of consciousness." What I am suggesting is that Augustine's analogies are inadequate because they either minimize or ignore the other two aspects of human interiority. We are not only intellects: we feel, and we move. Of course, Augustine meant something more global in his use of the word "mind," and perhaps he would agree when I suggest that memory might involve the body, the will - the feeling.

What could this mean in terms of a vestige of the Trinity found in the human person that more adequately reflects our modern understanding of the subject? Here we find help in Thomas Aquinas' formulation of the Immanent Trinity in the *Summa* and his treatment of the divine processions. He states the necessity that actions within God remain within him and that "in the spiritual world the only actions of this kind are those of the intellect and will. Aquinas likens the inner procession of the Word, God the Son, from God the Father, to the activity of the intellect in which what is understood remains within the person who understands. The procession of the Spirit is from the action of the will and corresponds to the procession of love. With this as a starting point, would not a "fuller reflection on the subject as incarnate, as image and feeling, as well as mind and will," open us to the possibility that it is in fact both the self and the self that is transcended that constitute the material, the subject matter so to speak, of our salvation? Such an understanding of the subject would mean that any human activity could be a form of prayer, when engaged in by a subject who is intentionally ordered toward God. For prayer is not a matter of outward activity, but of inner orientation. Prayer is a relationship of love between the subject and the object of his love and as subjects, we participate in this relationship whether we are at Mass, at play, or – at work.

Work as participation in the life of the Trinity involves a fully intentional human subject whose thinking, feeling, and acting is informed by the grace that makes possible the

sanctification of all human activity. Work performed in a dynamic context of human consciousness, community, and conversion must lead us back to God, else we would not have been called to it. In action, we are subsumed into the will of God, we are merged with his heart and directed toward his intention. This contact is continuous because we are always in movement. We may not pause to reflect on this communion, we may not even be aware of it, but it exists nonetheless. The experience of grace is as large as the Christian experience of life. In every aspect, we must strive to hear God's call, for, even at work, it is "in him that we live, and move, and have our being."

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