

# Work as Key to the Social Question

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



## In Spite of All This Toil: Recovering Work in an Age of Profane Sacrifices

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by [Stephen D. Miles](#)  
Loyola College in Maryland

### Abstract

In the contemporary American context, sacrifice is regarded as inimical to satisfying work. Recent Catholic Social Teaching suggests otherwise that sacrifice and good work are essentially linked. This essay explores the connections between sacrifice and work toward the end of developing a spirituality of work that responds adequately to the tensions of the human mind and heart.

The next time I teach my course on Catholic Social Teaching, I will include among the readings for the unit on labor Bishop Myers' (Peoria, IL) recent pastoral letter to older priests. The letter, which encourages retirement-age priests to continue to serve the church in Myers' diocese in lieu of full retirement, concludes with a final "word of encouragement" that recalls Christ's parting words to St. Peter: "When you were young you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go." [1]

I suspect my students will be positively puzzled by the bishop's choice of words. Having been raised in a culture that deifies self-actualization, they have learned to want work that enables them to use their talents and to develop their personalities. They wish to find careers that permit them to enjoy a significant degree of freedom, both within the workplace and outside of it, and they want to retire with sufficient youth and energy left to enjoy years of uninterrupted leisure. The more socially conscious among them hope their work will somehow "make a contribution," and virtually all would like to be satisfied in the knowledge that their work has "meaning."

If the recent literature on work in America is any indication, then there is ample reason to believe that my students will be disappointed. In her recent study of the working life, Joanne Ciulla suggests that one of the characteristic features of the American workplace

is that it is simply unable to produce satisfying work: “Many employees are dissatisfied, overworked, and worried, and are wondering about their lives.... [I]f the desire for meaningful work relates to the broader question of meaning in a person’s life, then there is no reason to believe that employers have any great insights to offer.” [2] Her findings are supplemented by the investigations of other scholars, which show that American laborers are overworked, [3] over-managed, [4] and overwhelmed by anxiety and stress. [5] And these are the ones with the “good” jobs. The non-professionals are underpaid, [6] underemployed, [7] and underrepresented in the political, economic, and cultural lives of their communities. [8] For a whole host of reasons, work is simply not delivering on its promises. If people want work to be meaningful and life enhancing, the fact of the matter is that more and more people are being sacrificed to their work.

It is, perhaps, a peculiar coincidence that, precisely at this time, recent teachings of the church have suggested that sacrifice is, perhaps, essential to work. This developing emphasis is noteworthy, if perplexing, given that the predominant tone in the church’s maturing theology of work is, quite frankly, optimistic. Work, even the most menial activities, is described as co-creative activity with God. It is, moreover, an important means to integral human development and the key to the social question. [9] But the same teachings suggest that work is also linked with death; it is a participation in the suffering of Christ and a sacrifice to God. [10] Indeed, if work is to attain its proper dignity, says the current pontiff, it must be sustained by a spirituality that is grounded in the Paschal Mystery.

In this paper, I will explore the relationship between satisfying work and sacrifice. In keeping with the church’s developing tradition on work, I argue that satisfaction and sacrifice are necessarily linked in an account of work that is inspired by Christian theology and spirituality. The claim requires development in view of the ambition of many Americans of good will to uncouple these concepts. To be sure, that concern is not entirely unwarranted. In a nation built on the backs of slaves, factory workers, and child laborers, where people today work longer weeks than their counterparts in other industrialized nations, the moral word on sacrifice may indeed be its purgation from work. Nevertheless, absent some effort to understand work in terms of sacrifice, I contend that satisfying and meaningful work will continue to eclipse us.

I proceed as follows. First, I develop a sketch of the current work situation in America by attending briefly to key insights behind its evolution, including its treatment of themes of sacrifice and self-love. Next, I attend to an interpretation of sacrifice that is inspired by a Christian theology of the cross. Finally, I discuss the integration of work and sacrifice through a consideration of the human response to the sacrifice of Christ.

## **I. The Rise and Fall of Good Work**

That the dawn of the twenty-first century should find so many Americans dissatisfied with work is somewhat ironic. The century before was, in many ways, a century of progress for the American worker. By the 1950s, the manufacturing class, which had

been so thoroughly abused during the Industrial Revolution, enjoyed higher wages, numerous legal protections in the workplace, and great political power. And several decades later, the rise of the technology generation brought many Americans unprecedented economic freedom, as well as power in the workplace—including the power, for many, to opt to do their work away from the workplace. Indeed, notes management authority Peter Drucker, by the 1980s it seemed as if the Marxist criticisms of the capitalist economy were being resolved by capitalism itself. [11]

Still, for all these achievements, the contemporary heart finds itself parched on today's working landscape. I suggest that the reasons for this can be found by attending briefly to the Reformation and Humanist roots of the American approach to work. Indeed, it may be the case that the contemporary struggle to find satisfying work is simply part of an ongoing effort to bring to their appropriate completion the tremendous transformations in the working life that began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Various scholars, notably Weber, have studied these transformations and have produced complex theories of their history. My aim is far more modest. I want simply to study some representative moments during a time period of great change in the meaning of work, and I want to interpret them through the lens of human desire or satisfaction. What are the values and practices that contribute to a situation of work that so ceaselessly aggravates the tensions of the mind and heart?

It will help first to say a few words about the character of our longings. The engaging study of love by the late Martin D'Arcy, S.J., provides helpful guidance. [12] D'Arcy noted that throughout human history, we find evidence in the practices of all cultures of a natural human desire or inclination to transcend ourselves in an act of abandonment to the divine. The movement of this desire is centrifugal; under its influence, we are compelled to offer ourselves for possession by the gods and union with them. We see it at work in the orgiastic ritual sacrifices of the ancient pagans, and again in the Dionysian strand of Greek philosophy. In the Christian tradition, its presence is famously acknowledged in Augustine's claim that "our heart is restless until it rests in [God]." [13] And we find it again in the longing for mystical marriage, in both the philosophical and theological traditions. [14] Even today, in our grossly materialistic and increasingly secular culture, we detect its operations in the movement, heralded on the cover of *Fortune* magazine, of all places, to "bring God into the workplace." [15]

Desires are satisfied when they attain their end. Hence, the satisfaction of this desire requires, in part, a totality in our intention to give ourselves away. But such totality is comprised by a variety of causes, not the least of which is a competing inclination or desire that belongs to reason and that is, by nature, self-regarding or egoistic. The movement of this rational love is centripetal. Its delight is found in taking things and persons to oneself, in making them one's own for the sake of one's own preservation and good. The most notable incarnation of this desire, claims D'Arcy, is the classical and humanist ideal of the poised and controlled person, whose instincts and passions have been made subservient to the rule of reason. Far from abandoning itself to the divine, the personification of this ideal seeks to close the universe and establish fixed limits through the imposition of reason's form upon the indefinite and determinable. Aristotle's magnanimous man is an exemplar; less

endearing versions are found in history's tyrants and calculating utilitarians.

D'Arcy's analysis of the twofold character of human love—giving and taking, self-surrendering and self-regarding—suggests that human happiness or satisfaction rests, in part, on the capacity to reconcile these loves, to resolve, as it were, their dialectical character. I will take up later the correspondence that allows for the fulfillment of each. For now it suffices to note that happiness cannot be achieved through the negation of one or the other love. These loves are natural, and both are always present simultaneously in their subjects. One love may predominate in a given person or culture, but the subordinated love still seeks expression. Thus, notes D'Arcy, the early pagans who made their sacrifices to the gods also hoped that their bloody offerings would procure human well-being. Conversely, the great philosophers “advocate a high-minded humanism with one breadth and at the next are darting out into untrodden ways to greet the beckoning hand of the unknown God.” [16]

How have these longings been tended in the evolution of today's workaday world? When we attend to the early stirrings of modern work, we find that it is roused by the flashing out of a subordinated love in the moderation-disturbing arguments of Martin Luther. In his view, the Roman church's heavy dependence upon “the philosopher” had captivated Christianity with a concern for virtue that obscured the Christian's knowledge of himself as a sinner who is saved by grace alone. [17] Luther's objection was not to the pursuit of virtue *per se*, but to the failures to distinguish Christian virtue from the virtues and to advocate singular attention to the former. Christian virtue—chiefly love of God and love of neighbor—is the free response of the Christian to the unmerited grace of Christ. It is unique in both its content—self-transcending love—and the condition of its possibility—the dying of the self to rebirth in Christ. Luther knew from his own experience that the will's bondage to self-love precluded its fulfillment of the commands to dedicate oneself to love of God and love of neighbor. [18] Thus virtue, apart from grace, was always but an expression of self-love. [19] But where grace is the fount (and form) of virtue, the self is liberated to the possibility of giving itself away.

The Christian's singular dependence on grace implied the non-necessity of the church's traditional forms and structures of mediation. Whereas the medieval church stressed the sacramental life and privileged the monastic and religious vocations for their alleged closer proximity to Christ, the church's head, the Reformers emphasized that God speaks directly to the heart of the person and that all persons, as sinners, enjoy a basic equality before God. Together, these convictions conduced to a remarkable valuation of rather everyday social functions. Rejecting the view that holiness is the province of the “religious” or that it is tied exclusively to their work, Luther and Calvin held that God works more broadly by calling people to a wide variety of social vocations through which they are commanded to serve their neighbors. [20] Sanctification took place not in the monastery or convent but in the context of such ordinary occupations as parent, farmer, craftsman, etc., where one is challenged daily to practice the difficult command of neighbor-love. [21]

As far as the conduct and ends of economic activity are concerned, the teachings of the Reformers remained contiguous with that of their Catholic forebears. For Luther and the early Reformers, economic production and commerce, properly understood, were means of

serving God and one's neighbor. In their zeal to promote Christian faithfulness in the various occupations, the Reformers tolerated no exceptions to the traditional moral laws that rendered economic activity an appropriate form of service. [22] Even Calvin, who is reputed to be more accepting of emergent economic realities, insisted that economic activity was subordinate to the first task of giving glory to God, and he condemned the private hoarding of goods on the principle that we owe to others everything that is in our power to give. [23]

There are, however, significant discontinuities that impact the style and rhythms of the working life itself. Charles Taylor remarks that the Reformer's affirmation of the ordinary comes at the expense of traditional loci of the sacred. Hence, "ordinary life is to be hallowed. But this doesn't come about in the manner of the Catholic tradition, by connecting it to the sacramental life of the church; rather it comes about within this life itself, which has to be lived in a way which is both earnest and detached." [24] In this sense, the Reformer's particular affirmation of lay life corresponds with the rise of a new set of burdens for the Christian as she endeavors to live a holy life within a rapidly changing world.

The Reformer's efforts to keep work, and economic activity on the whole, anchored within a theological, moral vision were compromised by the simultaneous breakdown of ecclesiastical authority and the explosion of commercial activity in Western Europe. With the cultural weakening of the social carriers of that vision, a theoretical vacuum emerged, and this opened the door, in places like England and elsewhere, for a significant transmogrification of economic values. By the end of the seventeenth century, economic activity was situated anew within a closed vision of the universe wherein it was regarded as the key social task.

The turn is systematized, philosophically, with John Locke's elaboration of a social theory around his distinctively modern conception of the self. [25] That self, depicted in Locke's "state of nature," is a self without ends, other than his own preservation in freedom. [26] As a creature endowed with freedom and equality, he enjoys "uncontroulable liberty" to dispose of his person and possessions as he pleases. [27] But complete license is not granted, for he is bound by a divine law, promulgated through reason, that teaches him to "preserve himself" and, that "when his own preservation comes not in competition," he ought "to preserve the rest of mankind," which is to say, that he ought not "to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions." [28]

Locke's linkage of self-preservation and divine law reveals that his commitment to the logic of freedom is born, at least in part, of a conviction that creation possesses a God-given integrity. For that reason, nature can be expressive of moral principles that we could discern if we properly attuned ourselves to the world in its dependence upon God. In this regard, Locke's thinking shares a certain affinity with the pre-Reformation tradition of the natural law. But the extent of the connection is ambiguous, for when Locke discusses the ends of the law of nature, he does not link lawfulness with happiness, as was previously done within the Thomistic tradition of virtue. The absence of that link can be interpreted in light of Locke's consistent discussion of the moral law in terms of prohibitions. [29]

Happiness, to the extent we find this in Locke's theory, is linked with the use of freedom that does not fall under the restrictions of the law, and it is found in the enjoyment of the comforts that we obtain in that freedom.

This allows us insight into Locke's view of work and its significance. Work is, for Locke, an extension of the above-described, pre-political self. Thus, its aims and purposes are defined prior to consideration of community. It consists mainly in one's mastery over the "almost worthless material" of nature. When we mix our labor with the earth, we join it to ourselves, and so work is our title to property. [30] By God's design and command, it constitutes the primary means whereby we acquire goods for our self-preservation and comfort. [31] Work, then, is an instrument for the attainment of goods that are extrinsic to the activity of work itself. The essential purpose of work is to procure the goods that satisfy our material needs and wants, and in this manner it is linked to our happiness.

Does work serve any social function? Locke believed that it did, but only indirectly through the self-interested efforts of the industrious person, whose invention and hard work enable him to extract more goods from nature while using less of its resources. This person effectively "gives" to humanity those natural resources that are saved through the creative application of his skills in the pursuit of his wants and needs. [32] Such "increase" becomes crucial for the sustenance of humanity as its population begins to outgrow the limits that God set upon nature's bounty. In this fashion, work that results in increase—what amounts to the efficient creation of wealth—can be said to be analogous to God's own creative activity. [33]

The appeal to theology invites a comparison. Whereas the Reformers stressed that work was a response to a personal call from God to serve the neighbor selflessly in love, now work is a correspondence with the Creator's design that we appropriate for our own use and enjoyment things that are otherwise held in common. Corresponding to this shift is the supplanting of charity and justice as the chief virtues of work by the virtues of self-interest and industry. [34] Using D'Arcy's descriptions, the comparison suggests both sides of the tension between other-directed love and self-regarding love, between self-sacrifice and self-care. It also suggests that the reconciliation of these loves, to the extent this is possible, depends in part on what is true of God and our relation to God. This point becomes even clearer when we examine, in the natural theology-dependent work of Adam Smith, the intellectual foundations of the modern eclipse of political philosophy by economic science.

It is but a short leap from Locke's work to that of Adam Smith. Smith followed Locke in stressing the imperative of self-preservation and the capacity to pursue that natural end in freedom. But he sought to go beyond Locke's nearly exclusive focus on the natural rights associated with self-preservation to address more adequately the moral duties that we have toward other persons. [35] In this vein, Smith's writings share something in common with the work of the Reformers, whose love ethic Smith would have learned through Francis Hutcheson, his teacher at Glasgow. Yet Smith's proposal is not at all a repetition of the Reformers' work. A true man of his age, Smith faulted that tradition for its incapacity—stemming from its commitment to disinterested love—to acknowledge the legitimacy of self-interest as a motive for moral action. Against the view that selfless love was the only

truly moral motive, Smith contended, with Hume, that moral actions admit of a variety of motives, including but not limited to love of other persons. [36]

Smith's theory of moral sentiments or passions provides the context for his reconciliation of self-preservation (or self-love) and love of other persons. A few words about that theory will help to make Smith's attempted reconciliation of these loves intelligible. According to Smith's theory, all human acts have their source in the passions. The morality of a particular act is a function of the character of the passion that gives rise to it, as well as its intended effect in the recipient of the act. The criterion by which these passions are assessed is the natural sympathy of an impartial spectator. An act is said to be a moral act if an impartial spectator, upon entering imaginatively into the experiences of the acting agent and the receiver, would sympathize with the passions of both parties.

It follows from this description that the attainment of moral perfection has a great deal to do with seeking the approbation of other persons and enjoying, as it were, a kind of solidarity in fellow feeling. [37] In this light, we can see that while Smith is elevating the role of the passions in the moral life, he is not simply blessing all subjective desire. Rather, it is his position that, in a given set of circumstances, there are suitable and unsuitable passions, and the former are characterized by a kind of natural sociality. In discussing love, for example, Smith proposes that nature has formed us for mutual kindness: the person who shows love to other persons is naturally rendered an object of their love. Hence, concludes Smith, if we wish to win the love of others—and we should, as their approbation is crucial to our happiness—we do well to commit ourselves to the task of loving them. [38] Love of others, we might say, is a prudential form of self-love.

This implicit suggestion of the subordination of love of one's neighbors to self-love finds further amplification in Smith's important treatment of ambition and its relation to the social good. Ambition is that passion whereby we desire to maximize our private happiness through the prudential pursuit of health, material gain, and social rank and reputation. Its virtue is signaled by the fact that we naturally sympathize more readily with the joys and relative ease of the wealthy man than we do the sorrows and anxieties of the man who is poor. [39] We are charmed by the beauty of the life of distinction and convenience, and though we may find that the rich man is not actually happier than the poor man, we do recognize that the former enjoys, at least, the means to happiness whereas the latter struggles to elude sorrow. And so we honor the industry that makes these means of happiness possible. With our sympathies so aligned, we are driven by our passions to endure great sacrifices and toil for the future betterment of our condition. This desire, says Smith, is the "secret motive" behind the most serious pursuits of private and public life. [40]

Behind this motive we may speak of the secret engineering of nature, which brings about the general welfare, paradoxically, through our private ambition. Nature, says Smith, deceives us by calling us to a quest for personal happiness through the pursuit of private gain in order to turn that pursuit to the advantage of the entire community. [41] Put differently, it appeals to what is strongest within us—the desire for personal advantage—to accomplish exactly its opposite in the order of intention—the welfare of our neighbors. Self-love and love of others are reconciled, then, by way of nature's "invisible hand." [42]

When I pursue the end of my own preservation and advantage, I am rendering myself available to nature to accomplish through me more social good than would otherwise be achieved if I actually directed my intentions to the good of my neighbors. This is not to say that I am not also obligated and inclined to actually love my neighbor and intend her good; rather, it is simply to assert that nature has entrusted the welfare of the community to motives stronger than human love and more reliable than human reason. [43]

As was the case with Locke, Smith's justification for this confidence in nature's operations appeals to a natural theology that links our desires with divine providence. God, the "administrator and director of the universe," has so ordered our passions that their free play, under the guidance of the criterion of sympathy, conduces to the divinely appointed end of the greatest possible happiness. [44] Their operation, singly and jointly, we might say, is possessed of an intelligibility that does not derive from human reason (though it can be witnessed by reason, as Smith's illustration of the invisible hand suggests). This means, for Smith, that independently of our intellect's capacity to theorize about the individual or social good or end, the unleashing of our passions sets in motion the progress of the species toward its proper goal—a goal that oftentimes eludes our own awareness.

It is upon these psychological and theological foundations that Smith advances his social theory. The principles of free enterprise that he articulates in his *Wealth of Nations* represent the social institutionalization of the liberation of the natural instinct of self-preservation. Hereafter, the wealth of the community is equivalent to the aggregate total of the material wealth of each of its members. And the social method for the generation of the community's wealth is the appeal to the self-love of persons to be better consumers of the goods available for consumption. "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages." [45]

Within this social vision, work is devoid of any intrinsic meaning; work's value is purely instrumental, a mere means to the attainment of material ends. [46] For this reason, the central concern regarding work, in Smith's system of natural liberty, is its relative efficiency. Thus, Smith's most significant proposal regarding work is the division of labor, which enhances productivity by increasing worker dexterity, by saving time lost to occupational shifts, and by promoting—through the singular attention of a worker to his task—the invention of machines that abridge and facilitate the laborer's work. [47] Smith recognized that such a division would correspond with class distinctions, but, as we have seen, he believed that nature used these to the advantage of all. Thus, he writes, the peasant in his system of liberty fares just as well if not better than the royals in a monarchical regime. [48]

What began, then, as an effort to improve upon Locke's theory results, in practice, in the intensification of Locke's seminal economic insights. That intellectual momentum secured the doctrine of free enterprise, with that of political freedom, as a principle of the system of democratic capitalism that is the engine of American social life. Since the industrial revolution, the doctrine has undergone numerous permutations in practice, owing largely to

the critiques of other capitalists (e.g., Keynes and the representatives of welfare capitalism), as well as the opponents of capitalism, most notably Marx. Labor unions have played a significant role in curbing abuses of the free market system. And more recently, the rise of service and technology-based industries has helped transfer ownership, to the worker, of one of the primary means of production, namely, the highly specialized knowledge that is needed to run these industries.

Notwithstanding these significant changes, the basic Enlightenment meaning of work remains largely intact. The continuity is seen in the narrow fixation, within American business, upon efficiency and technological advance—concerns that were central to the views of work articulated by Locke and Smith. Similarly, one sees it in the absolutizing of self-interest as the principle method of economic development. And again, one sees it at the intersection of these interests in the rise of management as the characteristic social function of the age. This final point deserves elaboration.

With its emphasis upon efficiency, the new economics invited the expansion of human mastery over the natural environment to include the individuals who peopled that environment. In its early stages, that invitation was a seduction that gave way to such remarkable pursuits as Frederick Winslow Taylor's time-motion studies, which aimed to reduce worker movement to machine-like efficiency. [49] While workers' rights and other achievements rendered efforts like Taylor's a thing of the past, the study and manipulation of human behavior for the sake of enhancing economic productivity has become a mainstay of American business life. Indeed, notes Drucker, the need for the manager has only intensified in the last two decades. With the increase of personal autonomy and the rise of the "technologist"—i.e., persons who work with their hands and who possess highly specialized knowledge, like computer operators, medical technicians, physical therapists, etc.—the manager becomes more necessary to orchestrate into a working whole the otherwise disparate efforts of free individuals whose narrow educational pursuits have left them ill-equipped to address the question of their shared ends. [50]

The work of the manager, however, has not been limited to mere orchestration. It has also included the very delicate task of imparting to employees the values of the business or corporation. The recent history of management in America, observes Ciulla, can be characterized as the enduring effort to harness the "ghost in the machine" in order to subordinate it to the end of economic profitability. [51] In keeping with this aspiration, psychology has attained to a prominence in the working literature that, in earlier days, had belonged to morality. And in practice, American workers in the 1980s and 1990s found themselves the subjects of experiments by management gurus who presumed to have expertise in matters of human motivation. [52] Of course, the unspoken assumption of this approach—an assumption, we have seen, that was made by Locke and Smith—is the fundamental compatibility of human psychology and the laws of economics that have been bequeathed to us. We are led to ask whether modern economics got the right person, so to speak. Reflection on our own experience, as parents, teachers, community advocates, etc., suggests that what is good for the economy is not necessarily good for the human person or her community.

Beyond this concern, the aims and practices of management have not infrequently obscured the nature of the relationship between employer and employee. In its quest to “employ the whole person,” for example, business management has sought loyalty from the workforce, but it has not frequently offered loyalty in return. Similarly, while companies claim a disproportionate share of their employees’ lives, they do not reward those employees with a proportionate share of their earnings. [53] Management practices, then, are always operative within the framework of a power relationship that, in a competitive global environment, is characterized increasingly by a corporate commitment to the bottom line. And with the pervasive threat of downsizing, fear now accomplishes the aspirations of management to render the worker captive to the firm.

With the development of social modalities that reinforce a view of work as a mere means to external ends, we now find ourselves unprepared as individuals and communities to engage in a pursuit of meaningful and enjoyable work. For many Americans, the work that they do lies at the periphery of their real interests, which they pursue after hours and on the weekend. It follows that when employers today ask more of their workers—by demanding greater hours, by loading them with gadgetry that keeps them tethered to the office—workers find themselves reluctant, if not resentful. The demand for more hours amounts to an unwelcome intrusion into the waning time that one has to pursue those things one really wants to pursue—indeed, the time one has to be oneself.

In this context, the suggestion that the pursuit of good work requires recognition of its normative link to sacrifice can only appear to be absurd. If anything, now is the time for greater self-care, and there is wisdom in this intuition. Regrettably, though, self-care is already shaped so thoroughly by the logic of egoistic love that its aims often fail to transcend the limited concerns of the self-regarding self. And so self-care is sometimes translated as consumption, which Americans pursue compulsively. [54] Witness Wendy Spears, a poster child of self-interested desire whose musings were reported in the *New York Times Magazine*: “I love me,” says Wendy, “and I feel like no one else is going to love me like I love me. And sometimes I just give myself something to myself from myself with all my love.” [55] On the saner end of the scale, people speak often today of the importance of “balance” or what amounts to a controlled pursuit of equanimity, usually for people of means. [56] There are, to be sure, certain benefits to a more balanced lifestyle, but balance can also be deadly, as it sometimes imports into one’s spiritual life habits of control that may preclude abandonment to God. In these and other manifestations, self-care is conceived in such fashion that its attainment depends a great deal on the economic freedom that work alone can provide. Thus, our aversion to work is accompanied at once by our greater dependence upon it.

A disturbing irony thus surfaces. For the sake of trying to satisfy one love, neither love is being satisfied. A lopsided commitment to our own preservation and good results in the immersion of ourselves more deeply into a style of life that we do not find satisfying. The result for many Americans is a spiritually bankrupt condition, wherein people do not really will what they spend most of their time doing. Like Augustine during his days on the treadmill at the imperial court, such cynical persons conduct their lives without being present to their lives in any meaningful way. It would seem, then, that while sacrifice is

being avoided, sacrifices are nevertheless being made, only to idols. “Business is business,” remarks Jon Sobrino, is an idol, and like all idols, it demands sacrifices. [57]

## **II. Reconciling Sacrifice and Self-love**

We are lead to ask again, then, about the possibility of reconciling the tensions of the human heart. In view of the desperation that inheres in the American pursuit of self-love, we may pose the question in this fashion: Is it possible to make of our lives a sacrifice without completely drowning ourselves? The claim of Christian faith is that one can. Indeed, the claim is even stronger: that the end of self-love and the discovery of the fullness of joy is possibly only if one gives oneself away.

The Christian reconciliation of self-abandonment and self-regard rests on upon the conviction of faith that humanity finds in Christ the fullest revelation of God and a perfect and living sacrifice. The matter is succinctly stated in the Doctrine of Kenosis that is expressed, Scripturally, in Paul’s letter to the Philippians:

Christ Jesus...though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross (Philippians 2:6-8, NRSV).

In his theology of the cross, Hans Urs von Balthasar underscores this Pauline linkage of the Incarnation and the cross. [58] Together, notes Balthasar, the descent of the Word in the Incarnation and the descent of Jesus into death form one piece in the kenotic movements of God. Thus, the suffering and death of Christ are not merely the consequences of Jesus’ controversial life; they are the culmination of the movement expressed in the Incarnation. The Incarnation, says Balthasar, is ordered to the passion.

This connection allows us to interpret the cross from two vantages. Viewed as God’s action, the Son’s obedience to the cross is God’s loving entrance into radical union with the creature whose life is shaped through and through by the fact of her death. As a complete submission to the chains of the creature, the cross constitutes an act of self-concealment wherein God abandons God’s own glory for the sake of the creature. This is not a feigned masking of God’s glory but the willed acceptance into God’s own life of the suffering of humanity in its alienation from God. In D’Arcy’s terms, the cross manifests God’s fulfillment of the movement of the desire for radical unity with the other. Through this unity—a unity that is achieved without God’s ceasing to be God—God reveals Godself most decisively as a loving servant of humanity whose own inner life is characterized essentially by self-giving love. Thus, Jesus interprets his death for his disciples in terms of foot washing; the God of Christian faith is a god who washes the feet of humanity in love.

Viewed from the vantage of Jesus’ humanity, the cross represents the unique

fulfillment, on the part of the creature, of the abandonment of oneself entirely to God. Balthasar's amplification of the events of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday is illuminating in this regard. Interpreting these events in light of Jesus' unique and loving obedience to the Father, Balthasar explains that the sacrificial character of Jesus' death is grounded most immediately in his free election to give himself entirely to God. He is indifferent to all things but the will of the Father, which Jesus loves for its own sake. Thus, Jesus' weakness and defenselessness in suffering his trial and crucifixion are, at root, acts of the most profound worship of the Father.

Viewing the cross from these different perspectives should not obscure their continuity, which is founded upon God's absolute love of humanity and its fount, the self-giving love that constitutes God's own triune life. [59] Jesus' obedience to the Father, then, is at once an expression of his love for humanity, a love that moves toward solidarity with persons in their suffering. In Jesus' "yes" to the Father, he links his fate with ours, consenting to suffer in his body and soul the penalties that belong to us. At the same time, in this movement of obedience and solidarity, Jesus penetrates to the absolute depths of human suffering such that his experience is entirely unique. Balthasar's contemplation on this mark is especially insightful. Insofar as Jesus assumed the universal guilt of humanity, he has uniquely been made the entire object of the divine eschatological judgment. Thus, in his own life Jesus suffers the limits of human damnation and marks the very boundaries of human experience.

If Jesus establishes the limits of creaturely existence, the Father makes possible their transcendence by raising the Son in the Spirit. This gift to the Son, given in God's infinite pleasure with Jesus' sacrifice, is also God's gift to humanity. In raising the Son to eternal life, the Father pronounces for humanity His approval of Jesus' ministry and life. In his life is the fulfillment of the covenant, and so Christ stands before the world as the individual and social goal of humanity. But the resurrection also confers a new mode of existence upon the world, for with his free return in the Easter appearances, Christ opened up the walls of time to eternity such that everyday experience is now set against a new horizon. And by leaving us the gifts of his Spirit and the sacraments, he gave us access to himself that he might also be our way to the Father.

This description suggests the seeds of the resolution of the dialectic between self-love and sacrificial love. By dwelling within us the Spirit of Christ makes it possible for us to offer ourselves in friendship to God and so to be bound to God in a union of self-giving love. We do not die so much as we are transformed more nearly into the image of the triune God, who abandons Himself in love and yet fully lives. [60] In our case, the correspondence between self-sacrifice and self-fulfillment is always conditioned upon the free gift of God's self, and it is realized only within context of a relationship of reciprocal love. As D'Arcy observes, "[p]ersons do not die when the love is mutual; they live more fully each in the other's love. But when it comes to the infinite love of God for man, man, so far from having anything subtracted from his being, has the personal joy of giving back to God something of that infinite love which has taken possession of him." [61]

In view of these convictions, the trajectory of human life can be described as a

passage, inaugurated in time, that breaks through to ever-greater union with God. That passage is made possible by the Paschal Mystery and unfolds as we respond in graced freedom to the invitation to dedicate the totality of our lives to God in an ongoing sacrifice of love. The passage, which is more existential in its progress than linear, entails the integration of all spheres of our lives—work, play, marriage, etc.—into this relationship of love. A spirituality of work, then, must link our work with the graced means by which we enter more fully into that relationship. And so, the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which unite us to God, are the pillars of a spirituality of work. When our work is guided by these, writes Pope John Paul, work “may be given the meaning which it has in the eyes of God and by means of which work enters into the salvation process....” [62]

### **III. The Virtues and Practices of Good Work**

I begin with a brief consideration of faith. The virtue of faith gives the soul a vision of the setting in which our lives play out. In essence, faith is our graced assent to the revelation of the world’s creation by God, who made it “very good,” and its healing and exaltation through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Through faith, we believe that all places, so to speak, are already on their way to God, such that “every moment of our lives can be a kind of communion with his love.” [63] Faith, then, affirms the goodness of human existence, a goodness that is given to it by God. It is our agreement, notwithstanding the challenges that experience presents to our faith, with God’s radical assent to human life.

As such faith undercuts the characteristically modern attempt to impart to time our own meaning. Everywhere today we see people re-arranging the circumstances of their lives in a relentless pursuit of peace and a “good time.” The irony, of course, is that this pursuit becomes little more than a juggling act in which time is cheapened through its commodification. Time is now a quantity that is spent, earned, lost and wasted. Faith cuts across this utilitarian vision in its confidence that time’s meaning is given to us by God in the invitation to friendship.

More excellent than faith, then, is charity, which Aquinas defines as “the friendship of man for God.” [64] By way of charity we are actually united with God, and so charity is at the very heart of the moral, spiritual life. By way of charity, the soul finds peace, and it delights in the spiritual joy of possessing the object of its longing. Among the virtues of a spirituality of work, then, charity commands the greatest attention.

Charity is essentially ordained to act; indeed, writes Aquinas, “no virtue has such a strong inclination to its act as charity has, nor does any virtue perform its act with so great pleasure.” [65] As love of God is the primary act of charity, this virtue inclines us above all else to practice our friendship with God. Thus, the moral life is centered with respect to the activities of prayer and worship through which we communicate with God and render our praise and thanksgiving. Charity, however, is no private virtue, for when we love God, we also love all that belongs to God. Charity, when it is true, extends necessarily, then, to other persons whom we love in God. As the fount of neighbor-love, love of God also shapes the

character of that love. When we love our neighbor with charity, we love them as belonging to God and thus made for union with God.

Significantly, Aquinas does not develop a lengthy list of acts that are specific to the virtue of charity. Rather, charity works broadly as the form of all the virtues, commanding their acts and directing them to God as their end. [66] This suggests an important practical corollary for how we think about the integration of work into the spiritual life. Contrary to dualistic spiritualities that effectively demonize the virtues of the contemporary economic order, this view suggests that the acts of these virtues can and should be engrafted into the life of grace whereby they are charged with a new significance. Charity, then, leads to deeper engagement with social, economic, and political life because it finds in human activity a world of potential means for loving God and neighbor.

Charity is nevertheless consistent with a distinctive style of engagement. In tandem with faith, charity causes us to respond to the neighbor with a fuller view to her actual reality as a person created for and called to eternal life with God. Charity thus precludes treating her as a utility-maximizer or a mere means to my own ends or the ends of economic production. At root, charity is fundamentally incompatible with the kind of vulgar worldliness that sees self-interest as the key to the social question.

As a participation of the Spirit of the crucified Christ, charity also seeks expression in active solidarity with persons in their suffering. This is what Aquinas means when he identifies mercy as an interior effect of charity. [67] The merciful person grieves for the distress of others, and she responds to that suffering as to her own—indeed, because it *is* her own through the union of love. [68] Through mercy, her work becomes most imitative of God's work, every exercise of which is a manifestation of mercy. [69] Mercy is thus “the sum total of the Christian religion.” [70] The measure of the adequacy of a Christian spirituality of work, then, is the extent to which it challenges us to allow the suffering of others to condition the use of our freedom.

This suggests a much broader application of mercy than is usually understood when one thinks today of the works of mercy. Mercy, we presume, is a heroic virtue for individuals; it is, moreover, a virtue for private life. Periodically one hears of public acts of mercy, such as the case of Aaron Feuerstein. Feuerstein, the owner of a Massachusetts textile factory that caught fire days before Christmas, continued to pay his employees their full salaries until the factory was rebuilt. He did not even withhold their Christmas bonuses. But Ciulla's observation that employers like Feuerstein are a dying breed suggests that the exception proves the rule. [71] Mercy, we accept, has little purchase in public life, much less economic life.

A spirituality of work that is born at the foot of the cross must seek relentlessly the conversion of work to mercy. This, I take it, is the insight behind the U.S. Bishops' admonition, in their letter on the economy, that all business and economic activity must be evaluated in terms of their impact upon the poor. [72] The significance of this provision is not simply that it limits harm to vulnerable persons in the community; rather it promotes in proper programmatic fashion the examination of all work in the light of the principle of

mercy. Through such practical proposals, the mentality of occasional works of mercy may rightly be overcome in favor of a view of work that is oriented essentially by mercy.

One final consideration of charity's social manifestation requires mention. Aquinas believed that our commitments to our obligations of love play out within the context of social fellowship that is signified by the so-called "order of charity." Though we all form one body, each of us belongs to different communities within that body, including the communities of family, friends, workplace, country, church, etc. The health of the whole is predicated upon the health of the parts, and the health of the parts depends upon the observation of the specific and *limited* obligations that properly inhere within each set of relations. [73] The effect of this is that our commitment to any one community, such as work, can never become totalizing, lest we foreclose on our obligations to other communities, such as family and church. More to the point, the observation of the order of charity engages the diverse gifts of the community in the process of attending to and caring for each individual member in the full variety of her needs as a person. The neglect of that order—through the reduction of our lives, for example, to very limited spheres of activity, such as work and family—is the erosion of the mutual and multiple bonds of fellowship that make it possible for the community to love all persons better and to prosper as a whole.

As the fulfillment of charity is the uninterrupted fellowship of grace, we live now and labor in hope, in partial possession of that end. Until such time as the world enjoys that end, the manifestation of the Son in history, says Balthasar, will always be a sign of contradiction. [74] Hope is the virtue that allows one to live with seriousness in the face of evils that crucify. It is also the virtue that keeps us patient in our own slow growth in holiness as Christ plunges us more deeply into his own life.

We have attended to the crucial interior transformations that are requisite for a Christian spirituality of work. As Christ's gifts of grace include also the sacraments, our working lives must be integrated into the sacramental life. Specifically, in a culture that has reduced all time to an endless repetition of days, work must be considered alongside the Eucharist. As Pieper has argued, it is by way of the weekly festive ritual of Eucharistic liturgy that we participate in activity that is meaningful in itself. [75] And so liturgy breaks our captivity to endless utilitarian pursuits that do not satisfy the heart. Put differently, Eucharistic liturgy keeps our lives from becoming nothing but work. More than that, however, it incorporates us more fully into Christ's sacrifice, transforming us into his body such that, between Sabbaths our work may not simply be co-creative work with God but co-redemptive work.

## Notes

[1] *Origins* (July 19, 2001) vol. 31: no. 9

[2] Joanne Ciulla, *The Working Life: The Promise and Betrayal of Modern Work* (New

York: Times Books, 2000), 223-24.

[3] See Juliet Schorr, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

[4] See Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

[5] See Bryan E. Robinson, *Chained to the Desk: A Guidebook for Workaholics, Their Partners and Children, and the Clinicians Who Treat Them* (New York, New York University Press, 1998).

[6] For a gripping account of one person's effort to survive on low-paying jobs in America, see Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001).

[7] See Jerry Jacobs and Kathleen Gerson, "Do Americans Feel Overworked? Comparing Ideal and Actual Working Time," in *Work and Family: Research Informing Policy*, ed. Toby L. Parcel and Daniel B. Cornfield (London: Sage Publications, Inc., \_\_\_\_).

[8] See Peter F. Drucker, "The Age of Social Transformation," in *Working: Its Meaning and Its Limits*, ed. Gilbert C. Meilander (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).

[9] These descriptions of work are interspersed throughout several of the church's recent teachings, including especially: Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et spes* (Dec. 7, 1965) and Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens: On Human Work* (1981).

[10] See Pope John Paul II, *Dies Domini: Guide to Keeping Sunday Holy* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998), 34; see also *Laborem Exercens*, ch. 5.

[11] Drucker, 194-96.

[12] M.C. D'Arcy, *The Mind and Heart of Love* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956). D'Arcy's study of love is noteworthy in its attempt to refuse a facile juxtaposition of the two loves that have, customarily, been designated eros and agape.

[13] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3.

[14] D'Arcy, 222-23, 270.

[15] *Fortune Magazine*, July \_\_, 2001.

[16] D'Arcy, 271. It is worth noting that even at the high point of the Enlightenment, we find Immanuel Kant, of all persons, insisting on the existence of a God who can reward

virtue with happiness.

[17] See Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*

[18] See Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, \_\_\_\_.

[19] It is for this reason that Luther contends that the “virtuous acts” of the non-Christian are still sins (see *Freedom of the Christian*, \_\_\_\_).

[20] See, e.g., also John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, III.x.6, and IV.xx.10.

[21] In his letter entitled “Secular Authority: To What Extent it Can be Obeyed,” Luther claimed famously that Christian love can express itself through the activity of the executioner.

[22] In his classic study of capitalism’s rise, Tawney observes that Luther “reiterates the content of medieval economic teaching with a literalness rarely to be found in the thinkers of the later Middle Ages...” (R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: A Historical Study* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1962), 96).

[23] Calvin, III.vii.5.

[24] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 223. Taylor’s thesis might exaggerate the case insofar as it suggests a division that was beyond the aims of the Reformers. Nevertheless, there are emphases in the works of the Reformers that played out in the marginalization of the sacramental life and a leveling of the traditional spheres of the sacred.

[25] The following treatment of Locke is based on his account of political society in his *Second Treatise of Government* (1690).

[26] For Locke, the end of the law of nature is the peace and preservation of humankind. Unfortunately, Locke does not develop the meaning of these terms, though we can surmise their meaning given Locke’s repeated identification, at the start of his treatise, of power as a problem for human relationships. Whatever else peace and preservation may mean, for Locke, they refer to freedom from the arbitrary imposition of the will of other persons (see Locke §§2-4).

[27] *Ibid.*, §§4,6. The paragraph between these cites Hooker’s account of equality at length. It is significant to note that the more characteristically medieval emphases of Hooker’s version—e.g., the stress upon justice and charity--do not find further expression or elaboration in the remainder of Locke’s treatise.

[28] *Ibid.*, §6. Interestingly, Locke suggests, in the same paragraph, that a person may “destroy” his life in the event “some nobler use than that its bare preservation calls for it” (*Id.*). Unfortunately, Locke’s treatise does not give us insight into the kinds of

circumstances that might render such a choice moral.

[29] Freedom of men under government, says Locke, is “a liberty to follow my own will in all things, where the rules prescribes not”; and freedom of nature is “to be under no other restraint but the law of nature” (Ibid, §22).

[30] Ibid., §25-27, 32, 43.

[31] Locke’s understanding of goods is underwritten by the peculiarly modern “rule of property” that “every man should have as much as he could make use of...” (Ibid., §36).

[32] Ibid., §37.

[33] See Robert A. Goldwin, “John Locke,” in *History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 507.

[34] Locke’s discussion of the American Indians is interesting in this regard. The first of the reasons that he lists for their penury is their failure to apply their labor, in the manner of the English, to otherwise bountiful lands (Locke, §41).

[35] For a development of this argument, see Cropsey, “Adam Smith,” in *History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 655.

[36] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, VII.ii.3.

[37] Ibid., I.ii.5.

[38] Ibid., VI.ii.I.19.

[39] Ibid., I.iii.2.1; IV.i.1-9.

[40] Ibid., I.i.1-9.

[41] The pursuit is vainglory for two reasons. First, no matter the amount of increase of goods, the person’s capacity to consume is fixed. Second, the acquisition of such goods cannot finally stave off the anxieties and dangers of human existence, including suffering and death.

[42] Ibid., IV.1.10.

[43] “Nature has wisely judged that the distinction of ranks, the peace and order of society, would rest more securely upon the plain and palpable difference of birth and fortune, than upon the indistinguishing and often uncertain difference of wisdom and virtue. The undistinguishing eyes of the great mob of mankind can well enough perceive the former: it is with difficulty that the nice discernment of the wise and the virtuous can sometimes

distinguish the latter. In the order of all those recommendations, the benevolent wisdom of nature is equally evident” (Ibid., VI.ii.I.20).

[44] Ibid., VI.ii.3.3.

[45] Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, I.2.

[46] “The annual labor of every nation is the fund which originally supplies it with all the necessaries and conveniences of life which is annually consumes, and which consist always either in the immediate produce of that labor, or in what is purchased with that produce from other nations” (Ibid., Introduction and Plan of the Work).

[47] Ibid., I.1.

[48] Ibid., I.1.

[49] See Ciulla, 92-95.

[50] Drucker, 195.

[51] Ciulla, 108, 116.

[52] It is significant to point out that worker on the lower end of the economic scale have been spared such niceties. Instead, they are asked to endure drug tests, insulting character examinations, and powerlessness in the workplace. See Ehrenreich, 51-119.

[53] Ciulla reports that in 1974, CEO salaries were about 40 times higher than that of the average worker. By 1999, the average CEO compensation was 326 times that of the average factory worker (Ciulla, 157).

[54] See Schorr, 107-165.

[55] Quoted in Joseph E. Mulligan, S.J., “The Sickness of Affluenza,” in *Blueprint for Social Justice* (Vol. LIV, No. 8, April 2001).

[56] It is worth recalling a conversation I enjoyed years ago with a friend who is also a Jesuit priest. We were talking about the distinction the avowed poverty of the religious and the material poverty of the poor. After considering the daily anxieties and stresses of the impoverished, as well as the considerable costs entailed in alleviating those anxieties in the American context, my Jesuit friend commented that, indeed, “one has to be rich to be poor”!

[57] Jon Sobrino, S.J., “The Cost of Speaking the Truth,” in *The Journal of Peace and Justice Studies* (\_\_\_\_).

[58] The following analysis of Balthasar’s theology of the cross is based upon his text,

Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, trans. Aidan Nichols, O.P. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990).

[59] Balthasar, 79. The continuity is poetically signaled in Mark's Gospel. Within the narrative, the first full recognition, by one its characters, of Jesus' secret identity comes precisely at the moment of his death: "Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'" (Mark 15:37-39 (NRSV)).

[60] Balthasar reinterprets personhood in light of the image of the Trinitarian God: "With that departure point, the created person, too, should no longer be described chiefly as subsisting in itself, but more profoundly (supposing that person to be actually created in God's image and likeness) as a 'returning (*reflexio completa*) from exteriority to oneself' and an 'emergence from oneself as an interiority that gives itself in expression'" (Balthasar, 28).

[61] D'Arcy, 275-76.

[62] Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, ¶24.

[63] Jean-Pierre De Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, trans. John Beevers (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 48.

[64] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II.23.1c (hereafter "S.T.").

[65] *S.T.* II-II.23.2c.

[66] *S.T.* II-II.23.8c,ad1; 24.12.

[67] *ST.* II-II.30.

[68] Aquinas admits of two motives for mercy. For the person of charity, the motive of love is most relevant, as this is the reason that God takes mercy upon humanity: that our suffering is God's own suffering (*S.T.* II-II.30.2ad2).

[69] *S.T.* II-II.30.4c,ad3.

[70] *S.T.* II-II.30.4c,ad2,ad3.

[71] Ciulla, 167.

[72] National Conference for Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (Washington, DC: Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, United States Catholic Conference, 1986), \_\_\_\_.

[73] Aquinas, *S.T.* II-II.26.1-8.

[74] Balthasar, 254.

[75] Josef Pieper, *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1999), 44-51.