

CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM AND METHOD

1. Three Visions of Work

Work is one of the single most important activities in a person's life. For most people it consumes a third to a half of their waking hours. The jobs they hold greatly effect how people perceive themselves and influence the degree of fulfillment they find in their lives. How work is understood, and how the role of the worker is perceived effects not only the arena of labor but also every other facet of one's life.

In the book *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah and his contributors explain that work can be envisioned in one of three ways: as a job, as a career, or as a calling. Seen as a job, work centers on the means by which people make money so as to consume goods "It supports a self defined by economic success, security, and all that money can buy."¹ A job corresponds to work as extrinsically understood. In this view work is defined by its extrinsic benefits, such as wages, perks, working conditions and so forth. Work is valued for its material gains. Studs Terkel's book *Working* recounts some of the stories of those who understand their work as a job. In her interview with Terkel, Nora Watson reflects on her job as an editor:

Jobs are not big enough for people. It's not just the assembly line worker whose job is too small for his spirit, you know? A job like mine if you really put your spirit into it, you would sabotage immediately. You don't dare. So you absent your spirit from it. My mind has been so divorced from my job, except as a source of income, it's really absurd.²

Like many of Terkel's interviewees, Nora characterizes the meaning and value of her work only in terms of financial remuneration. Like most such people, she finds her work dissatisfying and demeaning. She knows intuitively that work by its very nature is more than financial remuneration. But her job is structured to repress the psychological, socio-ethical, and spiritual possibilities that could be expressed in

work. Her work as a job contributes nothing positive to her life. It is merely a means to material gain.

Seen as a career, work traces peoples' achievements and advances in a particular occupation. The worker becomes defined by social standing and prestige as well as "by a sense of expanding power and competency that renders work itself a source of self-esteem."³ Rather than being concerned only about economic gains, work understood as a career is also concerned about psychological gains. The meaning of a career comes from extrinsic factors such as societal norms of prestige and social standing, and intrinsic factors such as developing self-esteem. In addition to supplying material goods, work as a career ought to contribute to the development of one's psychological health by being creative, autonomous, and fulfilling. Although the self-actualization and self-fulfillment which a career attempts to achieve are noble aspirations, they should not be sought without social awareness to guide the effort. The corporate financial officer arranging multi-million dollar mergers or the marketing agents for large tobacco companies may find their work fulfilling, exciting, and creative. But does that mean their supposed self-actualization and personal creativity contribute to the larger social good? When their labor may contribute to displaced workers, ill-health, and social disruption can they truly be satisfied? John Paul II explains in *Centesimus annus* (CA) that when freedom in process of self-actualization becomes detached from truth, it degenerates into "self-love carried to the point of contempt for God and neighbour, a self-love which leads to an unbridled affirmation of self-interest and which refuses to be limited by and demand of justice" (CA, 17).

Finally, seen as a vocation or a calling, work transcends the dualism of a job and the tendency of selfishness of a career. It does this by connecting work's purpose with the proximate and ultimate end of a person's life. As a vocation, work is more than just a source of material and psychic rewards. As Bellah et al. explain:

A calling links a person to a larger community, a whole in which the calling of each is a contribution to the good of all. The Episcopal Book of Common Prayer says in the collect for Labor Day, 'So guide us in the work we do, that we may do it not for the self alone, but for the common good.' The calling is a crucial link between the individual and the public world. Work in the sense of the calling can never be merely private.⁴

Work is not only a private, that is, financial or psychological affair. It extends beyond the individual worker and the object that is created. Work must be directed toward a greater end, the common good. Its value comes not only from the goods and profits that are produced and the psychological growth that is attained. Work attains a more important value—a humanizing effect that binds workers closer together and contributes to society's general welfare.

But work as a vocation is more than just a connection to the community. Work ought to derive from the very meaning of the person. If a religious dimension exists for the individual, then work must also take on a religious significance. What people do for one third of their waking hours and why they do it will stem from how they understand themselves. A vocation enables work to become more satisfying but understood not solely from the perspective of the self or even from the community, but informed by God's grace. Work as a vocation transforms the

worker and the object the worker produces by God's grace. A vocation integrates the divine into the activity of work. God calls all workers, doctors, factory workers, managers, farmers, etc. to work to build the kingdom, to be stewards of the earth, to co-create, and have dominion over the land because we are made in God's image.

This is not to deny the value of work defined as job or career. The fact is, work is a job. It is a means to a financial end. If work, as employment, does not generate income, no matter how noble or psychologically satisfying, in the end it's useless. And work should be psychologically rewarding. Climbing the ladder of success is a satisfying activity. But if work fails to be connected to a good and a truth beyond the individual and the organization, it eventually becomes an exercise in self-interest, whether through the satisfaction of the pocketbook or the psyche. As Bellah points out, "The absence of a sense of calling means an absence of a sense of moral meaning."⁵ If people do not find a moral and religious sense to an activity that consumes a third to a half of their waking hours, they seek the ultimate meaning of their lives in private relationships with either God, or other people. This ultimately leads to a form of dualism by creating two different ethical standards, one for work life and another for private life.

2. Bridging the Gap

Bellah and his contributors prophetically state that if people in society are ever to become more virtuous "a reappropriation of the idea of vocation or calling, [and] a return in a new way to the idea of work as a contribution to the good of all" will be indispensable.⁶ The papal social tradition has been attempting to do this for over the past one hundred years. The teachings on the area of work in the papal social tradition provides insights that address the deficiencies of work understood as a job or a career. The difficulty, however, exists in bridging the theory of the papal social tradition (moral and religious principles and virtues) with the practice of organizational life (competitive pressures of the firm and the psychological needs of the worker). Merely saying that work ought to be a vocation does not necessarily mean it will become one. Today's secular society does not make it easy to see the religious and moral aspects of work. While many people sense a religious dimension to their work lives, they have a difficult time perceiving their work in concrete ways as a vocation.⁷ Work as vocation is often perceived as a form of good-doism relegated to the areas of social services or volunteer work with little connection to the so-called real world. Overcoming this false impression and the difficultly bridging the gap is the main purpose of this book.

I see three steps that are necessary to bring about a concrete reappropriation of work as a vocation. First, a systematic understanding of work (Chapter 1). The concept of work is extremely broad. If work as a vocation is to have any concreteness, work itself must be understood as it is experienced in the organization. Second, a systematic understanding of the papal social teachings on work (Chapters 2, 3, and 4). Using the understanding of work as it is experienced, what does the papal social tradition say about it? This step is crucial, since if one has an inappropriate understanding of work as a vocation, the application of misinformed principles and virtues can prove disastrous. It will become, clear that the moral and religious principles that define work as a vocation in the papal social

tradition are not abstract or meaningless platitudes. The popes are sensitive to their historical periods, even though they were not always totally correct in evaluating them. The principles and virtues they articulated along with the theologians, philosophers, and others who attempted to understand and expand on them have formulated a substantive tradition which has developed in the last hundred years. To neglect or misunderstand this tradition leads to widening the gap between work and vocation.

Third, apply today's organizational work programs in light of the moral and religious norms of the papal social tradition (Chapter 5). More so than any other time in the twentieth century, organizational programs, such as quality circles, quality control, work-teams, employee stock options, gainsharing, and so forth, are becoming widely incorporated into the organization. If applied with the intention to further the dignity of all workers and promote the common good, these programs can partially realize work as a vocation.

This third step is the most difficult part of bridging the gap between work and vocation. Taking the step from theory (principles and virtues) to practice entails understanding the principles and virtues in light of today's circumstances. Are the principles applicable to the situation? Does the situation call for different principles? Does the situation even call for principles or is it merely a matter of market and technological know-how? Is the situation correctly understood? These questions call for prudential judgments which need both an acute mind and an open heart. Yet even though the task is difficult, if one fails to attempt it, work remains at the level of a job or a career. As John XXIII states in *Mater et magistra* (MM), "A social doctrine has to be translated into reality and not just merely formulated (MM, 224)." Otherwise, the social doctrine becomes meaningless, and the role of faith becomes privatized in the realm of one's private life. John Paul II's new encyclical, *Centesimus annus*, has also echoed this call of translating the principles and virtues of the Church's social doctrine to today's particular situation (CA, 59). He is concerned that some Catholics, particularly theologians and philosophers, are so concerned about the systematic expression of Catholic social thought, that they neglect its practical expression. John Paul II explains. "Today more than ever, the Church is aware that her social message will gain credibility more immediately from the witness of actions than as a result of its internal logic and consistency (CA, 57)." This is not to say that the organizational programs mentioned above are mandated by the popes. Yet, the popes do mandate that something be done to extend the moral and religious principles and virtues to the organization.

3. Defining Work

In order to understand work as a vocation, there must first be some agreement on the nature of work. What follows is a brief analysis of work that explores the presupposition that work, as a human activity, is an inherently value-laden activity. Because work is a formative activity both of the person and of the object it is directed toward, the mere description of work establishes the moral and spiritual importance of its activity.

THE ACTIVITY OF WORK

What is work? During the Middle Ages as well as other earlier historical periods, the products created through work were closely identified with the people who made them. Names such as Baker, Smith, Miller, Cook, Mason, Carpenter, Hunter, and Farmer attest to the close identity between what one made and who one was. Even today when people ask “What do you do?” they answer, “I’m a teacher,” “I’m a steelmaker,” “I’m an accountant.” However, since the Industrial Revolution, a split has grown between the workers themselves and the products they produce. With the increased use of assembly-line techniques and bureaucratic structuring, workers have even lost sight of the product they produce. They find themselves producing what they perceive as an insignificant part. Unlike the Bakers, Smiths, and Hunters of the Middle Ages, some modern workers are valued solely for the changes in the *object* made at the exclusion of the changes in the *subject* who made it.

This distinction between the subject and object is used by various authors. In this chapter these terms are meant in the sense Pope John Paul II uses it in his encyclical *Laborem exercens* (1981). This distinction has nothing to do with the distinction between objective truth or subjective opinion. Rather, the adjectives describe two aspects or two changes affected by work emanating from the person. Work insofar as it has a self-determining effect on the subject is *subjective*. Insofar as work has an effect on an external object it is *objective*.

When people work, they change the object outside themselves and they change themselves. These two changes which emanate from the activity of work occur simultaneously. Work by its very nature is intentionally orientated. It is directed toward a specific object outside of the subject who works, whether that object takes the form of a product or a service. At the same time, like all human activity, work has a self-determining dimension that penetrates the subject.⁸

The subjective changes affected by work are manifested in two ways: formation and remuneration. The formative dimension of work addresses its dynamic effect on the person. The work one does affects the personality⁹ and being of the subject who performs that work. The remunerative dimension of work addresses the reality that income from work is usually the sole means of life-sustaining support. Remuneration is a major factor in the quality of life workers and their families’ experience.

The objective changes affected by work are manifested in two ways: process and product. The process dimension of work points to the series of steps and acts needed to generate the product. No product or service is made without a series of steps that the worker must go through. Unlike God, people cannot create things *ex nihilo*. They must go through a process to achieve an end. The product dimension of work points to the object generated from the process. Through the process of work a product or service is created, that is, work is always directed toward some end. This product or service is utilized in some way by those who acquire the product.

A danger exists of separating the subjective and objective aspects of work to such an extent that they are viewed as completely independent from each other. The distinction is merely a heuristic one. A mutual influence exists between the subjective and objective aspects of work. The objective aspect (process and product dimensions) has a dynamic effect on the formation of the worker’s

personality and character. Not only is the object changed by the subject, but the subject is “changed by the objective aspect. Hence, whenever there is an objective change, there is also a subjective change. In order for the subjective change to become active, the worker must initiate the objective aspect. As this is done, a simultaneous interaction occurs within the subject that causes a change. This is not to say that the object completely determines the subject, as some behaviorists or environmental determinists many assert. Rather, it is through the interaction of the subject and the object that change occurs in both the subject and tile object.

FOUR ORGANIZATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF WORK

The activity of work, then, consists of two sets of interdependent aspects: the subjective and the objective. The subjective aspect entails two organizational dimensions: formation and remuneration. The objective aspect entails two organizational dimensions: process and product. Work is the objective and subjective interrelationship. This interrelationship in the workplace is organized in four dimensions: formation, remuneration, process, and product. At this point it is important to elaborate on each of these four organizational dimensions of work. There are two reasons for this. First, while each of the four dimensions interrelate and constantly overlap in the experience of work, each has unique characteristics. Second, each of the chapters of this book is structured by means of these four organizational dimensions. Without an initial understanding of the four dimensions of work, it will be difficult to understand the framework of each chapter.

Formation. When people ask the following questions, they are inquiring into what this book calls the formative dimension of work.

- What is the relationship between what workers do and who they become?
- To what extent are people shaped by their work?
- How is a person motivated?
- What is the nature of the human person?

Formation is the essential dimension of work which focuses on the changes work brings about in an individual’s personality, character, and potentialities as a subject. In order to understand work it is imperative to understand the person who is performing the work. Human beings are complex entities. In studying the formative dimension, one attempts to understand how work affects the economic, psychological, socio-ethical, and spiritual characteristics of the person. Every theory of work attempts to discover the formative effects work has on the person and then to organize the workplace accordingly.

The other three organizational dimensions of work are rooted in the formative dimension. It is here that the fundamental presuppositions for understanding the human worker are stated. How the person is perceived and understood will largely determine the approach one takes to remuneration, the process, and the product of work. If, for example, the person is understood in only economic terms, or only in

psychological terms then those perceptions of the person will have bearing on how the workplace is organized concerning remuneration, process, and product.

Remuneration. When people ask the following questions, they are inquiring to what this book calls the remunerative dimension of work.

- Are wages determined by the market or by justice?
- How involved should the worker be in the financial operation and risk of the company?
- Should incentive packages be distributed throughout the firm?
- Should workers own the means of production?

Remuneration is a distinctive and essential characteristic of work. Without remuneration, work is an activity with another name. For example, an involuntary activity without remuneration is slavery. A voluntary activity without pay is voluntarism. And an activity without just remuneration is exploitation.¹⁰ For most people, work is not an option but a necessity. It is the only means they have to support themselves and their families. This need to work both affects the subject's personal make-up, and greatly determines one's quality of life. A study of remuneration includes such things as wages, incentive programs, and worker ownership of the firm. It also includes the effect remuneration has on the worker as well as the general welfare of society.

Process. When people ask the following questions, they are inquiring into what this book calls the process dimension of work.

- What are the techniques of the operation?
- In the process of creating the object is the worker secondary to the considerations of efficiency and output?
- What is the relationship between the worker and the means of production?
- How should workers be organized in relationship to capital and technology?

Since work has a formative effect on the worker, the process of producing goods and services is significant. The process dimension is the way in which work is performed. What is of particular importance in the process is the way the workplace is actually organized. The workplace, enterprise, organization, and firm are social units of production. Yet the workplace is not only a place where products are made and transformed, it is also a place where people are changed and transformed. The process used by the firm is extremely important, since the person who performs in this process is an important and integral part of the process. Modern production structures have tended in the past to foster in workers passivity and apathy. This is particularly true among blue collar, middle management, and

some service sectors. Within the structure, work can lack intellectual and emotional challenge, and demean one's life.

Product. When people ask the following questions, they are inquiring into what this book calls the product dimension of work.

- Is the object made for the consumer simply a means to some financial end or does it have some intrinsic connection to who the producer is?
- Does a worker along with organizations have an obligation to develop quality products that are useful, save, environmentally sound, and affordable?
- Is profit the sole purpose to producing?

Insofar as work entails a goal, all work entails a product produced or service rendered. The product is the object made from the process employed. A study of this dimension focuses on the relationship between the subject and the object made within the context of the wider society for which the object is destined. People's labor is represented in the product. How they perceive the product, whether it is socially desirable or not, determines in part how fulfilled they are in work. The product of production has both an internal and external aspect. The internal aspect of the product is the relationship between the worker who has created the product and the product itself. If workers take very little pride in the quality and craftsmanship represented in the product they produce, very little hope exists that work will be dignified. The external aspect of the product is the direct negative and positive effects of the product, that is, the externalities or social costs/benefits of the product produced. Throughout the book, whenever the product is mentioned it should be assumed that this includes services as well.

The preceding discussion has described the four essential components of work. These components are derived from the fact that work is always the activity of a human person. As a human activity, work is inherently value-laden, because any discussion concerning the human person, whether the person is viewed as an economic animal, a psychological being, or a religious creature, is fundamentally a discussion of values. Any comprehensive vision of work, then, presupposes a vision of the person and consequently a vision of values. No one interested in organizing work can be blind to the values of work. This is why an understanding of the moral and religious principles and virtues of the papal social tradition is so important, since work, at least from a Catholic view point, is fundamentally religious and moral. The popes presuppose a vision of the person which works out in the organizational dimensions of formation, remuneration, process, and product.

4. Preview and Limitations

Chapter Two traces the positions of Pope Leo XXIII, Pope Pius XI, and Pope Pius XII, as these set the foundation for Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Mater et magistra* as well as Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Laborem exercens*. The chapter is structured along the four organizational dimensions of the work. Chapter Three

explicates *Mater et magistra* itself. Chapter Four concentrates on the thought of John Paul II, and his encyclical *Laborem exercens* using the same structure as Chapters Two and Three. Chapters Three and Four are the heart of the book insofar as they signify the height of two theological traditions in the papal social tradition: *Mater et magistra* represents the apex of the natural law tradition in the area of work, and *Laborem exercens* represents the apex of the scriptural and doctrinal tradition in the area of work. Chapter Five presents concrete programs that implement the insight of the moral teachings of the papal social tradition, and of organizational programs.

The matrix below gives a summary view of four visions of work: job, career, and two from Catholic social thought. A job borrows heavily from economics, career from psychology, John XXIII and the popes prior to him until Leo XIII from natural law, and John Paul II from scripture and doctrine. None of the four perspectives are totally mutually exclusive.

	JOB	CAREER	JOHN XXIII	JOHN PAUL II
FORMATION	Economic	Psychological	Dignity	Image of God
REMUNERATION	Equity	Worth	Justice	Dominion
PROCESS	Efficiency	Autonomy	Participate	Co-Creator
PRODUCT	Productivity	Quality	Common Good	Stewardship

As with any text, this one has its limitations. 1) The understanding of work is vast, and it includes such issues as labor/management relations, strikes, automation, unemployment, unions, right to work, government policy and regulation in the workplace, and various other issues. The area of focus in this text is micro in nature following the four dimensions described above: formation, remuneration, production process, and product. These four dimensions of course also have macro implications which will be pointed out, particularly the states' responsibility toward the remunerative dimension. But the thrust of this book remains in the micro aspects of the organization. And while the developing world and international dimensions need to be considered in an understanding of work, this book can only adequately treat work as experienced in North America. The exclusion of these macro topics is not an indication that these are not important issues; rather, the micro area of work, to be treated adequately, needs my particular focus.

2) The focus of the book is to construct a foundational organizational ethic that utilizes the papal social tradition. It spends time in exposition and application of the papal social tradition toward this end. While criticisms of the tradition are important considerations, to place them in the text would take away from this main focus. This is why specific criticisms of the papal social tradition are relegated to extended endnotes.

3) While it is important to recognize the social and economic developments which influenced the writings of the Catholic social documents, this text spends more time developing the official Catholic teaching from which the popes draw,

than explaining the historical debates and social conditions which surrounded their development. This text is more systematic than historical in that my concern is establishing a theology of work and of the organization using the papal material rather than explaining who wrote what and why they wrote it. Thus the social and economic historical developments which influenced the papal formulations are ancillary to identifying the ethical and theological concepts proposed by the documents.¹¹

4) The purpose of this book is not to say that the papal social tradition is “the be all end all” in understanding work as vocation. The Protestant and non-Christian traditions have a long history in understanding work as a vocation. The amount of ecumenical work on this area has yet been untapped.¹² However, I have limited the tradition in this book to the papal social tradition, both because of a practical reason—to explore another tradition would double the size of the book—and for a systematic reason, to develop a cogent Catholic system.

¹ Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 66. This book is a revision of my dissertation “An Organizational Work Ethic in the Papal Social Tradition” (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1991). In Chapter One of the dissertation I outline and critique two schools of organizational behavior that reflect the outlook of work viewed as a job, namely, Taylorism, and as a career, namely the Human Relations School.

² Studs Terkel, *Working* (New York: Avon Books, 1975), 675.

³ Bellah, et al., 66.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid, 71.

⁶ Bellah, et al., 287-288

⁷ See Thomas McMahon, “Religion and Business: Concepts and Data,” *Chicago Studies* 28 (April 1989) 3-16.

⁸ Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, Analecta Husserliana Series, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, vol. 10 (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1979), 150. Wojtyla speaks of the subject as the primary and principle object of the subject’s activity. While this is true, the language becomes more cumbersome and circular to use.

⁹ The meaning of the word personality here is taken from Catholic social thought, where it means more than the contemporary term. Personality is often referred to as character in the social tradition.

¹⁰ Some may dispute this point since it does not recognize parenthood as work because there is no formal remuneration dimension. Anyone who is a parent knows that parenting is work. However, the work that is discussed in this book restricts work to employment from which a person earns a living. While a parent who stays home with his/her children saves money in day care, the person is not able to earn a living by staying home with his/her children. This point is in no way a slight to parenting. Much of what is discussed in this book relates to the experience of parenting, but the overall nature of work in this book is directed for formal employment.

¹¹ David Hollenbach gives this argument for justifying the structure of chapter two in his book *Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 42.

¹² One book that has attempted to bridge gaps between the Catholic and Protestant understanding of work is Lee Hardy, *Fabric of This World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), passim.