

# Work as Key to the Social Question

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



## Towards a Christian Spirituality of Work

by Edith H. Raidt

St. Augustine College of South Africa, Johannesburg

At the time when the encyclical letter *Laborem exercens* (*LE*) was published, the term “spirituality” was still relatively unknown. Therefore the last chapter of the encyclical, “Elements for a spirituality of work”, was rather unusual and even controversial, but at the same time daunting and challenging. It is not surprising then that in most commentaries and discussions on *Laborem exercens* little or no attention was given to this particular chapter. Especially in Third World countries, the message of the encyclical with its emphasis on the dignity of human work and the working person, focused the attention mainly on the working class, on the rights of workers, and on exploitative working conditions. In the one or the other article there was even a negative response to the idea that Christ was himself “a man of work”, that “he belongs to the ‘working world’”, and that he “looks with love upon human work”. (*LE* n.26). Let me quote an extreme example: A South African commentator writes:

“The sentiments are noble but unconvincing, based as they are on a purely superficial use of scripture. Certainly Jesus was taught the trade of a carpenter, but did this have any meaning in his ministry at a deeper level than co-incidence? Is there anything in the New Testament, in fact, which could help the worker in today’s complex society? Sadly, there has been very little work done here in depth.” (Draper 1991:121) [1]

And the writer asks rather cynically

“whether the Church has any right to present Jesus as ‘Christ the Worker’ to the present day workers of South Africa. Tokenism is not a very attractive game, not even when it is played with the noblest sentiments by pious churchmen.”

In some theological circles there was considerable criticism about the encyclical’s use of the

Book of Genesis, especially in regard to work as co-creation, the interconnection between human work and the creative and preserving action of God. The encyclical's approach to this theological question was seen by some as useful but incomplete which could lead to an oversimplification of ethical issues in the domain of work. (Hollenbach 1983). Hauerwas regarded it as "a remarkably bad idea" (1983: 42)

And yet it was precisely these two core concepts - work as co-creation and Jesus the man of work - that inspired people in the domain of work and helped them to develop a spirituality of work. There were a number of groups, especially circles of business leaders in Southern Africa and Latin America, who took up the message of *Laborem exercens* and became gripped by the concept that "work is a sharing in the activity of the Creator". At a time when entrepreneurs and business leaders were frowned upon in church circles and were frequently regarded as capitalists, exploiters and ruthless profiteers, the concept of the business leader as co-creator, as a covenant partner in God's ongoing process of creation, as the Creator's instrument and as steward of God's garden opened up a new vision and a sense of a specific vocation. The fruit of this awareness was a twofold one: it led to the unfolding and practical application of a spirituality of work in the business environment, and this in turn resulted in a unique apostolic outreach.

In 1982 I was approached by a group of business leaders in Johannesburg (South Africa) to conduct a six month course in "Christian business management", based on Catholic Social Thought and the teaching of Father Joseph Kentenich. We ventured together on a road of discovery and growth. The course became a serendipity for all participants and has since been repeated almost annually in different centres in South Africa and from 1989 onwards in various countries of South America and Europe, [2] The basic themes were constantly further developed and became an enriching experience for hundreds of entrepreneurs and business executives in very different cultures. The central message of *Laborem exercens* formed the core of these formation programmes. For nearly all of them this was the first exposure to papal encyclicals and Catholic social teaching. Perhaps the most beautiful fruit was the gradual unfolding of a spirituality of work for leaders in business and industry. The experience of the participants bears out the relevance of the statement in the encyclical: "The knowledge that by means of work the human person shares in the work of creation constitutes the most profound *motive* for undertaking it in various sectors" (n. 25).

In this paper I do not intend to dwell on theological and theoretical issues raised in and as a result of the encyclical, instead I want to concentrate on the importance of the elements of a spirituality of work as outlined in chapter 5 of the encyclical (LE n.24-27) and the effect of an applied spirituality of work in the life and practical work situation of business leaders. Experience has shown that the challenges and ideals of Catholic Social Thought, especially from *Laborem exercens* onwards, can only be put into practice at the individual, local, national and international levels if leaders in the working world are assisted in developing a profoundly personal and apostolic spirituality of work.

## A spirituality of work

In the light of the wide and often extremely vague use of the term “spirituality” one has to first of all define what we mean by a spirituality and more specifically a spirituality of work. In the classical tradition, spirituality means the personal relationship of a human being with God, along with all the attitudes and modes of expression that this relationship includes. It was only in 17th century France that “spirituality” was given this meaning for “devout life”, signifying the numerous breakthroughs that occur in a life devoted to God, in new commitments and ways of service.

- Spirituality is “a **lived experience**, the effort to apply relevant elements in the deposit of Christian faith to the guidance of men and women towards their spiritual growth” (G. Ganss 1993:61), involving the whole person - body, mind and soul, place and relationships.
- Christian spirituality “concerns the quest for a fulfilled and authentic Christian existence, involving the bringing together of the fundamental ideas of Christianity and the whole **experience** of living on the basis of and within the scope of the Christian faith” (McGrath 1999:13)
- “Christian spirituality is the daily, communal, **lived expression** of one’s ultimate beliefs, characterized by openness to the self-transcending love of God, self, neighbour, and world through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit.” (McBrien 1999:1216)
- A spirituality of work is such a **lived experience** which helps to bring together the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, bridging the perceived gap between the two, and providing a creative response to a situation of ongoing stress, high-powered demands, quick decision-making and chronic overwork.

From the few definitions of spirituality quoted above it will be noticed that the core of each is the reference to a “lived experience”. In dealing with a spirituality of work more is meant than a theology of work. While the one is a knowledge of and about work in a Christian sense, the other is the daily lived experience in the concrete work situation in a secular, materialistic and often antagonistic and God-less environment.

According to the encyclical, the Church now

“sees it as her particular duty *to form a spirituality of work* which will help all people to come closer, through work, to God, the Creator and Redeemer, to participate in his salvific plan for man and the world and to deepen their friendship with Christ in their lives by accepting, through faith, a living participation in his threefold mission as Priest, Prophet and King...” (LE no. 24)

This statement indicates that an essential element has been lacking, [3] that we do not as yet have an adequate and effective spirituality of work, and that the challenge of Vatican II, especially as spelt out in *Lumen gentium* has not yet been taken up fully, namely that it is

the task of the laity,

“by their very vocation, to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations...There they are called by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for **the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven.**” (LG 31).

Hannah Arendt’s criticism that the Christian religion has contributed to a significant devaluation of work and politics, the two chief poles of public life, is unfortunately still valid. Arendt maintains that the Christian ethic, “while it is incapable of founding a public realm of its own, is quite adequate to the main Christian principle of worldlessness and is admirably fit to carry a group of essentially worldless people through the world.” (Arendt 1958:49). Similar comments can be found in the *New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*:

“In the centuries preceding Vatican II in the Roman Catholic Church, almost all lay activity and work were considered to have little if any intrinsic worth. This world was understood to be passing away and to have nothing of lasting value to it, except perhaps as it interacted with Church life.”(1993:1050)

The *New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought* (1994) points out that this is a longstanding problem in the Christian churches. Even the reformers Luther and Calvin

“saw work as a service to man but as having no value of itself in God’s sight; ‘this dualism led to a severe dichotomy between an individualistic pietism on the one hand and a humanism without theological roots on the other’(Illanes 1980:29).” (1994:995)

“We are only beginning to develop a true theology of work. The very term ‘theology of work’ is of recent vintage, appearing in theological literature only about the middle of this century”. (1994:991)

Clearly, such a dichotomy and “worldlessness” cannot be the right Christian response. Instead, both a theology and a spirituality of work, encouraging world penetration, sanctification of the world from within, and coping with the world are required. In his well known address to business executives of UNIAPAC, “The market and the kingdom”, Michel Camdessus refers here to the need for holiness: “For those of us who have to perform a work like ours in this urgency of rendering a service to mankind, there is no other solution - and I’m certain of this - than sanctity.” (1992)

In response to the encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* (1931) Father Joseph Kentenich, the founder of Schoenstatt, an international ecclesial lay movement, developed a lay spirituality which he called “workday sanctity” [4] and which in the meantime has been taken up by countless lay persons worldwide in their striving to live a spirituality of work in the midst of their secular activities. Although they are 50 years apart, there is a remarkable similarity

between this spirituality and the proposed elements of a spirituality of work as set out in *Laborem exercens*. Business leaders, in their attempt to give a creative response to the social encyclicals - from *Quadragesimo anno* to *Centesimus annus* - have found in Kentenich's "Workday sanctity" the necessary framework and inspiration.

### **Work as sharing in the activity of the Creator as his covenant partners**

In the traditional view work has been seen as a necessity, as the way to earn one's living and support one's family, also as a means to further the self-development of man, but very often with the emphasis on work as penance and expiation, as a punishment for sin, rather than on the glorification of God.

### **Work as a genuine and indispensable source of happiness**

However, human work seen as a sharing in the ongoing creating activity of the Creator brings out a new dimension which emphasises and actualises God's covenant relationship with his human partners. It uplifts work and the working person into the friendship with the Creator, and it brings to the fore an almost forgotten reality, i.e. that work was part of the happiness of paradise, and that according to God's plan it should be a source of happiness even today. The biblical view, expressed in the second creation account, that "the Lord took the man and put him in his garden of delight, to cultivate and tend it" (Gen 2:15) highlights the paradise joy of co-creation. Although John Paul II is often criticised for placing the emphasis on Gen. 1:15, "Be fruitful and *multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it*" (LE n.4), even this mandate of the Creator, if seen as stewardship, is a source of happiness and service:

"Man is the image of God partly through the mandate received from his Creator to subdue, to dominate, the earth. In carrying out this mandate, man, every human being, reflects the very action of the Creator of the universe."

In countries which are only just recovering from centuries of colonialism, apartheid and job reservation, and which are still in the grip of migratory labour, large scale unemployment and dire poverty, such a concept of work may seem at best idealistic or utopian at worst (cf. Draper 1991). And yet when South Africa's Constitution of 1996 enshrined the right to work as a human right it captured something of this ideal. Work should be a source of happiness today, and it is a major challenge to employers and employees to develop an appropriate work ethic. Reflecting on the massive unemployment in Germany in the nineteen-thirties, Kentenich emphasised that work is an indispensable source of happiness, and that the desire for work is a natural desire, and suitable work is an *inalienable human right* (Nailis 1937/1955: 104). Therefore unemployment is "in all cases an evil, which, when it reaches a certain level, can become a real social disaster." (LE n.18)

In 1986, at the height of the apartheid struggle the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) were about to call for radical economic sanctions, disinvestment and divestment, and Catholics were invited to comment on a draft document. A group of "independent, concerned and Catholic business men" submitted a well researched and well documented response in which they "question the Bishops' right to morally approve of this form of violence which deprives many people of their basic human right to suitable employment: see *Laborem exercens* n. 3: "...work is a *key*, probably the *essential key*, to the whole social question really from the point of man's good." These businessmen argued that from their personal experience every worker had on average 15 or more dependents. In the case of job loss and ensuing unemployment thousands of dependents would have to face starvation and dire poverty. Therefore they concluded:

- Economic sanctions are a form of violence and therefore immoral.
- The Bishops are urged to set up a commission without delay to plan a programme to get racial discrimination eradicated without recourse to violence.
- The Bishops should not work for polarisation but for reconciliation and the strengthening of the presently existing goodwill.
- We should be seeking for a Christian response ...
- All Catholics in their everyday lives should deal with their fellowmen in the light of the Gospel
- Catholics should acquaint themselves with the Church's, especially Papal, social and economic teaching and apply it in their everyday life. [5]

As a result of this submission which was presented to the Bishops' plenary session, the final stance of the Bishops was less radical and more considerate of the rights of people to employment. [6]

In his very thought-provoking article "The right to employment: A theological perspective", Buti Tlhagale (now the archbishop of Bloemfontein) reflects on *Laborem exercens* and gives a South African view on work as a blessing not a curse, work as cooperation with God, work as a human right, employment as the basis of peace and stability, and unemployment as "tarnishing God's image". Though written in the early nineties, the basic message is still relevant, all the more since the hopes in the great transformation after 1994 were not fulfilled:

"The problem of unemployment is obviously a complex issue. But from a theological perspective the jobless have a right to work. This is consistent with God's intention for human beings. Simple justice demands that they too participate in work so that they be able to fulfill their basic needs and be part of society. As it is, the texture of the South African society is paper-thin. It tears away at the slightest pressure. Employment for most people would ensure the prospect of peace and development. Theologies of work, human rights and liberation must address the plight of the 7 million people unemployed in the context of a changing South Africa. After all, these theologies are intended to be at the service of the poor. The unemployed in South Africa today constitute the "poor of the poor". (Tlhagale

1994)

### **Working with God - The priestly, prophetic and kingly function in the workplace**

Work seen merely as a human right is not adequate, especially when it is seen in a “culture of entitlement”. The biblical concept of work in a covenant paradigm with the Creator gives a new and fuller view of work as a human right, as a way to self-actualisation and self-fulfilment, as service to the community and as contribution towards the common good. Speaking from the perspective of a third-world country and in a post-apartheid era, I have to stress the vital importance of a profound education process in which business leaders will have to provide essential leadership and example. In their businesses and companies they will have to promote a culture of creative work with its demands and rewards. In 1997, Thabo Mbeki, the then Deputy President of South Africa, made an impassioned plea to counteract the prevalent “culture of entitlement” and

“the collapse of an acceptable level of morality in our society, which among other things has resulted in the elevation of the self, and the serving of the interests of the self to the point that this becomes a religion in itself. The self becomes the God that we must all worship. You see it in South African society that there is a general feeling in the country that the democratic state and society are the providers, which must provide for my needs which I will identify. I will sit and watch and wait and expect, and where the government does not deliver - I will oppose. I will go on a march, I will toyi-toyi. [7] Why has this democratic state not delivered to me that to which I am entitled? And all this is said and done in the absence of a balance in the context of what might be in the national interest.” [8]

Referring to the time of the “struggle” Mbeki asked, where are the prophetic leaders today? In the past,

“these outstanding leaders of the religious communities in South Africa and elsewhere in the world developed a liberating theology, which served as the moral basis for the national liberation struggle...But where are they today? Where is this continuing intervention?” (Mbeki 1997: 11-12)

More than once Mbeki appealed to the religious communities to provide prophetic leadership in this time of moral crisis. Joseph Kentenich would interpret this as a message from the God of history speaking through the signs of the times which require a courageous and creative answer.

The awareness of being in a covenant relationship with the Creator, of sharing in the ongoing process of creation gives business leaders a sense of calling. They discover their unique vocation as business leaders and their social responsibility for the shaping of a more

just and humane society.

The constantly lived experience of being in a covenant partnership with God also provides the business person with a sense of *security*, of being personally sheltered in God's presence and *providence*. The daily fostered relationship and faithfully practised application of working *with* God helps to develop a profound *accountability* to God in all business decisions and at the same time a childlike attitude of *trusting dependence* on God, which can be a powerful antidote to *stress*. [9]

Since human work is a share in the creative and self-giving activity of God, it should be a continuous working with God and "a living participation in Christ's threefold mission as Priest, Prophet and King" (LE 24). This reference in the encyclical refers to *Lumen gentium* which speaks so eloquently about the task of the laity and their task "to make the Church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that she can become the salt of the earth" (LG 33).

### **A priestly function in the workplace**

"The supreme and eternal priest, Christ Jesus, ...also gives them a share in His *priestly* office, to offer spiritual worship for the glory of the Father and the salvation of men. Hence the laity, dedicated as they are to Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, are marvellously called and prepared so that even richer fruits of the Spirit may be produced in them. For all their works, prayers and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit - indeed even the hardships of life if patiently borne - all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (cf. Pet. 2:5). In the celebration of the Eucharist these may most fittingly be offered to the Father along with the body of the Lord. And so, worshipping by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God." (LG 34)

This priestly function of lay people in the midst of the humdrum of the working environment is expressed in an appealing, though somewhat dated, way in the book *Workday Sanctity*:

"Not only the stars, the forest and flowers exist for the glory of God, not only the storm and the sea find their ultimate purpose if expressed in human language, but things of culture and industry likewise are destined for the same end. The blast-furnace, the motor car, telephone and radio, can all sing the praise of God, the Almighty and wise Creator. We, living in the age of technological achievements, should join our voices to the tapping of typewriters and the howling of sirens of factories - since we are the priestly mediators between even these things and God. They can find the fulfillment

of their existence in no other way.” (Nailis 1937/1955: 122-123)

The priestly office of the laity not only exists in this form of ongoing worship and praise but also in the offering of sacrifices connected with their work. I want to highlight a particularly painful and challenging area, which can only be coped with in the sign of Christ’s redemptive suffering, namely the fight against fraud and corruption. Many a business leader has had to face enormous difficulties and setbacks, in some cases even to the point of death threats and bankruptcy, as a result of their courageous stand against corruption. Work in the sign of the Cross is the hallmark of a Christian spirituality of work. Those business leaders who espouse this ideal of following the Crucified Redeemer can cope even with such extreme situations of stress without breaking down and without giving in to compromises. I regard them as the modern “martyrs” in the working world, giving witness to Christ and His values even to the point of losing everything.

In the final section of the last paragraph of *Laborem exercens* the working person’s participation in the mystery of the Cross and the Resurrection is briefly but very succinctly outlined:

“The Christian finds in human work a small part of the Cross of Christ and accepts it in the same spirit of redemption in which Christ accepted his Cross for us. In work, thanks to the light that penetrates us from the Resurrection of Christ, we always find a *glimmer* of new life, of the *new good*, as if it were an announcement of ‘the new heavens and the new earth’ in which man and the world participate precisely through the toil that goes with work. Through toil - and never without it. On the one hand this confirms the indispensability of the Cross in the spirituality of work; on the other hand the Cross which this toil constitutes reveals a new good springing from work itself, from work understood in depth and in all its aspects and never apart from work.” (LE n. 27)

This is the centre piece of a Christian spirituality of work. When giving spiritual direction to business leaders this mystery should play a major role and consideration. It will be a powerful means to cope with the demands and the unavoidable suffering and toil that belong to a leadership position in the working world.

### **A prophetic function in the workplace**

Both documents, *Laborem exercens* and *Lumen gentium*, stress the *prophetic function* of the laity as a participation in the prophetic office of Christ:

“Christ is the great prophet who proclaimed the kingdom of the Father by the testimony of his life and by the power of his word. Until the full manifestation of his glory, he fulfills this prophetic office, not only by the hierarchy....., but also by the laity. He accordingly establishes them as

witnesses and provides them with the appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*) and the grace of the word... so that the power of the Gospel may shine out in daily family and social life..." (LG 35)

This dimension is of special relevance to business leaders in the workplace. President Thabo Mbeki, as quoted above, has even called for "prophetic leaders", i.e. leaders with a vision and commitment to society. Ideally speaking, Christians in the workplace should be able to discover the intrinsic value of created things and see them as little prophets of God, bringing a message from him. St Augustine speaks of "nutus Dei" - greetings or hints from God. For St Ignatius it was imperative to find God in all things. And they should be able, in and through the *sensus fidei* to discern the will of God in daily life. Business leaders who are frequently involved in risk taking and quick decision making need the gift and the art of discernment, not just according to the rules of the market, but first and foremost according to God's plans and his will in every situation. In this connection Father Joseph Kentenich's teaching on practical faith in Divine Providence has proved to be of decisive assistance to business people. [10] It has become an essential component of a timely spirituality of work. It helps business leaders to live as active covenant partners of the God of life and of history, to discover and encounter him in all events of daily life, to discern his will and act courageously according to it. Cooperating with the God of life they also see their role and responsibility for society and the course of history.

Faith in Divine Providence makes the believer sensitive to the God of life, and alerts one to the *vox temporis – vox Dei* reality. Business leaders have found here a powerful way of discovering the "trace of God" in day-to-day management and business events, to see the opportunity when God opens a door, and then to respond with creative action. As a source of discernment, this practical faith in Divine Providence becomes the hermeneutic key to interpret the God-willed meaning of things and events of the present moment and of history (Unkel 1981: I, 108). And it provides what some businessmen call, a "methodology of decision-making" (Valle 1996). This echoes what Vatican II described in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*):

"Only the light of faith and meditation on the Word of God can enable us to find everywhere and always the God 'in whom we live and exist' (Acts 17:28); only thus can we seek his will in everything, see Christ in all men..., make sound judgments on the true meaning and value of temporal realities both in themselves and in relation to man's end." (AA n. 4)

The prophetic function of lay leaders in the workplace extends in a very special way to the readiness to act for the common good and to make a decisive contribution to the course of history. This may be a somewhat unusual interpretation of the task of the laity, but it is decisive for role players in business since it is this sector that has a major impact on the well being of society. It gains even more meaning when seen within the rapidly expanding scope of globalisation. Prophetic Christians, steeped in this faith, are people of hope, optimism, vision and courageous daring.

Discerning the "trace of God" inspired business people to take courageous initiatives, such

as

- helping displaced people who had been forcefully removed by the apartheid regime and dumped in a desolate place called “Nobody” to start their own little businesses from absolutely nothing. [11] The rural uninformed were educated in the finer aspects of carrying on small businesses. Their joy in putting matters into practice was overwhelming. (Coleman 1994: 21) Out of this initiative developed the important and very influential “Small Business Development Corporation” project which led to a major breakthrough in assisting black entrepreneurs who previously had been barred from active participation in business.
- The “trace of God” inspired business people in Chile to submit a proposal to their government for an economic reform aimed at “Humanizing the company” (“Towards a more humane and dynamic company”. CENEM 1973 / 1993).
- Recognising the God of life through the “trace of God” led to a highly successful project in Chile “Developing a new company of workers.” *Metalgas* which is constituted and on the basis of full worker participation and worker ownership received the prize of being the “model enterprise” of Chile in 1993.
- “Inspired by the principles of Christian humanism, *Metalgas* is a company of workers in the service of an economy of solidarity. Its aim is to harmonize work, technology and capital in order to serve – as the ultimate goal – the full development of those who constitute the company and the Chilean society.”(Feature article in *Mensaje*, see PRAXIS 1993: 4)

### **A kingly function in the workplace**

Finally, the laity are also called to share in Christ’s mission as King. We read in *Lumen gentium*:

Christ...has entered into the glory of his kingdom. All things are subjected to him until he subjects himself and all created things to the Father, so that God may be all in all ... The Lord also desires that his kingdom be spread by the lay faithful: the kingdom of truth and life, the kingdom of holiness and grace, the kingdom of justice, love and peace. In this kingdom creation itself will be delivered from the slavery of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God.” (LG n. 36)

The rest of this paragraph is quoted in *Laborem exercens*:

“The faithful, therefore, must learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation, and its orientation to the praise of God. Even by their secular activity they must assist one another to live holier lives. In this way the world will be permeated by the spirit of Christ and more effectively achieve its purpose in justice, charity and peace... Therefore, by their competence in

secular fields and by their personal activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them work vigorously so that by human labour, technical skill, and civil culture created goods may be perfected according to the design of the Creator and the light of his Word.” (LG n. 36, quoted in LE n. 25)

A very beautiful and impressive interpretation of this kingly office of the laity, especially of business executives, is presented by Michel Camdessus in his talk on “The market and the kingdom”, given to members of UNIAPAC on 27 May 1992. [12] Camdessus bases his speech largely on the encyclical *Centesimus annus* (1991). Another, equally impressive speech highlighting the kingdom values for business leaders, is Enrique Shaw’s lecture on “Eucharist and business life”, which was delivered in October 1959 at the VIth Eucharistic Congress in Cordoba, Argentina. [13]

Camdessus so aptly points out: “The Kingdom is about to be built, but it will not emerge from our tool boxes.” The values of the “Judge who is the King in the Kingdom” (Mt 25:31-46) have to be applied. “Today, my Judge and my King is my starving, thirsty, foreign, naked, sick, or imprisoned brother...”

“The reign of Christ belongs to history in which we are actors and which has been progressing since Jesus entered human history. The reign comes about when God is King, when we recognize him and spread this reign like an oil slick, impregnating, renewing and uniting the human realities...As Christian businessmen, as good workers of the economy, [we] are in charge of the commercial wealth, but also of giving witness to the coming of the Kingdom, where grace reigns.

When you help people to grow, you are in the realm of the Kingdom...

There is the *invisible hand of the market*, with business at the centre, but also *the hand of justice* of the state...The third hand, the fraternal *hand of solidarity* has the task to reduce the inequalities, to fight poverty, in our house and in the world...”

Enrique Shaw finds the kingdom values enshrined in the beatitudes which he applies to the daily chores and duties of the business leader.

“The Eucharist, a permanent sacramental presence of the Word incarnate among us, with a silent call to a greater *personalism* and a greater *solidarity*, is not only the engine but also the compass, *the ‘steering wheel’* of an authentic business life...”

“Christ in the Eucharist, when He is exposed on the tabernacle for our adoration, seems to insist once more on those basic Christian attitudes that He taught us in the Sermon on the Mount” [14]

What is striking in this lecture is the contemplative nature of Shaw's reflections. As one reads through the treatment of the beatitudes and their application to very concrete situations and problems in the day-to-day business life in a company, one is struck by the depth of faith and an honest standing in the world without being of the world. Here one finds someone who has successfully united the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. This is what a spirituality of work is all about.

The Eucharist and the Sermon on the Mount make one deeply aware of another very important quality of the kingly function of the business leaders, namely *servant leadership*. Through Robert Greenleaf's publications this concept has become widely known in recent times, but actually it goes right back to Christ's example and teaching. Working for the Kingdom means providing selfless leadership, exercising authority as the servant-leader and to build community, especially in the company.

### **Working WITH and FOR others – the company as a community**

A lived spirituality of work is community-building. One of the most beautiful fruits of business leaders committed to a management style where the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity are applied, is "the company as a community". The aspect of the *common good* becomes a central feature in decision making. Here the "gospel of work" (LE n. 26) and the constant life-giving union with "Christ, the man of work" (LE n. 26) are becoming part of the daily work situation.

### **Some concrete initiatives**

Encyclicals are not meant to stay in the academic domain; they need to be translated into life. Therefore I want to refer here to some concrete and creative initiatives that were inspired by *Laborem exercens* and later encyclicals. When the courses in Christian Business Management, mentioned at the beginning, had taken root and spread, an intensive spiritual life resulted among many groups and individual business leaders, with the ideal of the "social saint" [15] gaining ground, i.e. the person who is fully immersed in God and – as his instrument and covenant partner - becomes "historically creative" in society, especially in and through the working environment.

In Buenos Aires, Argentina, a two-year "novitiate", i.e. an intensive spiritual formation programme was started in 1992, with the purpose of forming apostles of Christ in order to evangelise the business world; to interpret and live according to the calling of the business leader; to give attention to the personal concrete needs (professional, emotional, spiritual etc.) of each member; and to search for ways how to help shape a new social order through the company in the spirit of the Gospel. (Dumas 1993 a) The group consisted of eleven members from different parts of the country and from various sectors of the business world. Two of the participants were high ranking government officials. The spouses were also

active members of the group. The group met regularly in intervals of six weeks over a period of two years under the guidance of a spiritual director. An important objective was not only the learning process, but also the mutual encouragement and support at the human level, creating a fellowship which had definite repercussions in the business life of every one of the group.

The spiritual formation bore fruit in several programmes of apostolic outreach. In 1993, the Schoenstatt circle of business leaders and the “Association of Christian Business Leaders” (ACDE UNIAPAC Argentina) initiated an evangelising “Mission for business leaders” in Argentina, which involved 7000 couples (business leaders and their spouses), who came together for seven meetings, in order to study and apply Catholic Social Teaching to the working environment and in relation to family life (Dumas 1993 b). The topics – taken over largely from the CBM course - dealt with themes like:

- *The human person’s vocation as co-creator with God:* Business and managerial work as a participation in God’s creative activity. The universal destiny of the goods of the earth. Covenant with God through creative work carried out with excellence.
- *Business leaders as organizers of work:* Appreciating the value and dignity of work. Working with others. Authority over technology. Working for others.
- *The company as a community of persons:* The company as a community of values. The company as educational community. Participation in creativity (respecting the freedom and originality of everyone). Satisfaction of basic human needs (including moral needs)
- *The Christian vision of the business:* The meaning of profit and its use. The moral dimension of investment. Job generation and job maintenance. The business and the environment.
- *The state and the economic order:* Solidarity, subsidiarity
- *The person of the business leader:* his / her needs (physical, psychological, emotional, intellectual, religious); virtues; business leader and family
- *Creating a free market economy in solidarity:* Ethical and theological foundations of the Free Market Economy; Training to acquire a professional, moral and spiritual competence; respect for the pluralism of projects inspired by the same faith; the preferential love for the poor through the company.

This initiative was later taken over in Chile where a “Mission for the world of labour” was conducted along similar lines in 1996-1998, with 6000 industrialists taking part. The project is presently extended to Paraguay and Mexico. (Ossandon 1998:95).

## **Conclusion**

A sound and comprehensive spirituality of work is the necessary basis for a creative

collaboration with the Creator, and for an integrated “work-life” where business people and all working people experience their work as worship, adoration, and praise of God. Such a spirituality will be a source of strength and happiness for the working person, and an inspiration for solving problems in the work place. Ideally speaking it should help to integrate the *vita activa* with the *vita contemplativa*. Clearly, a lot of work has to be done in order to develop and foster such a spirituality of work, not as a luxury for a few, but as an essential element in the life of every Christian.

## NOTES

[1] Draper argues that workers in South Africa - and he only refers to black workers - had to contend with enormous problems which were “the fundamental consequences of the appropriation of the great majority of the land by the white settlers in the imperialistic era.” There was the compulsion of black workers out of a subsistence economy into the wage economy by expropriation of their land; migratory labour and job reservation; dependency on the white economy etc.; and all of this left the black worker with little bargaining power or dignity. “This is the context in which we must examine whether Jesus could be counted a worker, and whether his world and work have anything to say to the workers of South Africa today...” It is only through Jesus’ solidarity with the Poor that he has a relevant message today. “Jesus had the security of a trade. He could avoid the utter destitution of those who had become landless vagabonds or day labourers by his continuation of the family practice of carpentry he had learned from his father. Yet he chose to join the lot of those driven by economic necessity to *anachoresis*, abandonment of land and security.” (Draper 1993:130)

[2] See Raidt 1982 and 1991, Dumas 1993, Maguire 1994, Fothergill 1995

[3] It is interesting that the same lack has been felt in Protestant circles. In the preface to his “Handbook of pastoral care” *Work well: Live well - Rediscovering a biblical view of work*, David Westcott (Church of England) complains that in books about pastoral care “Work seldom features, despite the fact that many of us spend a substantial proportion of our time engaged in it. This book attempts to fill that gap, or, if not to fill it, to lay some foundations on which others can build.” (1996) Westcott makes frequent references to *Laborem exercens*.

[4] From 1932 onwards Father Joseph Kentenich gave a number of extensive training courses on “Workday Sanctity” as a unique and much needed lay spirituality for the Christian in the modern world. These were later edited and published in 1937 by Annette Nailis. The German edition, *Werktagsheiligkeit*, was very popular and received several reprints and editions. It was translated into Spanish, Portuguese and English.

[5] *Comments on SACBC: “The South African situation and the question of economic*

*pressure” and Commission for Justice and Peace: “Economic measures against apartheid and the challenge to the Church”*. by E.M. Collins, C.A. Dean, G.M. Kraljevich, P.C. Leon, P.G. Maguire, J. Nicolson, V.C.R. Salvador, R.T. Spurr. Johannesburg 1986

[6] Oliver F. Williams described the impact and the ethics of sanctions in his articles “The apartheid struggle: Learnings from the interaction between Church groups and business”, *PRAXIS*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1996 and vol 5, no. 1, 1997

[7] South African expression, perhaps of Ndebele or Shona origin, meaning to make quasi-military dance-steps characterized by high-stepping movements, performed either on the spot or while moving slowly forwards, usually by participants in (predominantly black) protest gatherings or marches, and accompanied by chanting, singing or the shouting of slogans. (*A Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles. Oxford University Press 1996*)

[8] Thabo Mbeki, “From liberation to transformation”, *PRAXIS*, vol 5, no. 2, 1997, p. 10.

[9] As an example see the personal testimony of the Argentinian business consultant Federico J. Dumas, “He experienced God’s love”, *PRAXIS*, vol 4. no. 1, March 1996, pp. 19-22.

[10] See Del Valle Nadal, “Divine Providence and the business leader”, *PRAXIS*, vol 4, no. 4. 1996. Nadal describes the experience of business people in Argentina for whom Kentenich’s “methodology of discernment”, based on practical faith in Divine Providence, has become an essential tool in the decisions and risks of their daily business activities.

[11] This project was initiated in 1986, by one prophetic business leader in Johannesburg for whom Fr Kentenich’s teaching on faith in Divine Providence and discovering the “trace of God” in the workplace had become an effective tool to become creative in a time of real crisis. It is interesting to note that this initiative was soon taken up and financially supported by the government of the day and especially by the private sector. Other business leaders and organizations took an active part in supporting this exercise of subsidiarity which bore rich fruit and became one of the “rolling stones” that led to the gradual dismantling of apartheid.

[12] The original French speech (the text of which was not available) was translated into Spanish and published in *Revista Criterio*, Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1992. The Spanish version was then translated into English and slightly edited for publication in *PRAXIS*, vol 1. no. 3, 1993.

[13] Enrique Shaw’s lecture is one of the most profoundly spiritual reflections on the calling of business leaders

[14] Shaw’s reflections encapsulate a genuine and timely spirituality of work, which has lost nothing of its freshness and relevance for today’s business leaders.

[15] This is an expression coined by Father Kentenich in the early 1930s and developed further in connection with discussions around “the social question.” It found a particularly strong resonance among professionals and business leaders in South America.