

# Work as Key to the Social Question

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



## Work, Worship, and *Laborem Exercens* in the United States Today

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### Abstract

As the Holy Spirit operates in our work lives, toil is an “inevitable” part of work. After a brief discussion of *Laborem Exercens* and a description of work life in the United States, the author then describes the challenges of a therapeutic culture and the tests of postmodern thinking when reading *Laborem Exercens* today. The work of philosopher Charles Taylor on the modern identity and Kenan Osborne, O.F.M. on the sacraments provide material for reflection on the connection between work and worship in a postmodern time. The author then describes some linkages between work and worship in the area of faith-based community organizing and in the development of cooperatives in faith communities. The author contends that worship has a role in the transformation of work life and that the use of “solidarity” and the sense of permanence in *Laborem Exercens* make personal sacrifice and commitment important to this transformation.

### Introduction

In 1981 *Laborem Exercens* reaffirmed that God’s sons and daughters are the primary value of work. We are different from other animal life because we have dominion over the earth and this dominion is achieved by our work. The encyclical described some negative aspects of our dominion that included increasing levels of pollution, technology and automation that at times treated people as instruments of production, and a poor distribution of work that left many in poverty. While the Church did not suggest that it had the answers to these difficulties, it did argue that the rights and dignity of workers were primary; for example, just wages and benefits were minimum means of insuring proper treatment of

workers. Philosophical thought itself, in the forms of materialism and economism, making human beings the effect of material processes or separating them from capital, had led to abuses of humanity. For this reason, Pope John Paul II underscored the rights of workers to organize themselves for their commonweal and emphasized that ownership—private property—served the worker. The task of the Church, according to the encyclical, was to speak out on the value of work as part of its evangelical message, teaching about humanity's role in the activity of the creator, reminding humanity of Christ's work in the world, and raising up human work in light of the cross and the resurrection of Christ.

In 2001 work-related injustices continue to exist when first world workers suffer from workaholicism, elements of alienation, and burnout on the job and third world workers struggle to sustain themselves on less than adequate wages and few or no employment benefits. In the following few pages, I sketch out a picture of work life in the U.S. today, discuss how the spirituality of work requires some healthy acceptance of toil and commitment, and relate work to a view that sees sacrifice as an element of the constitutive good in the postmodern world. Our worship of God includes a recognition of suffering and sorrow in our activities-- including work--along with a thankfulness for God's gifts of creation. The encyclical's spirituality of work sees toil as one element of work that is "inevitable" and this means self-denial should be a factor in our work efforts. As people living in a postmodern time, who are often focused on individual happiness and the avoidance of pain, how might we better understand the inevitable presence of toil in our lives as sons and daughters of a loving God? Philosopher Charles Taylor and theologians Miroslav Volf and Kenan Osborne, O.F.M offer language that speaks to the relationship between work and the transcendent in a postmodern era, and I will consider *Laborem Exercens* in light of this language. How effective is *Laborem Exercens* at addressing the work lives of postmodern workers? How is work and worship being integrated?

## **Framing of U.S. Work Today**

This paper is written from a North American's perspective, focusing on the subjective nature of work in the United States context but also acknowledging the global interconnection of all workers today. Every worker is both a producer and a consumer. Acting as consumers, U. S. workers and their government are indirect employers of third world workers. Their responsible use of income to purchase products and services that then provide adequate income for other workers requires a social conscience and a limiting of personal and communal desires. Some form of spiritual discernment relative to consumption will go far to helping others when individual purchases and national trade policies have global significance. Clearly, as fellow workers and consumers we would not be supporting an *ethically correct labor policy* if we were to purchase goods from others who compensate their workers at less than a family living wage. [1]

In the last half of the 20th century research studies routinely revealed that the majority of U.S. workers, if given the means to live well without having to work, would have continued to work. Americans see work as important to their lives. In one study the

percentage of workers answering that work was central to their lives ranged from a low of 64.8% to a high of 76.9% during the 23 years from 1973 to 1996. [2] In addition, the values that people placed on their work in rank ordering remained constant for the same time period. Workers, when given five values related to their employment, consistently ranked “intrinsic aspects of work” as the most important value followed by promotions, income, job security, and hours. [3] Although between 1985 and 1996 people most often responded that their work gave them a feeling of accomplishment, over time the percentage who responded that their pay and benefits, the extrinsic rewards of their employment, were good, dropped 5% and 8% respectively. The respondents saw their work as valuable to themselves and others but by the 1990s they felt less financially rewarded for their efforts than they did in 1980s. [4] Wages and benefits in fact did not keep up with the cost of living for many American workers; in the case of wages, the average real hourly wage only regained its 1980 level of \$7.79 per hour at the very end of the 1990s. During the intervening years this real wage had at some points dropped \$.30 to \$.40 below its 1980 average. [5] Workers, therefore, found that their wages and benefits were purchasing less over time.

Globalization has contributed to the lack of real wage increases for U.S. workers because their firms must compete against foreign products and services from low-wage countries. The result is downsizing, subcontracting, and the hiring of part-time employees. In the national labor market, documented and undocumented immigrants have increased the labor supply and in some geographical areas and industries have curbed wage growth. Responding to globalization, U.S. firms are asking their employees for greater efforts at innovation, flexible work rules, and the acceptance of more job insecurity. Although laws protect against job discrimination and hazardous work conditions, and set fair labor standards, the National Labor Relations Act has become ineffectual and inadequate as the United States’ national labor policy. [6] U.S. labor relations policy does not provide sufficient protections for organizing workers into unions and limits the effectiveness of unions as collective bargaining representatives. The loss of blue-collar unionized work paralleled the decrease or stagnation in wage and benefits in the 1980s and 90s.

An exponential development in technology has in some cases eliminated jobs as well as increased or decreased the skills needed for new work. In the United States, the diversity of the work force (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity) continues to alter work life. For example, as entire households (husbands, wives, and adolescents) enter the workforce, paid employment in childcare, elderly care, and other traditional household duties further impact the family. The macro factors of globalization, technology and demographics are causing constant change at the proverbial workbench and, while at times improving the standard of living of some people, these factors also produce unjust social relations (i.e., lead to sin) and anxiety in many men and women at the micro level.

Twenty years ago the Church wisely taught in *Laborem Exercens* that work was the key to the social question and that we sons and daughters of God were the proper subjects of work. Given their freedom, men and women can work in harmony with God’s creation or end their relationship with it by abuse and neglect. In light of reasonable concerns about global warming, free trade, structural adjustment programs, bio-engineered food, and a host of other global issues (and the ongoing manifestation of these fears at international summit

meetings), more workers as consumers and more consumers as workers need to see their lives in the context of the greater whole. Work in the subjective sense, with a focus on the meaning of work, ought to lead one to observe, reflect on, and respond to the ethical and social character of the questions raised up by work life.

## Work and Spirituality

How does one become more conscious of the interconnectedness between the suffering and joy of our daily labor and Christian discipleship? One necessarily takes time to worship and discern. The disciple must fundamentally believe that she is part of a new creation in Jesus Christ, and her work life ought to reflect this awareness given that work is for the maintenance of the person and perhaps dependents, entails social relationships, and is about service. Although *Laborem Exercens* may seemingly raise up a sentiment that work should be fulfilling and transforming, that is, directed towards the human person's desires as the subject of work [7]; it is God's desires for us and our efforts that are ethically significant. For unless the Lord builds the house, those who labor build it in vain. [8] How then does the love of God manifest itself in what we do or don't do when we produce products and provide services to others?

John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens* discussed the elements of a spirituality of work, and the Church community needs to share this teaching to help men and women see the interconnectedness of their labor and God's ongoing participation in the world. John Paul II wrote of the "transitive" nature of work given that the activity starts in the human person and moves to the external object, which speaks to man's dominion over the world. If God is the Creator of all, and men and women are created in the image of God, then in our dominion, we, and the encyclical says "in a sense," participate in the creation activity. In today's ever more accelerating socio-economic world, humanity has a greater need to step out of the exigencies of the moment to acknowledge the goodness of creation and its creator. Part of the present task is to identify those points where Spirit intersects our work life.

Protestant theologian Miroslav Volf writes in *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (1991) that a belief in the eschatological transformation of the world gives work special significance—work has independent value. He gives Gutenberg's invention of the printing press as a praiseworthy example of a person's contribution to creation. [9] Volf moves away from speaking of the spirituality of work in vocational terms and promotes a pneumatological understanding of work based on charisms. Where a theology of "vocation" had trouble explaining alienating work, his use of "charisma" fits a world where workers face multiple contexts and an ever increasing number of changes in work--using "charisma," one can therefore appropriately say that a particular job is unfulfilling. According to Volf, elite groups are not the owners of charisms, and charisma is not "charismatic," or miraculous. He does not define it broadly as all Christian ethical activity nor does he narrowly limit it to church work. What is key is that charisma is learning to respond to God in new ways—through the Spirit we cooperate with God. This pneumatological understanding of work fits an environment with rapid innovation, constant job redesign, and

multiple careers/occupations. Today people are not confined to a vocation or job, nor do they have the security of lifetime employment, and movement among jobs and careers has become the norm.

Volf realizes that when speaking of the spirituality of work one is easily caught on the horns of a dilemma. One can describe the charisma of work in such broad and effusive terms that every activity becomes spirit-laden, even alienating and oppressive work, or one can describe it in narrow and religious terms that exclude many occupations and activities. Although Volf's focus on charisma in work is useful, pointing to God's guidance of our lives as ethically decisive, I believe that a charisma that does not fully accept the toil and in some cases self-denial involved in work fails to capture the spirituality of work that we are called to live. I only use Volf as an example of a more recent and distinct understanding of the spirituality of work in a rapidly changing world.

## **Cult and Culture**

*Laborem Exercens*, in my estimation, still serves as a realistic teaching on work and offers a spirituality of work that will instruct any future generation. I say this because John Paul II has said that work has a fulfilling role for us (i.e., sharing in the activity of the Creator) that it has its human importance (i.e., Christ and the first apostles were men of work), and that all work, whether manual or intellectual is inevitably linked with toil and an element of grief (i.e., human work in light of the cross and resurrection of Christ). [10] The third characteristic of work in John Paul II's spirituality of work, that of "toil," plays a significant role in my linking of work and the worship of God. Toil is an acceptable and "inevitable" part of the human condition while alienation from work, workaholism and so on are not. [11] The acknowledgement of the role of toil marks a level of maturity in one's appreciation of work life and suggests a more fixed commitment to one's work and community. This fits with John Paul II's frequent admonitions to young people to stay in their lands and help their communities rather than join the brain drain to more developed countries.

*Laborem Exercens* continues to speak to our world because of its balanced and realistic understanding of our labors, an understanding that can be a frustration to those who want more vocal criticisms and specific remedies for the unfair treatment of working people. In fact John Paul II wrote plainly about the priority of labor over other factors in work and underscored the rights of labor. The issue of just treatment is subtler than the recognition and engagement of the injustices of low wages, poor working conditions, inadequate benefits and a host of certain wrongs. The haves of the world (workers and consumers) have inadequate communal concern for the have nots (other workers and consumers). Although an inequality in the distribution of wealth—that is, property—allows unjust working conditions, inadequate wages and poverty to exist, I believe the more important issue is a lack of "cult" in our culture and addressing this socio-religious deficiency is as important to gaining economic justice as is any passionate decrying of inequalities in

wealth. [12]

The subjective dimension of work is directly linked to our modern self, a self that has raised up the individual to the detriment of the communal self. “Cult” does not occur without community. Modern men and women spend their work lives attempting to achieve “better living” rather than modeling and supporting “good lives.” In a therapeutic culture like ours, where a person may achieve a “manipulateable sense of well being,” the person necessarily rejects a therapy of commitment that entails solidarity with others around some system of common belief. The psychological everyman is born to be pleased, not to deny himself to serve others. Individuals in our therapeutic culture are modern day ecstasies whose faith is placed in a liberation from earlier forms of faith that were ascetic, which tied the person to a symbol system of the community and its socialized sacred ethical framework. [13]

Culture without cultus appears, in almost all historical cases, a contradiction in terms. Within the mechanism of cult, culture was organized, consisting mainly of ritual efforts to elicit and produce stable responses of assurance to more or less fixed wants—fleshly and spiritual, as it used to be said. There was, then, a standard range of expectations from which reassurance was elicited, even though the responses of the eliciting agencies, rendered “sacred” by their supreme function of organizing a life worth living, might at any moment offer admonitions rather than consolations to the seeker. Thus the sacred socializing agencies composed a moral order. [14]

Many participants of the present therapeutic culture have no shared worldview to give them meaning or purpose, but they have a common desire for individual happiness. Both Freud and Marx wanted the individual to be the source of his or her power and not the illusion of some transcendent God. If creation were to provide no source of meaning and a savior were unnecessary, one would never commit to a community. The enchantment of a creation story and the life of discipleship for one who has been saved are no longer controlling or welcomed. A person or community that is not saved is indebted to no one. The gathering of a community to worship the transcendent is lost because the therapeutic is simply an informative experience between the individual being analyzed and the detached therapist.

I am arguing that we have the intellectual resources to create and share wealth through work, but as a therapeutic society we have not committed ourselves to any community that takes a posture of indebted thankfulness and that comprises rich and poor alike. In some way toiling together leads to worshipping together, and the link may be a vocational life that requires recognition of the importance of asceticism. “Toil is inevitable” and human beings will never fulfill all of their desires. The cathedral at Chartres has beautiful stained-glass windows depicting the various trades of the city and donated by the tradesmen—work and worship. In an Eastern tradition, Buddhist communities excavated irrigation canals and fields for growing rice, and the soil was often used to build stupas (shrines)—work and worship. [15] By and large our work in the United States has become disconnected from the transcendent, asceticism has no place in our thinking, and

our true alienation is an alienation from God.

### **Workers in the Postmodern Era**

The identity of the modern self has shaped the nature of work by making it a more individualistic and subjective endeavor with time. Workers have become job seeking social atoms that enter and exit work relations depending on their particular desires or the needs of the employer. [16] This form of work life may be an improvement over more limited work relations of earlier times, but modern society's inability to work towards any constitutive good (i.e., being able to name what the good life is as a community) still leaves to question the purpose of work. Philosopher Charles Taylor's discussions of the modern identity have something to say about where one finds work and the social question at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He argues that one historical strand of our modern self is a result of John Locke's turning away from an understanding of the world through innate ideas about the good and the true to an awareness of what makes us uneasy—the "uneasiness of desire." [17] By evaluating what makes him uneasy and using instrumental reasoning, the human being, as a disengaged reflective self (a punctual self, according to Taylor), can remake himself in a more rational manner. [18] Although John Locke wanted men and women to live rationally and remake themselves for God, with time the focus became living rationally for oneself without any appreciation of God. [19] Through the Enlightenment, with its roots in religious tradition, three foundational philosophical factors have led to secularization: 1) the raising up of the significance of the ordinary life, 2) the belief in the person as a free self determining subject, and 3) the ideal of universal benevolence. With an understanding of moral freedom and responsibility that is found in every person, the Enlightenment thinkers ultimately led others to believe that the transformation of the individual and the reform of civilization were found in our self-responsible reason.

Charles Taylor also underscores what he calls the expressivist turn in the philosophical thinking of the self. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the Romantics begin to view the anthropocentric movements of earlier thinkers as failing to give justice to nature as the inner source within us—the voice within each of us. In the beginning this expressive turn included benevolence and the parameters of traditional mores but with time, in search of humanity's deeper nature, the moral perspective became more individualistic.

Expressivism was the basis for a new and fuller individuation. This is the idea which grows in the late eighteenth century that each individual is different and original, and that this originality determines how he or she ought to live...this really makes a difference to how we're called on to live. The differences are not just unimportant variations within the same basic human nature; or else moral differences between good and bad individuals. Rather they entail that each one of us has an original path which we ought to tread; they lay the obligation on each of us to live to our originality. [20]

Because of the expressivist turn and one might think of developments in art as leading this

turn—naturalism to impressionism to expressionism to abstractionism--the notion of the good life is different for each person; therefore each person not only has his or her own *calling*, but more significantly their own *originality*. In an extremist view, art is in the eye of the beholder. In the post-expressivist era, a person does not understand more of her inner self by observing the wider domain in which one is set (e.g., the public order as in Platonism), but she understands the inner self from the position of her detached, self-determining “first-person” stance. [21]

Taylor, however, sees some movement out of the confines of a self that is solely disengaged and trapped by instrumental rationality—the iron cage of rationality. He finds it in epiphanic art. Epiphanic art combines the aesthetic of the artwork and the person of the artist—that is, who she is and her place. Through the epiphanic art the human person is aware of the spiritual whole, which implies a moral source. The individual who experiences this art is able to engage a framework outside of the self-determined, disengaged self because she “sees and shows” the world as being good. There is, therefore, a constitutive good.

The recovery [of the constitutive good] may have to take the form of a transformation of our stance towards the world and the self, rather than simply the registering of external reality. Put in yet other terms, the world’s being good may now be seen as not entirely independent of our seeing it and showing it as good, at least as far as the world of humans is concerned. The key to a recovery from the crisis may thus consist in our being able to “see that it is good”.

The Judaeo-Christian origins of this whole notion ring in the phrase I’ve just used. In effect, there are two different bases to the deep commitment of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim civilizations to goodness of being. One lies in the Greek philosophy they have all taken in, principally in Plato, where the goodness of reality is a feature of its own ordering, something we grasp by contemplation. But the other basis comes from the doctrine of creation, and is there in the first chapter of Genesis. The goodness of the world is not something quite independent from God’s seeing it as good. His seeing it as good, loving it, can be conceived not simply as a *response* to what is, but as what *makes* it such. There is, of course, and age-old debate in all three traditions about the relations between what God see and what he makes, his intellect and his will. For the vast majority of theologians it has been basic that these two can’t be separated and related in God they way they are in us.

What we have in this new issue of affirming the goodness of things is the development of a human analogue to God’s seeing things as good: a seeing which also helps effect what it sees. [22]

Taylor suggests that this transformation in the epiphanic expression could be thought of as grace and offers Dostoyevsky as one author who has written about this creative imagination and power that is part of the self. [23] This view of the self then allows what is ordinary in

life to be extraordinary, a transfiguration occurs, and life has meaning. [24] The self-determined modern person who Taylor describes as possessing an ordinary life and who affirms benevolence, may, however, pay a cost for his freedom and benevolence. A spiritual wholeness may lead to one's suffering or destruction. The constitutive good is not "invalid" according to Taylor if it leads to suffering or destruction; and, Enlightenment naturalism, for example, criticized Christian asceticism for such an acceptance of suffering. [25] But suffering and perhaps toil are a part of the constitutive good. I argue that in our understanding of work, we need to acknowledge the presence of toil, personal sacrifice, and perhaps grief, in any work life, not to make self-sacrificing behavior the end, but to acknowledge it as part of the constitutive good. In the liturgy we see God's goodness and give meaning to the *sacrifice* in our gifts given and in the gift received. The liturgy is about God's action in our lives and our response. Jesus Christ has sacrificed himself for us.

The ascetical and joyful elements of work are both important to our experience as co-creators. The worker who encounters the emptiness and barrenness of one's existence and seeks the filling of the Holy Spirit or who knows God at work in the gift of creation--understanding the interconnectedness and wholeness of this same existence--can find meaning and contentment in his creative role. The ascetical element suggests that a person might better understand the toilsomeness of her employment and career to comprehend the tensions she faces, the sufferings she might feel, the emptiness of what we call chores. Again this should not be a false embracing of struggle and suffering for their own sake, but hopefully a recognition of the meaningfulness of work actions that include burdens and self-denial. A work life that is all suffering and sorrow, without the transfiguration of oneself, is simply not good work. Workaholism and oppressive and alienating labor are unhealthy weights on people, but an ascetical stance for instance, can free the worker from destructive ambitions or help the worker as a consumer to let go of consumeristic and materialistic perspectives that contribute to undue suffering in oneself and others. This route of the ascetic is at its source an awareness of ourselves as empty so that we might understand that it is the Spirit that fills us—gives us life. An ascetical perspective in work life is a receptive posture that permits the human being to be open to God and know the space that his work and the work of God fill. A worker who is a contemplative in action can then relish the joy of work as the fulfillment, enchantment, and contentment that one encounters in wholesome work (i.e., creative activity) that is freely accomplished for oneself and others. [26]

Charles Taylor does not see the possibility of modern society's acceptance of a cosmic order or common horizon. The acknowledgement of a constitutive good now needs to come through a personal resonance experienced by each individual. This experience can happen in modernism, in poetry and art, when a person experiences his subjectivity but, then, through this inward turn is moved beyond himself. These experiences bring about a unity across time and memory. The result is a decentered self and awareness of moral sources. I believe Catholic worship already has these epiphanic moments when, for example, the words "the body of Christ" and "Amen" enable us to know the transcendent present in what we say—the "invocative uses of language." [27] To uplift the subjective dimension of work in modern times, Catholics need to better understand these moments and share them with others. The challenge is to relate these sacramental moments to our work lives and to recognize them when they occur through the Holy Spirit's action in work as

well.

Kenan Osborne speaks of people receiving the sacraments in their individual way because of their subjective postmodern stance. He calls this understanding of sacraments—*Haecceitas*—the “thisness” of each celebration of the sacrament. [28] There is openness to the freedom of the Holy Spirit at work in each discrete baptism or Eucharistic celebration, and I would suggest the epiphanic (that is, Charles Taylor’s use of epiphanic) occurs in these moments. Osborne calls rituals the celebrations of sacramental *haecceitas* and underscores the primary role of God in these events. The liturgy celebrates God’s work in the community’s life and the people respond with thanksgiving. As we come together to pray, we acknowledge and lift up Christ’s love for us and Christ’s ongoing action within the community. And, finally, the Holy Spirit makes God presence to us in the word and Eucharist. [29] Most importantly for this discussion of the subjective dimension of work, the ritual celebration of the sacraments presents the evangelical tension between cult and ethics. Osborne quotes Louis-Marie Chavet:

The element “Sacrament” is thus the symbolic place of the ongoing transition between Scripture and Ethics, from the letter to the body. The liturgy is the powerful pedagogy where we learn to consent to the presence of the absence of God who obliges us to give him a body in the world, thereby giving the sacraments their plenitude in the “liturgy of the neighbor” and giving the ritual memory of Jesus Christ its plenitude in our existential memory. [30]

The Christian worship of God already makes a difference in the work lives of millions of people in the world today. The presence of Jesus Christ in the sacramental lives of working people creates opportunities for sharing Christ with others in the work setting. The challenge is to share this presence in word and deed in multicultural work communities that have multiple world perspectives. Both Taylor and Osborne are making valiant attempts at explaining how an objective and common understanding of the constitutive good or the sacramental presence of God might happen in a subjective postmodern world through epiphanic experiences and sacramental *haecceitas*. In part, they succeed in acknowledging and explaining this inward and subjective term, but they also fail; the mere attempt at explaining the possibility of reintroducing a constitutive good or the presence of the “thisness” in each discrete sacramental act is an attempt at making something like a cosmic order accessible to the public. This still leaves them open to criticism from a postmodern person. While the language they use may be acceptable to the postmodern critic I cannot help but believe that their conclusions would be rejected—unless, of course, the person accepts their “publicly accessible” frameworks.

### **Workers are Already Integrating Work and Worship**

Many people are already using their faith to make sense of their work lives. In the United States, one mediating institution that has had success at giving the “the sacraments their plenitude in the “liturgy of the neighbor”” is faith-based metropolitan organizing.

Professional organizers in the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) often work with local Catholic parishioners and members of other faith traditions to support the rights of immigrant workers, pass living wage ordinances, and assist workers who are organizing unions. [31] The leaders in these organizing efforts are often the leaders in their parish scripture study groups, parish catechetical efforts, sodalities, and other ministries. They in turn bring other community members into reflection and action around life issues that often have their roots in livelihood concerns. Organizational meetings include prayer and relationship building through one to one conversations. The IAF's lead organizers from across the United States are avid readers of theology and social science texts and will periodically meet with theologians and other academics for discussions. The success of this network of metropolitan organizing groups is due to its awareness that the spiritual "capital" found in faith communities is an essential source of social change. [32]

Having attended the IAF's ten day national training and having studied some of its organizing efforts, I can attest to seeing holy moments occur in the lives of the participants. Leaders emotionally and spiritually confront the hurt and pain that they have experienced in their lives, relate it to the wider social injustices in their communities, and then return to their homes and work lives as faith-based change agents. The IAF has numerous faith traditions in its network, ecumenical services at times occur, and for the Catholics involved in trainings and meetings, the celebration of the Eucharist is a normal practice. The Pacific Institute for Community Organizations and Gamaliel are two additional national faith-based organizing networks that work along the lines of the IAF and also have their historical roots in the organizing of Saul Alinsky, the Congress of Industrial Organizations' organizing of the 1930s, and the Catholic Action movement. [33]

In the 1990s the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, under the directorship of Kim Bobo, a long-time community organizer, began to facilitate relationships between local religious leaders and labor unions throughout the United States. The network has grown to 62 committees in 31 states. The board has an ecumenical leadership that includes clergy from the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish traditions. The National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice strongly focuses on the spiritual dimensions of its participants. It has worked with institutions of higher education to educate seminarians and undergraduates about Catholic social teaching. [34] The local worker justice committees integrate prayer and religious symbols in their activities. In Santa Monica, California members of Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) processed through the city streets to show support to area low-wage workers in their organizing efforts. A rabbi and leaders of various Christian denominations, including Catholic priests, handed out small portions of *matzah*, *maror* and *karpas* to the participants to point out the hardships of low paid service work. At one Santa Monica beach hotel the rabbi offered bitter herbs to management observers to emphasize the bitterness of the hotel's campaign against the workers' attempts at organizing a union. Workers acted out their work lives and expressed their desires for improvements at "stations" along the procession that led from city hall to various work and religious sites. [35] The National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justices also disseminates information and resources for clergy who want to relate their homilies and religious activities to work life.

The aforementioned organizing groups have focused their energies around attempts to alleviate unjust working conditions in the U.S. This merging of faith life and organizing has concentrated on the industrial relations model of employer and employee relations. Periodically, faith-based groups have also made attempts at worker-owned cooperatives, and the Campaign for Human Development has supplied financial capital for such initiatives in low-income communities. In the Hispanic immigrant community of Los Angeles, groups with strong ties to the Catholic Church have made attempts at creating cooperative enterprises focused on garment manufacturing, food catering, and day work (house cleaning and maintenance). [36] Many of these projects have had the Mondragón Corporación Cooperativa (MCC) as their model, the same institution mentioned in the United States Catholic Bishops' 1986 pastoral letter-- *Economic Justice for All: A Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*. [37] Don José María Arizmendiarieta, the visionary Basque priest, brought faith and work together in an extraordinary way, and the corporatist spirit found at Mondragón emphasizes its socio-religious underpinnings. Religious celebrations were a part of the daily life of the Mondragón people and study circles in *Acción Católica* and JOC (the Young Catholic Workers Movement) were a source of training for the cooperatives' founders. [38] In 1993 Jose Maria Ormaechea, one of the five student founders of the cooperative, which today has over 50,000 worker-owner members, was described in the following way:

He lives an austere life and has no desire for wealth. He is rich because he has enough, not because he has a lot. He is generous, ready to share, help and make sacrifices for others. By contrast, he is critical of what, in his opinion, are frivolities, which have little to do with solidarity...He is a practicing Catholic. He understands religion as a way of life and not a sterile faith not based on actions. His Christian morality is supported by the pillars of solidarity and the value of work as the way to human perfection. [39]

As of today, one finds few successful replications of the Mondragón model in the United States. While spiritual and social capital abound, most faith-based cooperatives have failed for a lack of intellectual and financial capital. Although the Campaign for Human Development and other non-profit financial institutions have funded cooperatives with small amounts of capital, no one has contemplated a concerted strategy to help such shoe string operations become viable enterprises. Workers can only hope that in light of the Mondragón history, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and U.S. Catholic universities might work together to initiate and nurture cooperatives in communities where people practice their faith and long for economic development.

U.S. workers continue to experience both joy and toil on the job and in some cases outright injustices. While *Laborem Exercens* might be faulted for not using language that would resonate with many postmodern workers, it continues to recognize the need for a better work life and offers a balanced perspective of the rights and responsibilities of workers and employers. U.S. workers by and large continue to find some meaning in their work although they feel rewards are now lower than before and their lives are stretched thin because of the demands of their jobs. *Laborem Exercens* presents a spirituality of work that includes the inevitability of toil. While some theologians like Miroslav Volf would argue

for a charisma of work that suggests a mobile and contingent work force, *Laborem Exercens* suggests a more rooted work life in the tradition of communal solidarity. [40] While all working people should strive for less alienating, less stressful and more joyful work, working people should also strive to see the Holy Spirit at work in the toilsome and sometimes sacrificial parts of their work lives. Making work more fulfilling and less alienating will take some faith and sacrifice.

In these postmodern times, in the U.S.'s therapeutic culture, Catholic liturgy should be playing a significant role in the transformation of our economic lives. For Catholics, *Laborem Exercens* does nothing to dissuade a sacramental radicalism that might lead one to see the Eucharist and other sacraments as God's grace leading to new ways of working. Virgil Michel and Dorothy Day in the U.S. context and Don José María Arizmendiarieta and his students in Spain lived out this radicalism. And relative to the postmodern worker, the encyclical encourages an engagement of the wider pluralistic society. John Paul II's use of solidarity is encompassing enough to remind Catholics of their solidarity in the Eucharist and common baptism as well as of their solidarity with the poor and oppressed, no matter their religious tradition or philosophical perspective. [41] The liturgy is the wellspring of grace that will nurture the personal and communal transformations needed for the work life rightly lived. Workers as consumers and consumers as workers will hopefully find themselves responding to God and performing the right sacrifices that lead to life.

## Notes

[1] *Laborem Exercens*, 17.

[2] Report of the Committee on Techniques For the Enhancement of Human Performance: Occupational Analysis, by Thomas Kochan and Stephen Barley, co-chairs, *The Changing Nature of Work: Implications for Occupational Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1999), 51.

[3] *Ibid.*, 56.

[4] *Ibid.*, 57.

[5] Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment, Hours, and Earnings*, 2001.

[6] See James Gross, *Broken Promise: The Subversion of U.S. Labor Relations Policy, 1947-1994* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1995).

[7] Stanley Hauerwas, after the publication of *Laborem Exercens*, contended that the encyclical's personalist reasoning suggested that even if a person were to work in an inhumane situation, he should be "able to find work fulfilling no matter what its objective character." Stanley Hauerwas, "Work as Co-Creation: A Critique of A Remarkably Bad Idea," in *Co-Creation and Capitalism: John Paul II's Laborem Exercens*, ed. John W.

Houck and Oliver F. Williams (University Press of America, 1983), p. 49. Although Hauerwas acknowledges that this view was obviously not the intent of the document, he believed that the text lead to this conclusion. I believe a more sympathetic reading would acknowledge that difficult and unsatisfying aspects of work remain in most occupations, and even more so in alienating work, but that the person is still capable of lifting up his humanity vis-à-vis the toil or alienation. While recently researching a paper on Catholic hospitals and labor organizing, I learned of a nun who had spent the majority of her work life in the hospital's laundry and who had found her work to have meaning. Are there more fulfilling activities than washing and folding? Yes, of course, but this person found her efforts in her context to be fulfilling.

[8] Psalm 27.

[9] Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 96.

[10] *Laborem Exercens*, 24-27.

[11] I accept Wittgensteinian linguistic analysis and therefore use “toil,” “workaholism” and “alienation” as they are used in our culture and context. I have no essential definitions for these words because none exist.

[12] It is Freud's strike at culture that has weakened cult—ritual practices. I find it interesting that a Marxist and a Christian could both openly speak of worker solidarity while a Freudian eschewed any commitment to the community. Marxism had its sense of communal “faith.” In my discussion of commitment and cult I rely on Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

[13] *Ibid.*, 71.

[14] *Ibid.*, 14.

[15] I am reminded of the importance of E.F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. In his essay on Buddhist economics he reminds the reader that work is about the purification of the human character and not the multiplication of human wants.

[16] Robert Wuthnow, *Poor Richard's Principle: Recovering the American Dream Through the Moral Dimension of Work, Business, and Money* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996). Wuthnow finds that large percentages of surveyed U.S. workers are working longer and harder (p. 20-24). In his national survey of 2000 people, Wuthnow found that 59% of the full-time workers were bothered by stress each week and one in six daily. While not all occupational switching is bad, the data suggests that some switching is caused by dissatisfaction with work; moreover, no one argues that turnover is an insignificant concern to employers (p. 32-36).

[17] Charles Taylor, *Sources of The Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge:

Harvard University Press, 1989), 170.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] This change in focus happens over centuries. Deist thinking would make the person's pleasure primary and not the person's relationship to God. If God loves me, God must want for me what I want for myself. Instrumental reasoning or procedural thinking then leads to a rational attainment of what I need. Max Weber describes how over time the search for the kingdom of God develops into an economic virtue that is simply "utilitarian worldliness" (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*).

[20] Taylor, 375.

[21] *Ibid.*, 389.

[22] *Ibid.*, 449.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] *Ibid.*, 450. "Transfiguration" is used in the Kierkegaardian sense that in a choice made, an ordinary person becomes extraordinary. As the person changes from an aesthetic stance to an ethical one, a "transfiguration" occurs and an inward life results.

[25] *Ibid.*, 519.

[26] My discussion of the ascetical element of work life suggests that work, including its drudgery, is a way to serve God and self. Clearly, the worker nourishes the human spirit through creative, joy filled work and leisure, too. Robert Wuthnow, *Poor Richard's Principle*, p. 62-82, writes of the ascetic moralism and expressive moralism found in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century U.S. Protestant culture. These two perspectives attempted to "curb" an economic system that was moving down a path that would make work an end and weaken the Christian worker's primary intent to serve God and neighbor. Wuthnow argues that utilitarian arguments would ultimately top these moralist views.

[27] Taylor, 492.

[28] Kenan Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World* (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1999), 58.

[29] *Ibid.*, 160.

[30] Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbole et Sacrement: Une relecture sacramentelle de l'existence chrétienne* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1987). Eng. Trans. By P. Madigan and M. Beaumont, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1995) as quoted in Kenan Osborne,

[31] In the mid-1990s the city of Baltimore passed the first living wage ordinance in the U.S. after BUILD, the Baltimore IAF affiliate, and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees built a coalition of faith and labor groups. The campaign successfully worked for a law that requires all businesses that contract with the city to pay a living wage. This first ordinance has led to 40 more living wage ordinances around the country and most of the campaigns for these ordinances have included religious groups.

[32] See Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Scholzman and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995). A random survey of 15,000 members of the public with selected follow-up surveying revealed the significant role that religious institutions play in enhancing political participation. “[These religious institutions] play an unusual role in the American participatory system by providing opportunities for the development of civic skills to those who would otherwise be resource-poor.” P. 18-19. *Voice and Equality* provides excellent empirical proof for the significance of religious participation in active citizenship.

[33] Catholics interested in the world of work as it relates to faith also have the benefit of *Initiatives*, a publication of the National Center for the Laity, and *Blueprint for Social Justice*, published by the Twomey Center for Peace through Justice at Loyola University. These publications offer insights, book reviews, and reports on the connection between work life and Christian discipleship.

[34] “Students Learn “Best Kept Secret” in Catholicism,” *Faith Works*, July 2001, 2.

[35] “Santa Monica Clergy, Workers Highlight ‘daily hardships’,” *Faith Works*, July 2001, 3.

[36] George Schultze, SJ, “A Study of the Influence of the U.S. Catholic Church on Union Organizing and Community Organizing: A Historical Review, Los Angeles in the 1990s, & Future Relations” (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1998), 362, 381.

[37] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, Tenth Anniversary Edition (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1997), 122.

[38] Ormaechea, Jose Maria, *The Mondragon Cooperative Experience* (Mondragón, Spain: Otalora, 1993), 17, 20.

[39] *Ibid.*, Inside front cover.

[40] See Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith, *The Case Against the Global Economy: And for a Turn Toward the Local* (San Francisco, California: Sierra Club Books, 1996) for sophisticated arguments for a local and communal economic vision that resonates with the

calls for solidarity and the sense of permanence found in *Laborem Exercens*.

[41] See Margaret M. Kelleher, "Liturgy and Social Transformation: Exploring the Relationship," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 16 (Fall 1998): 58-68.