

Work as Key to the Social Question

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



The Importance of a Culture of Work in African Milieu in the Light of the Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*

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ABSTRACT

The discourse on work, on its significance and on its conception leads obviously to an analysis of social, cultural and economical development of any society. But there can be no authentic development without work and the commitment of man, without his free, responsible and mutually responsible participation. What is the significance of work in the African environment ? How is work conceived by the Africans in comparison with their proper cultures ? The answers to these questions and their critical analysis in the light of the Encyclical *Laborem Exercens* will help understand why it is important and even urgent for the Africans to acquire an authentic culture of work which is necessary for the integral development of the human person. In this paper, we shall present first of all the conception of human work in Africa, a study made from the Cameroonian experience; this investigation will be followed by an exposition of the Christian concept of human work as presented in *Laborem Exercens* as well as its importance and implications for the economic and social development of Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Written on the occasion of the celebration of the ninetieth anniversary of the publication of the Encyclical letter "*Rerum Novarum*" by the great Pope of the "social question", Leo XIII, the Encyclical "*Laborem Exercens*" of Pope John Paul II, written for the eve of the year 2000, reveals itself as a real prophecy for the society of the year 2000. From this year, mankind has not only changed millennium, but it is also confronting a new social revolution: « we shall celebrate the ninetieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* in expectation

of new developments in technological, economical and political conditions that according to many experts, will go a long way to influence the world of work and of production not in a lesser degree than did the industrial revolution of the last century» [1]

The discourse on work, on its significance and on its conception leads obviously to an analysis of social, cultural and economical development of any society. But there can be no authentic development without work and the commitment of man, without his free, responsible and mutually responsible participation. What is the significance of work in the African environment ? How is work conceived by the Africans in comparison with their proper cultures ? The answers to these questions and their critical analysis in the light of the Encyclical *Laborem Exercens* will help understand why it is important and even urgent for the Africans to acquire an authentic culture of work which is necessary for the integral development of the human person. In this paper, we shall present first of all the conception of human work in Africa, a study made from the Cameroonian experience; this investigation will be followed by an exposition of the Christian concept of human work as presented in *Laborem Exercens* as well as its importance and implications for the economic and social development of Africa.

I) THE CONCEPTION OF WORK IN AFRICA

Work manifests itself in various forms and ways in human societies. It is at the same time the symbol of alienation and the symbol of human liberty. It is also the summit of intellectual activity, and above all the constitutive factor of human existence. To grasp the concept of work in general, it seems important to consider its definition from the etymological point of view since certain forms of work today, especially in the modern societies have nothing to do with the original meaning of the reality of work.

From the Latin expression « *labour* », the term work denotes : effort, pain, suffering or toil ; also the Greek word *pónos* was used to mean either work or suffering. The French expression for work, « *travail* » and in Spanish « *trabajo* » derives from the Latin word *tripalium* which designates an instrument used for torture or some kind of machine or device made of three stakes in order to maintain tied the domestic animals while they are being mounted with iron or being treated [2]. The English expression *labour* denotes equally the idea of effort, pain, toil and constraint. From this primitive, grammatical meaning, to the concept of work is usually associated the notions of pain, suffering, torture, or better still, of the alienation of man. In fact, in some period of the human history, the evocation of the title of worker recalled to minds not a social category comprising craftsmen and men performing some trade, but merely the office of the person in charge of torture or of execution of those who were condemned at the tribunal.

The development of technique and technology has obviously modified substantially these original connotations of work. Indeed, the English expression *work* (more generic in comparison with *labour*) and the German expression *werk* (also of a broader sense in comparison with *Arbeit*) fit better to free the concept of work from its reference to physical

effort, suffering, pain, or torture [3]. If work, in the ancient times, meant suffering, pain, torture, and even slavery, in the modern times, precisely from the XVIIIth century, with the birth of the industrial world and the development of the theories of the organization of work, it is more and more regarded as the effort or any activity undertaken by a human being to transform his environment for his realization and for the well-being of the society. However, this evolution of the concept of work cannot be applied to all human societies.

The studies of experts undertaken in the Sub-Sahara Africa by renowned anthropologists and ethnologists such as Dominique Zahan, Georges Ballandier, Marcelle Griaule, to mention but a few, reveal that whether in the sahelian or in the equatorial context, work is here and there linked to subsistence and preserves a purely functional and utilitarian nature. The notions of productivity and profit very dear to the modern life, and more precisely to the western societies, do not seem to have a pertinent impact upon many African societies. Indeed, many people seem to be satisfied just with the little production as far as food is concerned in order to live. Physical work which requires a lot of energy or some effort and causes pain seems to be undertaken only when one cannot do otherwise. There are, in our view, two determining factors which explain somehow why this primitive concept of work continues to persist today in African societies : one is the influence of colonialism, and the other is the biblical concept of work as announced by the missionaries [4].

1) The influence of colonialism

During the colonial period, some attitudes of the colonizers towards the colonized people have had a negative influence in Africa as far as work is concerned. There is, first of all, the phenomenon of forced labour. For the construction of roads, railways, it was so common to arrest people in villages and sent them without their will to this public work which used to be done under tremendous conditions with ill treatments [5]. The pedagogy of the cane used by the colonial authorities has marked the Africans with a strong sentiment of aversion for work. Indeed, this has developed in the African mentality a passive attitude towards work. The injustices and the bad treatments caused by the phenomenon of forced labour have made the colonized, "lazy" and "cunning". Work becomes for them a "burden" and is regarded as something done for the White. In fact, in many tribes in Cameroon, one finds local expressions such as "the work of the White", "the work of the Governor", meaning work done against remuneration. For in the African traditional contexts, salary or remuneration was ignored and people worked for their subsistence or for their survival, and not at all to make some profit whatsoever. Another local saying : « The work of the white man or of the Governor does not get finished », meaning by this, that one does not need to put a lot of effort in such work, in one's job. Such conception of work has therefore negative consequences such as absenteeism and lack of punctuality at one's place of work, lack of duty or professional consciousness, irresponsibility, etc. The analysis of Meinrad Hebga is very pertinent in this regard. He makes the following comments :

« On ne fustigera jamais assez l'irresponsabilité, l'absence de conscience professionnelle, de dignité ou de créativité qui bloquent les rouages des

machines économiques nationales. [...] Il est affligeant de voir les milliers d'employés de l'Etat ou de sociétés mixtes occupés, le plus clair de leur temps de travail à bavarder, à lire le journal, à commenter les nouvelles sportives ou politiques, voire à se promener, sans se soucier des dossiers parfois vitaux en souffrance, des clients impatientes, parmi lesquels des investisseurs potentiels ...» [6].

Another attitude worth noting is the forms of work done by the Whites in their colonies : their occupations were often either administrative work in the office, or intellectual work. As far as physical or manual labour is concerned, they exercised the function of control over the work which was executed by the Blacks. This attitude strengthens the traditional conception of work that manual labour means slavery. Work in an office, as a civil servant, is therefore regarded by most Africans as a noble person with more dignity. This explains why many parents and even many youth themselves prefer, even nowadays, comprehensive schools to the technical ones. For they hope to get, later on after school, an office job instead of an industrial or agricultural work in a factory or in a farm. This colonial heritage still has a lot of influence in many African societies today.

2) Work and malediction in the missionary message

The majority of the black African societies felt comforted in the primitive vision of work in the missionary message which depicted work as the result of the divine malediction as presented in the Bible :

«Accursed be the soil because of you. With suffering shall you get your food from it everyday of your life. [...]. With sweat on your brow shall you eat your bread» [7].

This biblical message that presents work as a divine malediction and punishment has had a deep influence upon the African populations. Indeed, added to this message the promise of another order of things, a better post mortem world, the vacuity of the commitment to work in the present existence was being strengthened in their hearts. This partial reading of the Bible coupled at times with some misinterpretation has obviously caused a great deal of damage.

This manner of presenting work as a malediction, as if an inexpressible enmity has been established beforehand between the well-being of man and the toil that he undergoes through work finds also its foundation in the hostility of nature. Would malediction then reside on the side of nature ? This approach is validated in the archaic societies of Africa [8]. The activities of subsistence which are, in these contexts of life, essentially : hunting, fishing, and picking, are undertaken only after the performance of some ancestral rituals. One beseeches the nature to stop for a while the enmity that exists between her and man in order that the latter may benefit from her generosity [9]. These primitive societies in which the division of labour was done according to two criteria : sex and trade groups, have not

changed much in the course of time. It is important to note that a man considered in society as a noble person, for instance the king or the chief, never worked. Likewise all those who are his descendants. These used to have slaves working for them. Physical or manual labour was reserved to a particular set of people, the unblessed ones, namely those who do not belong to the caste or the lineage of nobility.

In conclusion of this first part, it appears that the "modern" African societies have remained with the eyes fixed upon habits and visions of the world already obsolete. The persistence of primitive attitudes and habits are like a stubbornness to validate daily the decrees of the Book of Genesis in the Bible. Yet a good re-reading and understanding of this biblical message is necessary from within, in the African contexts of life so that the humanizing and social dimension of work and its value of the emancipation of the human person may triumph. This remark leads us to examine the concept of the human work that emerges from the Encyclical letter « *Laborem Exercens* » of John Paul II.

II) THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN WORK IN « *LABOREM EXERCENS* »

The concept of human work outlined in « *Laborem Exercens* » is very dense and multidimensional. In order to grasp it, it seems necessary to consider the various dimensions of work presented by John Paul II in this Encyclical. A few days after the publication of the Encyclical the Author himself, in an illuminating synthetic commentary on it, confided to a group of visitors at Castel Gandolfo that, in drafting *Laborem Exercens*, he had envisaged four outstanding characteristics of human work that are: man's prerogative, duty and right as well as service to the society [10].

1) Work as a prerogative

Reflecting on the first pages of the Book of Genesis, the well known story of creation, John Paul II affirms that « *the Church is convinced that work constitutes a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth* » [11]. In this conviction which does not derive only from human intelligence, but also from divine revelation, work appears as created by God and mandated to man as vocation from divine origin. At the origins of his existence, man made « *in the image of God ... male and female* » [12], hears the words: « *Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it* » [13]. These words, says the Pope, show the very deepest essence of the activity that man is called to carry out in the world. This mission given to man to subdue the earth and to dominate it indicates that « *as image of God, man is a person, that is to say a subject capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding on himself and aiming at his self-achievement* » [14]. This anthropological dimension of work is an echo of a wonderful intuition of the second Vatican Council, developed in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*: « *Human activity proceeds from man : it is also ordered to him. When he works, not only does he transform matter and society, but he fulfils himself. He learns, he develops his faculties, and he emerges from and transcends*

himself » [15]

It is therefore in this perspective that the Church, in her teaching, retains that work is first of all a prerogative of man as a person, a factor of human perfection ; « *for through work, not only man transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but also he achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes "more a human being"* » [16]. This characteristic of work as a prerogative of man is presented right from the very initial pages of the Encyclical *Laborem Exercens* :

« Work is one of the characteristics that distinguish man from the rest of creatures, whose activity for sustaining their lives cannot be called work : only man is capable of work, and only man works, at the same time by work occupying his existence on earth. Thus work bears a particular mark of man and of humanity, the mark operating within a community of persons; and this mark determines his interior qualification, in a sense it constitutes his very nature ».

In short, God associates man in his creative activity. Through his work therefore, man continues God's creation.

2) Work as a duty

This characteristic of work as a duty of man is a consequence of the first one. As a matter of fact, man cannot fulfil himself, succeed in his life, nor find his happiness, if he does not bring to maturity in the course of his existence his vocation to work. Instead of being regarded as malediction or punishment, work is the normal activity by which man assures his subsistence and his material progress. It is therefore a necessity, a duty that gives to the human being : life, serenity, engagement, significance. John Paul II develops this point in the fourth chapter in following words :

« Work is, as has been said, an obligation. Man must work, both because the Creator has commanded it and because of his own humanity, which requires work in order to be maintained and developed. Man must work out of regard for others, especially his own family, but also for the society he belongs to, the country of which he is a child, and the whole human family of which he is a member, since he is the heir to the work of generations and at the same time a sharer in building the future of those who will come after him in the succession of history. All this constitutes the moral obligation of work, understood in its wide sense » [17].

The exhortation of the Apostle Paul in his Letter to the Thessalonians also points out this characteristic of work as a duty. He severely warns: « *He who does not want to work, must not eat either* » [18].

The Pope wishes therefore to teach among other things, in *Laborem exercens* that everyone is called upon to carry out an activity at whatever level it may be, while exploitation of man and idleness are condemned [19].

3) Work as a right

In number 18 of the Encyclical, one is called upon to pay attention to one fundamental issue, namely the right to work, that is the right to have suitable employment for all who are capable of working. It must therefore also be made clear with whom rests the responsibility of guaranteeing and organizing the respect of that right. In this regard, the Pope introduces a clear and illuminating distinction between *direct employer* and *indirect employer*. The direct employer « *is the person or institution with whom the worker enters directly into a work contract in accordance with definite conditions* ». By indirect employer, on the other hand, one must understand « *many different factors, other than the direct employer, that exercise a decisive influence on the shaping both of the work contract and, consequently, of just or unjust relationships in the field of human labour* » [20].

Both the direct and the indirect employers are to act against unemployment. The first to be responsible in this action is the indirect employer, in this case the State, that has the role of acting against that real « social disaster » which is unemployment. In short the right to work is great and also fundamental in such a way that it has to be promoted and safeguarded by society even in the case of an eventual conflict with other rights.

4) Work as a service

The fourth characteristic of work which stands out in *Laborem Exercens* is service ; service to each one for his proper self fulfilment ; service to his family as the latter constitutes one of the most important terms of reference for shaping the social and ethical order of human work ; service to the society, to which man belongs on the basis of particular cultural and historical links. « *In fact, in the last analysis, it is always man who is the purpose of work, whatever work it is that is done by man _ even if the common scale of values rates it as the merest "service", as the most monotonous, even the most alienating work* » [21].

To conclude this short presentation of the various dimensions of the concept of human work in *Laborem Exercens*, we prefer to quote the following passage of the Encyclical itself which, in our view, expresses the real significance and importance of work for mankind :

« *The fundamental and primordial intention of God with regard to man whom « he created ... in his likeness, in his image* », has neither been withdrawn nor cancelled out, not even when man, after he has broken the original covenant with God, heard the words : « *With sweat on your brow shall you eat your bread* ». These words refer to the toil, sometimes heavy

that, ever since, accompanies human work ; they do not however alter the fact that this is the means whereby man achieves that « dominion », which is proper to him over the visible world « subduing» the earth.[...]

« And yet, in spite all this toil _ perhaps, in a sense, because of it _ work is a good thing for man. Even though it bears the mark of a bonum arduum, in the terminology of Saint Thomas, this does not take away the fact that, as such, it is a good thing for man. It is not only good in the sense that it is useful or something to enjoy ; it is also good as being something worthy, that is to say, something that corresponds to man's dignity, that expresses this dignity and increases it. Work is a good thing for man _ a good thing for his humanity _ because through work, not only does man transform nature, adapting it to his own needs, but also he achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes « more a human being » [22].

This page sums up the Christian concept of work which the Church proclaims in her social teaching which has taken a decisive turning point with the issuing, in 1891, of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII. Work in the modern society aims at the social and individual achievement and perfection, at the structural and infrastructural development of every society. But the care about profit and the excessive search for gain aim at reducing man to a mere machine of production and human work as a simple merchandise. This propensity towards the dehumanisation of the world of work is a dilemma of our time. It does not spare any society, any nation, not even the African societies in which human work is still conceived in general as just a means for man's subsistence. *Laborem Exercens* therefore came *in tempore opportuno* and has revealed itself as a real prophecy in regard to this reality of the human work in the third millennium. The message of Pope John Paul II in this Encyclical remains very relevant not only for the developed western societies, but also to the underdeveloped ones, especially for the African societies, in regard to the phenomenon of the globalisation of the world which brings about great social and economic transformations.

III) THE IMPORTANCE OF *LABOREM EXERCENS* IN AFRICA

Right from the introduction of her work which is entitled : « *Et si l'Afrique refusait le développement ?* », Axelle Kabou makes the following remark : « *Les causes du sous-développement de l'Afrique n'ont généralement que peu de rapport avec les mentalités africaines* » [23]. This author notes that the causes of the situation of the underdevelopment of the African continent are often attributed to the external factors only, forgetting that they are to be searched for also from within, namely from the African mentalities, or conceptions of life and of the world.

Many theories and solutions have been elaborated and applied for years in Africa for the development of this continent. Some of the actions undertaken to help African societies to improve their conditions of life are : financial loans granted to African countries by the

World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and by western countries through bilateral cooperation ; structural adjustments at the initiative of the IMF, the privatisations of State development Companies, technical assistants sent from the western countries for development projects, and so on. But despite all these actions and many various interventions initiated in view of the socio-economic development of Africa, the conditions of life of its populations remain always precarious, and their economic and social situation still very critical. What should be done for the success of an authentic development of Africa?

We agree with Axelle Kabou that there are internal causes which constitute obstacles to the progress of Africa. In the same line of thought, Meinrad Hebga writes : « *Si trente ans de souveraineté internationale, en grande partie fictive, se sont soldés par un échec total aux plans économique et social, les raisons doivent en être recherchées, par-delà l'instauration de régimes autocratiques, la mauvaise gestion et le tribalisme d'Etat, dans la mentalité profonde qui inspirait ces erreurs structurelles* » [24]. These internal causes are mostly sociological. Among them, there is the conception of human work. This, in our view, must be considered as the first and the most important obstacle. It is undeniable that there can be no authentic development without work. But it appears, that the conception of work in most, if not all African societies is not favourable for human development and perfection. « *Il est permis d'affirmer, que la mystique du travail ne caractérise pas nos sociétés africaines dans leur ensemble* » [25], writes M. Hebga. It is therefore in this context that the "Gospel of work", proclaimed by John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens*, reveals itself very important for the economic development and social progress of the African societies. Indeed, in comparison with this Encyclical, the conception of work in Africa has to be perfected because of its obvious weaknesses which constitute a serious hindrance to the individual felicity and to the authentic socio-economic progress. Let us have a look at some of these weaknesses or limitations before suggesting the necessary actions to be undertaken to overcome them.

1) Weaknesses of the conception of work in Africa in the light of *Laborem Exercens*

The limiting of the significance of human work to toil, consequently to human alienation, and the limiting of its function only to man's subsistence, constitute the main weaknesses of the conception of work in African societies.

From the four characteristics of the human work which are outlined in *Laborem Exercens* emerge a set of values which can hardly be promoted if one is influenced by the conception of work in Africa, as it has been described above. These values can be considered in three spheres that recall and perfect each other.

The first sphere, which corresponds to the characteristic of work as a prerogative of man, concerns directly man as a person. The expression, « *God created man in the image of himself* » (Gen. 1: 27), means that God created man as a person, that is to say, a being endowed with intelligence and will, that which distinguishes man from all other created

beings. « *As image of God in fact, man is a person, that is to say, a subject capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding on himself and aiming at his self-achievement* » [26]. This implies, as John Paul II underlines it, that all forms of work, all actions that man performs belonging to work must all serve to the fulfilment of his humanity, to the achievement of his vocation of divine origin by virtue of his humanity : that of being a person. By commanding man to subdue the earth and dominate the world, God indicates clearly that human work constitutes for each one his proper self-realization. When man becomes truly conscious of his vocation to be a person and his mission to subdue the earth, human work becomes something of great value, something to be loved, instead of being regarded as torture or slavery, and as something which causes pain, or fatigue, and consequently to be avoided as much as possible, connotations of work which are still encountered in African societies. Besides, the mandate to subdue the earth and to dominate it goes beyond the mere gathering of food for man's subsistence, that which characterizes the conception of work in traditional African societies. This mandate implies the transformation of man's environment for the improvement of his conditions of life, for his self achievement.

The second sphere of values which is necessarily linked to work concerns the family and corresponds to the characteristics of work as a duty and a right of man. « *Male and female he created them. God blessed them saying to them, Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it* » [27]. To dominate and subdue the earth is a task which cannot be carried by one person. It requires a lot of persons. Moreover, « *by his innermost nature, man is a social being ; and if he does not enter into relations with others, he can neither live nor develop his gifts* » [28]. Among the social ties necessary for man's development, the family comes first. But having a family or being a member of a family makes work an obligation for man, because as John Paul II rightly puts it, « *work is, in a way, the condition which makes possible the founding of a family, since the family requires the means of subsistence which man normally gains through work* » [29]. Man therefore must work to take care of his family, for the upbringing and the education of his children. It is evident that to assume the various tasks of the family, the limiting of the function of human work only to man's subsistence is very much inadequate. The economy of subsistence, especially in our modern world falls very short, because with very little financial means, it is just impossible for one to be able to take care of himself and of his family as far as food, health and education are concerned. In this perspective, not only man has an obligation to work, but he has also the right to get a job, an employment with a just remuneration, that which helps him to honour satisfactorily his family obligations and commitments.

The third sphere of values, which refers to the characteristic of work as service, concerns the « *large society, to which man belongs on the basis of particular, cultural and historical links* » [30]. « *Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth* ». This blessing of God over the first couple, Adam and Eve indicates also that society is an institution wanted by God himself, and that man is by nature a social being. Indeed man needs society and a better society for his self achievement and perfection. On this point, we read from the pastoral Constitution "*Gaudium et Spes*" :

« *The social nature of man shows that there is an interdependence between*

personal betterment and improvement of society. In so far as man by his very nature stands completely in need of life in society, he is and he ought to be the beginning, the subject and the object of every social organization. Life in society is not something accessory to man himself : through his dealings with others, through mutual service, and through fraternal dialogue, man develops all his talents and becomes able to rise to his destiny » [31].

It is evident that the social and economic progress of any community depends on human work, that is on the participation of every individual to the building of a better society in which all can attain their self perfection as persons. That is why work should be considered by everyone as a service he ought to render to society. It follows therefore that every person in society must get something doing : be it intellectual or manual work. But with in mind the primitive conception of work as punishment, torture or slavery, the value of service in human work is not seen at all. Consequently, work is carried out with grudge and cunning, with no duty consciousness. It is clear that such an attitude or behaviour does not help man to become more a human being, to attain his true dimension as a person.

From what has been said so far on this paper about the conception of work in Africa, it would not be erroneous to say that there lacks among the various African societies a true culture of work. It is important therefore to initiate the promotion of such a culture which, we think, will be very helpful for the economic and social development of the African continent.

2) The promotion of a culture of work in Africa

The promotion of a culture of work in African milieu requires a radical change of mentalities. But for this change to be operated, there is a pressing need for education to work at various levels: the family, the school, the State, the Church.

As first teachers, it is with the parents that lies, in the first place, to train their children to work, to inculcate to them the importance of work for man and for humanity as a whole. This education does not mean theoretical lectures to be given to children. It will rather impress them from the concrete examples, that is to say, if the parents themselves spend time to work, if they show a real passion to work. In some villages in Cameroon, it is current to see adults sitting from morning to evening at the market's place just taking pleasure in chatting, in playing cards or other games, whereas the women go to the farm alone or are busy with the domestic functions. Such an attitude cannot obviously be an incentive for children to work. From the infancy, it is good to ask the child to accomplish little functions at home, such as helping the parents in the farm, in a carpentry workshop (if it is the father's trade), in the kitchen for the cooking of food, in cleaning the house or its surroundings so as to ensure the salubrity of the compound, and so forth.

The school is another adequate environment for the promotion of the culture of work. The teachers and the lecturers, like the parents at home, must also instil the love of work to their

pupils and students through personal examples : for instance, by dedicating their time to prepare well their lessons, by respecting the schedule of the lessons, by marking the examinations copies with duty consciousness with no favouritism, that is to say, not giving high marks to those students who do not deserve them ; the attitude of favouritism indeed kills the spirit of effort in the intellectual work. The students are to be encouraged to study hard, and at the same time to be discouraged with sanctions to any form of fraud at the exams. At school also, physical work or manual labour is to be encouraged in various ways. There are schools which possess big lands (especially in rural areas). Why not create a school farm where students can learn agricultural work, and the produce of the harvest be sold to add to the income of the school ? In some schools (minor and major seminaries for priestly vocations) there is manual labour at least once a week in the training's program ; the students accomplish functions such as cultivating the garden, being florist, cleaning the class and common-rooms, the toilets, and so on. Such a practice can be imitated in the public and private schools. It would not be bad if manual labour is introduced, at the levels of primary and secondary schools, as a discipline to be validated with a mark which is taken into account in the final evaluation to pass over to the higher class.

At the level of the State, it rests with the latter, to create through a better legislation of labour norms which give an incitation to good and profitable work for the individual and the whole society ; having a labour Code which protects the interests both of the worker and the employer, for instance in matter of the respect of the rights of the workers which are principally, according to John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens*, nos. 18 and 19 : the right to have a suitable employment for all who are capable of working. On this point it is left for the State to make provisions for suitable conditions and for an appropriate juridical environment for the creation of employments by the privates or by the agents of the so-called civil society ; the right to just remuneration for the work done; the right to health which demands that medical assistance should be easily available to workers; and that as far as possible be cheap or even free of charge ; the right to rest, that which involves a regular weekly rest comprising at least Sunday, and also a longer period of rest, namely the holiday or vacation taken once a year or possibly in several shorter periods during the year ; the right to a pension and to insurance for old age and in case of accidents at work. On the other hand, there should be norms which compel the workers not only to be effectively at work, but also to work efficiently and responsibly for the survival and the progress of the capital of the institution or the enterprise in which they are working. There must be therefore sanctions to inflict to the victims of late coming, absenteeism and laziness. It is not enough however to have a Code of norms, these must be applied. It is observed in Cameroon, for instance that many workers, especially of the public sector, do not bother at all to be on time at their work place, and others for months do not go to work, yet they receive regularly their salary without any qualm of conscience. But no sanction is undertaken against these workers. For the promotion of the culture of work the State should take serious measures to fight against such bad attitudes.

It is undeniable that the Church has an important role to play in the sphere of the economic and social development. It is known that Europe owes much to the Benedictine monks, especially for their manual labour and their intelligent industriousness which brought a decisive contribution to the western civilization, that which explains also why Saint

Benedict was proclaimed the Patron of Europe [32]. In Africa, the contribution of the missionaries, both catholic and protestant to the economic and social development is very eloquent. Missions centres were training places of work in all its forms, intellectual and physical : school activities, agricultural activities in big mission farms of cocoa, coffee or bananas etc., joinery and carpentry work, cattle breeding, etc. This missionary heritage is still being carried on nowadays by the Church in various African societies. There exists at the diocesan and parish levels committees for development where people are educated to elaborate and to realize micro-economic projects. Such initiatives are very praiseworthy and pertinent for the promotion of the culture of work. The Church can also educate to work at the theoretical level, namely by her preaching, in season and out of season, of the « Gospel of work » in the sermons, and through seminars and conferences organized for this purpose.

At this juncture, we would like to say, before concluding, that there are nonetheless some Africans who are very much aware that the social and the economic progress of their continent depend on the reality of work. These men and women have been trying to undertake actions for the promotion of the culture of work. There are for instance organized groups of persons at the level of villages in the rural area, or at the level of the quarter in towns, at the level of cultural associations, at the Church level, and so forth, which are effectively committed to work in view of transforming their poor conditions of life. But due to the limited material means to which these are often confronted, the productivity of their various projects are also very limited and it barely yields some profit. We suggest that such groups, when they are very well identified, must be directly be given financial help under well defined conditions by the State and investors from the rich industrialized countries, since the money usually given by the latter to the various governments in the African continent is hardly used for the purpose for which it is granted. This system which consists in helping the poor people through the government of their country has shown its limits. A new system should be tried, namely that of helping the poor directly through the organizations of the Church and the so-called civil society.

CONCLUSION

The conception of work in African societies, we have seen, remains very archaic and constitutes a serious obstacle to the economic and social development of the Africans. The concept of human work exposed in the Encyclical *Laborem Exercens* shows, on the contrary, that the authentic development and progress of the human person depend very much on human work. Work is a factor of human perfection ; it helps man to become more a human being ; through work, man participates in God's creative activity, as he is created in the image of God with the mandate to subdue the earth and dominate it.

Closing this reflection, it is our wish and hope that the Africans come to know the concept of human work in *Laborem Exercens* and that this vision of work may also become a cultural value in African societies. There is therefore, on the one hand, an urgent need for a radical change of mentalities, customs and traditions which are a hindrance to human development. On the other hand, to paraphrase Pope John Paul II, it becomes also very

necessary for the African societies to become open and to know how to integrate those elements of the modern culture which can bring advantages to humanity in all spheres of life, avoiding in all moral liberty that materialistic and economic mind which often accompanies the technical culture [33]. Besides, Africans must take at heart themselves the betterment of their conditions of life, by bending seriously to work, intellectually and manually. Still John Paul II, exhorting the Africans to take in hand the realization of their proper development and to abandon parasitic and destructive fatalisms, invites them to make use of their own intelligence, their own efforts and daily work because each person, with his own activity possesses the key for the development of his own environment, that is not only economic development [34].

In his pamphlet entitled « *Mystique chrétienne du travail* », written just a few months after the proclamation of the independence of Cameroon in 1960, the young priest Jean ZOA, of blessed memory, who later on became the archbishop of Yaoundé, made the following appeal to his countrymen, an appeal which appears to be still very relevant for all African societies forty one years after :

« Avons-nous compris à présent que le travail est fécond comme une "maternité"? Il enfante des objets ; il enfante des personnalités, il enfante des enfants de Dieu... Il engendrera aussi ce Cameroun qui se cherche si péniblement. Par amour pour notre patrie, que notre travail cesse d'être une corvée dont nous avons hâte de nous débarrasser. au contraire, nous allons l'aimer ; l'aimer tous les jours ; l'aimer jusque dans ses difficultés et ses obstacles. Tous les jours, il nous offre une occasion de lutte, d'effort et donc de triomphe et de joie ; et c'est par là qu'il nous grandit et nous épanouit! ».

The promotion of the culture of work, in the sense of the Christian mystique of work developed in the social teaching of the Church in general, and in *Laborem exercens* in particular, appears therefore to us as the best and unique way for the economic and social development of the African societies. Besides, through work, from the Christian's point of view, man finds normally his happiness in working not only on account of the salary received, but more profoundly because in work, he lives in union with God. With regard to the fact that work is linked with pain or suffering, spiritually also " the Christian finds 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 " [35].

NOTES

[1] *Laborem Exercens*, n. 1. 3.

[2]. CF. F. TOTARO, *Lavoro*, in *Dizionario delle idee politiche* diretto da E. BERTI e G. CAMPANINI, ed. AVE, Roma, 1993, p. 427.

[3]. *Ibid.*

[4]. Cf. E. MVENG, *L'Afrique dans l'Eglise : Paroles d'un croyant*, éd., L'Harmattan, Paris, 1985, pp. 203-213.

[5]. Cf. L. NGONGO, *Histoire des forces religieuses au Cameroun : De la première Guerre mondiale à l'Indépendance (1916-1955)*, éd. Kartala, Paris, 1982, pp. 81-83.

[6]. M.P. HEBGA, *Afrique de la raison, Afrique de la foi*, éd. Karthala, Paris, 1995, p. 89.

[7]. Gen, 3 : 17 and 19.

[8]. Cf. M.P. HEBGA, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79,

[9]. Cf. D. ZAHAN, *Religion, spiritualité et pensée africaines*, éd. Payot, Paris, 1970, pp. 37-55 ; Cf. G. BALANDIER, *Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire : Dynamique sociale en Afrique Centrale*, 4^e édition, PUF, PARIS, 1982, pp. 344-351.

[10]. Cf. F. BIFFI, *The « social Gospel » of Pope John Paul II : A guide to the Encyclicals on human work and the authentic development of peoples*, Pontifical Lateran University, Rome, 1989, pp. 30-31.

[11]. *Laborem Exercens*, n. 4

[12]. Gen 1 : 27.

[13]. Gen. 1 : 28.

[14]. *Laborem Exercens*, n. 6,2.

[15]. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 35, *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by A.FLANNERY, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1975, p. 934.

[16]. *Laborem Exercens*, n. 9,3.

[17]. *Ibid.*, n. 16,2.

[18]. 2 Th 3 : 10

[19]. Cf. F. BIFFI, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

[20]. *Laborem Exercens*, n. 16.

[21]. *Ibid.*, n. 6.

[22]. *Ibid.*, n. 9 . 2 ,3.

[23]. A. KABOU, *Et si l'Afrique refusait le développement*, éd. L'Harmattan, Paris, 1991, p. 11.

[24]. M.P. HEBGA, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

[25]. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

[26]. *Laborem Exercens*, n. 6,2.

[27]. Gen. 1: 27 and 28.

[28]. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 12.

[29]. *Laborem Exercens*, n. 10, 1.

[30]. *Ibid.*, n. 10, 3.

[31]. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 25.

[32]. Cf. M.P. HEBGA, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

[33]. Cf. E. FURLANETTO, *Una cultura del lavoro e della solidarietà per uno sviluppo autenticamente africano : Dai discorsi di Giovanni Paolo II in africa*, Estratto da "La SOCIETA" , Periodico trimestrale, n. 4 Ottobre-Dicembre 1995- Anno V, p. 962.

[34]. *Ibid.*, p. 963.

[35]. *Laborem Exercens*, n. 27.