

Work as Key to the Social Question

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



Laborem Exercens: A Challenge to the Korean Economy

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Introduction

For about three decades (1960-87) the labor movement in South Korea was kept on a tight rein by the authoritarian regimes in order to ensure rapid economic growth. During this period of suppression, the labor movement was one of the vital forces which persistently pursued democratization in the country. Since mid-1987, the political democratization drive has brought about sweeping liberalization of the labor movement in South Korea. The economic crisis that erupted in late 1997 made it urgent for the country to commit to restructuring the economy, thereby forcing large numbers of workers into a precarious condition. In fact, the process of restructuring resulted in a high rate of unemployment, which was “a real social disaster” (*LE 18*), unprecedented since the 1970s. Thus the economy faced a tremendous challenge: to provide the people with a social safety net as well as job opportunities, while facing the unavoidable tide of globalization.

On the other hand, national momentum regarding the need for the country to carry out moral reform in order to succeed in overcoming the economic crisis is gaining ground, because the economic crisis that hit the country was, in a sense, an inevitable consequence of social irregularities that emerged as an upshot of rapid economic growth.

In this process of restructuring the economy, industrial relations turns out to be a pivotal issue affecting Korea’s future economic development. It is, in a sense, the Achilles heel of the Korean economy. In an era of globalization, it has become ever more necessary to build a new industrial relations approach---one of accommodating the demands of a new labor force for a more democratic and participatory institutional framework in labor-management relations. A symbiotic model of labor-management relations should be developed, while

overcoming the opposition between labor and capital.

The Church in South Korea has made a meaningful contribution to the construction of right labor-management relations by undertaking various activities of proclamation and witness, sometimes even running the risk of being the signs of contradiction by various groups with vested interests. She has offered various kinds of assistance to the people who are victimized in the process of restructuring. She has also offered principles of right social order

The purpose of this paper is to address the labor issues that have occurred in the process of economic growth in Korea in the light of the teachings of *Laborem Exercens*. It will briefly describe some of the burning issues of the Korean economy with particular reference to the workers' conditions and critically assess them on the basis of the criteria enunciated in *Laborem Exercens*. It will then present some of the concrete witness of actions the Church in South Korea has borne in face of them.

Human Costs of Growth

For the past few decades, South Korea has recorded economic growth rates comparable to that of advanced countries such as the UK, the USA, and Japan during the past hundred years. Starting its growth in the 1960s, Korea ranks eleventh or twelfth amongst the big economic powers of the world. Such economic growth has radically changed the shape of society in Korea.

There is no doubt that such spectacular growth was achieved thanks to the enormous sacrifices of the people. Structural contradiction and imbalance victimized the people, especially the poor. Under the tenet of the so-called “*grow first, distribute later*” policy, economic growth was not accompanied by corresponding social development. The authoritarian regimes vigorously pursued economic growth on the basis of the paradigm of “low wage → export → growth” and strictly controlled any confrontation between labor and capital. Cooperation between labor and capital was imposed. Under these circumstances workers were forced to accept unfavorable conditions. They offered the sinews for development. But what they received in return was nothing but low wages, certainly not sufficient compensation for their labor. Moreover, they had to work long hours under bad conditions, often facing great risks.

Low Wages

During the period 1960-90, the annual rate of increase in real wages, 7.4 percent, was much

lower than that in labor productivity, 10.7 percent. During the period 1985-92, the average wages in non-agricultural sectors were always lower than the cost of living of the urban family comprising four persons, *i.e.*, the average number of people in urban families. This trend of lower annual rates of increase in real wages compared to labor productivity continued through the nineties and still persists today.

Income Disparity

The widening income disparity among the social strata is a consequence of cheap labor policy. For instance, during the twenty years between 1965-1985, the total income of the top fifth of the population increased from 41.8% to 43.7% of the total national income whereas that of the lowest two-fifths of the population decreased from 19.3% to 17.7%. The economic crisis which erupted in late 1997 aggravated the income disparity: the Gini coefficient increased from 0.283 to 0.317 during the period 1993-2000.

A significant wage difference between men and women still persists in the workplace. In 2000, the average woman earned 954,000 won (\$734) a month, 65 percent of the average man's salary (1.47 million won, \$1,131). Although the wage differential has declined considerably compared to ten years ago when the average woman earned only 55 percent of the average man's salary, the disparity of income between men and women continues to be one of the typical characteristics of Korean society.

Long Hours of Work

The average hours worked per week in non-agricultural sectors decreased from 51.6 in 1970 to 45.9 in 1998. But international comparisons show that Korea's workweek is longer than that of Hong Kong (45.2) as well as that of Japan (42.3), U.S.A. (40.6), and France (38.9 in 1994). Also the rate of industrial accidents is higher than that of some less developed countries as well as that of developed countries: the rate of fatal injuries registered in Korea in 1998, 0.29 per 1,000 persons employed is much higher than 0.03 in the Philippines (1996), 0.142 in Singapore (1998), 0.111 in Brazil (1997), 0.01 in Japan (1994), and 0.053 in France (1996).

Social Safety Net

Despite remarkable economic growth, social security is in its infancy. In fact, although since 1989 the entire population has benefited from medical insurance and other forms of

social security, *i.e.*, national pension system, unemployment insurance, workmen's accident compensation insurance, etc., these systems have a limited number of beneficiaries or provide insufficient services in terms of both quantity and quality.

Changes in the Labor Market

Employment

Export-oriented industrialization resulted in a rapid increase in non-agricultural employment. During the 1960s and 1970s employment in those sectors grew at an annual rate of 10 percent, reducing the non-agricultural unemployment rate from over 16 percent in the early 1960s to below 5 percent in the mid-1980s. The average rate of unemployment remained at 2.3 percent during the period 1990-97, which is the level of frictional unemployment.

The financial crisis that hit Asia in late 1997 forced Korea to call on the IMF for a bailout. The unemployment rate mounted to as high as 6.8 percent in 1998. The number of businesses that went bankrupt or were shutdown far exceeded the number of business startups which amounted to 15,700. Consumer prices rose by 10 percent and household income declined by 10 percent. More than 83 percent of the businesses either froze or cut their workers' wages.

Educational Composition of the Workforce

During the past two decades, the educational composition of the labor force has changed significantly. The proportion of those with a high school education or above more than doubled to rise from 28.5 percent in 1980 to 67.2 percent in 2000.

Due to such a change, the proportion of IT-related employment in the manufacturing sector increased from 27.2 percent to 30.9 percent during the period 1994-99, while the proportion of manufacturing employment in the whole economy decreased from 29.4 percent to 24.5 percent.

Women in the Market

The participation rate of women in the labor force has been steadily increasing from 36.9 percent to 48.3 percent during the period 1963-2000. This trend is associated with shifts in

attitudes about sex roles and market work, the women's liberation movement, and campaigns to reduce sex discrimination. It is to be noted that the participation rate of around 50 percent for women in South Korea aged twenty-five to thirty-four, is much lower than that in developed countries such as the U.S.A., Germany, and Japan which have over 70 percent. This is because the old convention that women tend to vanish from the labor force after marriage in order to provide child care and other forms of home production is still strong in Korea.

Aging of the Workforce

The average age of the workers is on the increase: it increased from 31.3 years to 35.9 years during the period 1988-99. The age structure of the workers employed in the manufacturing sector shows the same trend: during the period 1980-98, the proportion of the age group 20-29 years declined from 38.7 percent to 22.6 percent, whereas that of the other age groups increased: the proportion of the age group 30-39 years increased from 23.6 percent to 38.1 percent, that of the age group 40-49 years increased from 14.1 percent to 23.8 percent, and that of the age group 50-59 years increased from 5.1 percent to 10.5 percent. The decline in the proportion of those of the age group 20-29 represents their aversion to production work in the manufacturing sector. In fact, it is safe to say that it has become more difficult to find young workers in their twenties in the manufacturing sector.

Foreign Workers

It is estimated that as of May 2000, there are about 243,000 foreign workers in Korea. Except for Chinese of Korean origin, most foreign workers are from the least developed Asian countries. They represent about 1.1% of the employed workforce. 63.2% of them are illegal residents. 94% of them are employed in elementary occupations, the so-called 3-D (dangerous, dirty, difficult) jobs to which most of the Korean workers have a certain aversion. In this way they serve to solve the manpower problems mostly in small and medium sized enterprises. However, they are suffering from low wages, long work-hours, poor working conditions comparable with those which prevailed in the early period of industrialization in Korea. Since safety in their workplace is often overlooked, the industrial accident rate is very high.

Implication of the Changes in the Labor Market

There are numerous implications of such a labor market transformation.

First of all, authoritarianism is no longer viable in labor-management relations: the intervention of the State should be firmly based on the principle of subsidiarity.

The level of skills has been upgraded: it requires “the continual reappraisal of man’s work, both in the aspect of its objective finality and in the aspect of the dignity of the subject of all work, that is to say, man” (*LE 18*).

Aging of the workforce requires a solid formation of the people on the spirituality of work (*LE ch. V*) and on subjective dimension of work (*LE 6*).

Workers’ demands for “joint ownership of the means of work, sharing by the workers in the management and/or profits of businesses” (*LE 14*) have to be accommodated.

With regard to the increasing participation of women in the labor market, it cannot be overemphasized: “The true advancement of women requires that labor should be structured in such a way that women do not have to pay for their advancement by abandoning what is specific to them and at the expense of the family, in which women as mothers have an irreplaceable role” (*LE 19*).

Foreign workers “should not be placed at a disadvantage in comparison with the other workers in that society in the matter of working rights” (*LE 23*).

Changes in the Labor Movement

During most of the period 1960-90, trade union activities were suppressed. Basic rights of workers such as freedom of association, right to collective bargaining, and right to collective action were suppressed. Workers were considered to be patriots with so many duties, but few significant rights. Any conflict between labor and management was controlled. The unionization rate was kept low and industrial disputes were kept to a minimum until 1986. A back-scratching alliance between government and big business, which is a consequence of the government's preference for big business as an engine of growth, worsened the situation.

With economic growth, however, there has also been a growing awareness among large numbers of people of the human dignity and of the respect for the human rights. This growing awareness prompted the people to accelerate the march towards democratization, especially since the mid-1980s. Economic growth that had been achieved so far provided the momentum for political development. Democratization has had an impact on every field of life. Political democratization has brought about sweeping liberalization of the labor

movement. Workers' demand for their own rights has been met with a positive response.

The unionization rate which had declined from 15.8 percent in 1975 to 13.2 percent in 1986 began to gain ground again, reaching 18.6 percent in 1989. The rate increased sharply from 13.8 percent to 17.8 percent during the period 1987-1988, due to the democratization drive. From 1995, it began to level off at about 12 percent.

The number of labor disputes increased sharply in 1987 in the drive for democratization. Previously there had been about a hundred cases each year, except during times of political instability, when the number was very higher. In fact, 407 cases were recorded in 1980 in the political vacuum after the assassination of President Park and 3,479 cases were recorded in a single year of 1987, almost doubling the number of labor disputes that had occurred during the period 1975-86. This fact shows that union members as well as the leaders are very sensitive to the political atmosphere. In fact, the Korean trade unions can be described as "a semi-economic/political institution working in a political environment," in contrast with their American counterparts, which can be described as "political institutions working in an economic environment." (Arthur M. Ross, *Trade Union Wage Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957). Since 1990, however, the number of labor disputes has declined significantly, leveling off in the neighborhood of a hundred cases.

The rise of the service economy is reflected in the composition of the labor movement. Trade unions of white-collar workers such as clerks and professionals have registered remarkable growth since 1987. As the growth of heavy and chemical industries accelerated from the mid-1980s, young male workers employed in large enterprises of these industries came to the forefront of the labor movement, taking up the leading role which had previously been played by young female workers employed in small and medium enterprises of the light industries, such as textiles, garments, footwear, etc. Thus the labor movement progressed with young male workers in the large enterprises of heavy and chemical industries.

Implication of the Changes in the Labor Movement

People in general, especially all those concerned about right labor-management relations should be firmly aware of the principle of the primacy of human labor over capital (*LE 12*). They should be firmly convinced that capital should be at the service of labor and not labor at the service of capital (*LE 23*).

With regard to the political inclination of the trade unions, it should be emphasized that although union activity undoubtedly enters the field of politics, understood as a prudent concern for the common good, "the role of unions is not to 'play politics' in the sense that

the expression is commonly understood today. Unions do not have the character of political parties struggling for power; they should not be subjected to the decision of political parties or have too close links with them. Their specific role is to secure the just rights of workers within the framework of the common good of the whole of society” (LE 20).

In this context, it should be emphasized that unions are not a mouthpiece for a class struggle. “They are indeed a mouthpiece for the struggle for social justice, for the just rights of working people in accordance with their individual professions” (LE 20).

With regard to labor disputes, it should be emphasized that a strike must not be abused; “it must not be abused especially for political purposes (LE 20)”.

New Trends of the Economy

It is estimated that Korea’s economic development over the next decade has the potential to create nearly 3 million net additional jobs. Most of the new jobs will be created in service sector professions that are significantly higher value-added than the country’s current labor-intensive, low-margin manufacturing industries. (McKinsey & Company, *Korea in the Third Millennium*, 2001.).

The Korean economy is now in the process of a significant transition created by both its continued growth and the restructuring to keep up with the globalization underway. This transition is reflected in a significant increase in the number of job changes. It is estimated that a total of 12.5 million people will change jobs over the next decade.

Taking into account the natural aging of the population, the real job displacements number 5.6 million workers, 45 percent of the total, including 1 million farmers who will need to join the market due to a decline in agriculture and 1.3 million workers who will no longer have manufacturing jobs due to restructuring of the manufacturing sector. Workers making involuntary job changes will need help to maintain a minimum standard of living during the period of transition. Initiatives must be undertaken to help smooth the transition.

Future Tasks of Agents in Industrial Relations

The government will need to introduce more effective unemployment benefits, job retraining, and encourage the establishment of job search agencies to enable workers to maintain a minimum living standard, build the new skills required, and search for new jobs (Cf. LE 18). This will require provisions for overall planning with regard to the different kinds of work by which not only the economic life but also the cultural life of people is shaped (Cf.

LE 18). The principle of subsidiarity should be respected, avoiding one-sided centralization by the public authorities. The Tripartite Committee, instituted in the beginning of 1998 as a mechanism of social dialogue, should be enabled to work properly as a forum of coordination amongst labor, management, and public interests. Proper action will need to be taken in the dimension of international collaboration by means of the necessary treaties and agreements in view of the increasing trend of globalization (*Cf. LE 18*).

Trade unions will need to play an important role in the coming decade. Their focus should shift to minimizing the pain of job displacements and ensuring competitive compensation levels. With a successful role change, unions can play an important role in being part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

Management will need to set up appropriate formal structures or consultative forums needed to institutionalize employee participation in ownership, the management and/or profits of businesses (*Cf. LE 14*).

The Church's Response

In such a context, as explained in the preceding section, the Church in South Korea has made a very unique and meaningful contribution to the human promotion. Already in the late 1960s when the ill effects of rapid industrialization started to surface, she readily undertook initiatives to protect and promote the dignity and the rights of workers. Later, she carried out such initiatives more systematically through various organizations and movements such as YCW, Workers' Centers, Committee for Justice and Peace, national as well as diocesan, Labor Pastoral Office and Foreign Workers' Labor Counseling Office of the Archdiocese of Seoul, etc.

Through activities of these bodies, the Church in South Korea has tried to do her best to stand by the side of the poor, especially the workers. Legal, material, and spiritual assistance has been offered to the workers in need, including migrant workers. Especially since the late 1990s, the Church in South Korea has been actively involved in initiatives to assist the unemployed. Overall, her activities have been concentrated upon the conscientization towards the culture of solidarity of the whole population as well as her own faithful by means of formation programs.

Witness of Action

Young Christian Workers

The Young Christian Workers (YCW) has played a pivotal role in the Church's efforts to effectively carry out her social apostolate in South Korea since the late 1950s. In fact, the YCW in South Korea, started in 1958 with a handful of nurses of the Seoul National University Hospital in Seoul and later, developed to embrace manual as well as clerical workers in Seoul and other dioceses. The YCW can be considered as a pioneer in the Church's social apostolate. With its active involvement in the labor movement, it switched on the ignition for the Church's systematic involvement in social matters.

While committing themselves earnestly to their own work at their respective workplace, its members devoted themselves to the task of defending and promoting workers' rights and dignity. It played a leading role either in unionizing the workers or in activating the already existent unions in their respective workplace, conscientizing them toward the dignity of human person and human work by means of various formation programs such as seminars, study sessions, spiritual retreats, etc., based upon their own "see-judge-act" methodology.

During the authoritarian regimes, which harshly suppressed workers' protests, such activities represented almost the only effective channel for the workers to fight "against the degradation of man as the subject of work, and against the unheard-of accompanying exploitation in the field of wages, working conditions and social security for the worker" (LE 8).

An excellent example was given by a tiny YCW team of factory girls who succeeded in organizing a trade union at a textile company in the late 1960s in Ganghwa Island near Incheon, despite severe obstructionist maneuvering by the employer, who was a powerful assemblyman. The employer mobilized every possible means to dismantle the union: two of the YCW members were illegally dismissed and shutdown of the factory was unilaterally announced. The 21 textile companies operating in the area resolved not to employ the YCW members. At the same time the parish priest was taken to the police authorities on charges of maneuvering behind the scenes. The local bishop strongly reacted against the case sending a letter of protest and published a special message on it. The Korean bishops fully supported the workers by publishing a joint statement in defense of the workers' rights. And finally, upon these reactions of the bishops, the police and the manufacturers yielded somewhat.

This case drew nationwide attention and served as a good occasion to impart to the people as well as the faithful of South Korea the Church's teachings on justice in the world of work. This case foreshadowed the adversity the labor movement would have to face in the future. Without being discouraged by adversity, however, the YCW members were very often in the vanguard of the labor movement in the 1970s and the 1980s. They suffered "blacklisting" for their own activities. The government considered their activities to be "anti-government" or "pro-communist". Persecution reached the point of their being dismissed and blacklisted merely for being YCW members and/or Catholics. In the 1980s,

changes in labor laws such as confining the union organization to the company level and forbidding the intervention of third parties in labor disputes made the YCW activities even more difficult. However, their unyielding efforts to defend and promote workers' rights and dignity were the source of hope for all the workers in Korea. With them, the Church in Korea became the signs of contradiction in the society and bore the brunt of the forces of injustice.

Workers' Centers

The Church has made great contributions to the development of the young workers. Various groups of the Church have been actively engaged in this field with the support of the faithful both inside and outside of the country.

Anyang Workers' Center

Two members of the Association Fraternelle Internationale(AFI) started social, cultural, and educational activities for the workers in Anyang in 1965. Later, in 1968, an educational center was opened for female workers and with it a dormitory for young female workers was also opened in 1976. Apart from the courses of general education, courses on human rights, work, and religion were offered here. In the early 1990s, as there were no longer found migrant young people who had no place to live in, this dormitory opened its doors to foreign workers. A Workers' Center which played a similar role was established in other dioceses such as Daegu and Masan.

Don Bosco Youth Center

Since 1965 Salesian brothers have run Don Bosco Youth Centers where young people are trained as mechanics and welders. With it, they opened a dormitory for the young people who moved from rural areas in search of a job. Salesian and Franciscan sisters followed suit by each opening a dormitory for female workers near one of the industrial complexes in Seoul. These centers and dormitories also served as an effective source for recruitment for the YCW in the 1970s and 1980s.

House of the Migrant Workers

Missionaries of the Columban Fathers opened the House of the Migrant Workers, a dormitory for young workers, and Cardijn Evening School, an educational center, near Pyounghwa wholesale market located in the central area of Seoul. This dormitory helped young workers who moved from rural areas until they settled down. And the School offered courses in basic studies.

Committee for the Pastoral Care for Workers

In 1971 the Committee for the Pastoral Care for Workers was set up in the Seoul Archdiocese with a view to stimulating and supporting the apostolate among the workers and the urban poor. This Committee has actively pursued the training of those involved in the labor apostolate in the social doctrine of the Church, thereby encouraging them to apply it in their activities.

Amongst its various activities, care for the bus-fare-collecting-girls deserves a brief mention. It focused on the prevention of excessive labor and sexual harassment. Female members of the YCW and sisters of various congregations visited them at their dormitories and trained them in health care, literacy, basic calculation, preparation for the marriage, etc. Later on, as the bus companies adopted an automation system in the bus, such services were no longer needed.

Workers' Labor Counseling Office

In 1978, the Workers' Labor Counseling Office was set up in the Seoul archdiocese within the framework of the Committee for the Pastoral Care for Workers. While providing the workers with aid to solve the problems of various unfair labor practices, legal assistance, and counseling on union administration, etc., it vigorously pursued the realization of justice in the world of work, albeit to a limited extent within the framework of the very restrictive labor laws existent during the authoritarian regimes. Such activities made a great contribution to building up a more lawful and democratic society in the workplace. Thanks to such activities of the Myoungdong Workers' Labor Counseling Office, improvements were gradually made in the labor laws, and business and public authorities could not but observe these laws. (Jack Trisolini, SDB, "Participation of the Korean Catholic Church in the Labor Movement" (in Korean), p. 759.)

Two other dioceses followed suit: similar kinds of workers' labor counseling offices have been in operation in two other dioceses (the Kwangju archdiocese and Pusan diocese).

Foreign Workers' Labor Counseling Office

Foreign workers are mostly concentrated in the Seoul area. Most of them are so-called "illegal residents" and therefore working under hazardous conditions without any legal protection of their basic rights. Unfortunately their situation is worsening because of the

economic difficulties which are sweeping the country. Faced with such a situation, the Archdiocese of Seoul set up the Foreign Workers' Labor Counseling Office in 1992 and this office has offered them legal, medical, spiritual and material assistance, while actively seeking to realize the institutional reform required to guarantee them their rights as well as to solve the problems of inhuman treatment and discrimination which they are apt to suffer. Fully convinced that how foreign workers are treated is one of the tests of the quality of people's culture, this office has recently undertaken the initiative to establish just legislation with regard to the rights of the foreign workers (*Cf. LE 23*).

The Archdiocese of Seoul has also supported Center for Filipino Workers and Raphael Clinic which is a voluntary lay initiative to offer free medical services to foreign workers.

Three other dioceses (the Incheon, Suwon and Pusan dioceses) followed suit, and similar kinds of offices have been in operation since 1993.

In 1993 the Episcopal Committee for Justice and Peace published a statement calling for equal treatment of foreign workers. It also published an issue paper related to the basic rights of foreign workers. The Committee for Justice and Peace of the Archdiocese of Seoul held a seminar on the Human Rights of the Foreign Workers last year.

House of Peace

The economic crisis that severely hit the country in late 1997 forced the bankruptcy of many business enterprises. As a result, unemployment reached as high as 7%. This was an unprecedented disaster never before experienced by Koreans who were not adequately protected by a social safety net. In the face of increasing numbers of unemployed, the Church in Korea promptly came to their aid either at the diocesan or the parochial level. For instance, the Archdiocese of Seoul opened a House of Peace in four parishes to offer free meals, job information, legal assistance, and spiritual counseling.

Proclamation

Bishops' Statements

The Korean bishops have issued social statements on every occasion which required their intervention. Since they established Human Rights Sunday in 1982, a year after the publication of *Laborem Exercens*, they have utilized this as a channel for imparting the social teachings of the Church to the people as well as the faithful by publishing a message on various issues of human rights. On each annual Human Rights Sunday, the Episcopal

Commission for Justice and Peace publishes a message on human rights, applying the social teachings of the Church to that year's burning issues and this message is utilized by every parish as material for the homily on Human Rights Sunday.

Several of these statements deserve special mention, albeit very brief, in view of the historic significance they bore in the path of human promotion in Korea.

In the 1960s

Already in the 1960s the industrialization process pursued vigorously by the authoritarian regime started to bring about various social and economic ill effects. In the face of these, on June 30, 1967, the Korean bishops issued a joint declaration entitled "Our Social Principles". It states clearly that the true goal of economic activity consists in just distribution. Furthermore, it underlines the need for labor capital cooperation for the sake of the fundamental rights of workers and employers alike, and of the common good. It emphasizes that the role of the state should not deviate from the principle of subsidiarity and reconfirms the anti-communist standpoint of the Church.

The Church once again emphasized this basic standpoint through the joint statement of the bishops issued on 9 February 1968. This statement entitled "We defend Social Justice and the Rights and Interests of Workers" was the official and prompt reaction of the Church to the labor dispute which had taken place in January of the same year between the YCW and a textile manufacturers' association in an industrial area, Gangwha Island near Incheon.

In the 1970s

In the 1970s, the authoritarian regime controlled confrontations between labor and capital more strictly than ever before. With remarkable gains in economic growth, social and economic ill effects were becoming increasingly exacerbated. Confronted with the situation, the Church in Korea engaged in active intervention in the socio-economic field establishing the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace in 1970. It was during this period that some priests, including a bishop, were imprisoned and an American missionary priest was expelled from the country, for their social involvement.

In 1971 (14 November) the Korean bishops issued a joint pastoral letter entitled "Let Us Overcome Today's Irregularities". It deplored the evils of economic growth in the 1960s and declared once again the basic Catholic principles necessary for social development.

First of all, it criticized the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, the disparity of income between the rich and the poor and inhuman working conditions. With regard to the relationship between the individual and society, it made it clear that the Church rejects and condemns both the socialist and capitalist views and that the common good is the purpose of society's existence. It also made it clear that human development must be the basic principle

of a society's development.

“Keeping in mind the two pillars of social justice, *i.e.*, the common good and human dignity,” it examined the evils in the social, economic, and political fields and offered some concrete guidelines, emphasizing the need to improve the structure of income distribution through the balanced growth of urban and rural areas and the social responsibility of business enterprise.

At that time the labor movement inspired by the social teachings of the Church was often accused of being pro-communist. In April 1978, a textile manufacturer dismissed 126 factory girls, including many Catholics because of their union activities. The Korean bishops reacted to this case immediately and issued a statement in April of that year.

In this statement the Korean bishops deplored the fact that many workers' activities were suppressed and many workers were even dismissed because they were taking part in the labor movement in the Christian spirit or simply because they were Catholics.

The Korean bishops showed deep concern about this infringement on human rights such as the right to work and the right to a livelihood. They therefore urged the government to restore the jobs of all who had been unfairly dismissed, including Christian workers, to allow all trade unions to function, to stop its distorted propaganda maneuvers accusing the Christian workers of being pro-communists, to eradicate the practice of allowing business enterprises to pay wages which did not meet workers' cost of living, and to improve the workers' social welfare conditions.

Once again they clearly stated in accordance with the social teachings of the Church that workers are not merely instruments of production but human beings created in the image of God.

In the 1980s

In the 1980s, the authoritarian regime continued to pursue a cheap labor policy and to control any conflict between labor and management. As a consequence, the rate of increase of the real wage was much lower than that of labor productivity. The unionization rate was kept low and industrial disputes were kept to a minimum until mid-1987 when people's power gained ground in the march towards democratization.

It is in this context that the Bishop's Conference, fully inspired by *Laborem Exercens*, issued its social pastoral letter in 1985 (July 5th) entitled “For the Humanization of Our Society.” By making reference to scientific data of the social sciences as well as social teachings of the Church, it made an overall evaluation of the consequences of economic growth in Korea and urged the need for structural reform.

It appeals to all concerned to endeavor together for the humanization of our society, while calling attention to the centrality of the human person in social institutions.

To public authorities, it stresses that it is the natural duty of the political community to promote welfare in every field of the national economy, and in particular to protect the rights and interests of workers, farmers, and the alienated.

To business, it stresses that like the owners of the business, workers, too, can have their own voice in and contribute to the efficient management and development of the business and that the owners of the business should recognize the workers' right to organize and join unions without being threatened by any danger of retaliation.

To the Church, it stresses that Christians should recognize the workers' right to just remuneration, to participation in the economic decision-making process of the nation, and should be in deep sympathy with the labor movement and the farmers' movement. They should also advocate workers' right to leisure, worship, the time needed for family and cultural life, and they should spare no effort to help the farmers receive a fair price for their products.

Finally it recommends some pastoral initiatives such as incorporating the social doctrine of the Church in any formation program, looking after organizations for the social apostolate (ex YCW Catholic Farmers' Movement etc), and promoting pastoral activities for migrants etc.

Formation

For the Church to carry out her social apostolate effectively, it is imperative that her members be equipped with the social doctrine of the Church, which offers a set of the principles for reflection, criteria for judgment, and directives for action in the social reality.

School of the Social Doctrine

In the Archdiocese of Seoul, a School of the Social Doctrine of the Church was set up in 1995. It was an initiative to implement a follow-up to the Asian Laity Meeting held in Korea in 1994. The aim of this school is to make lay leaders aware of the social teachings of the Church and to encourage them to put these teachings into practice. It is run by a special committee comprising a bishop as head of the School, two priests and two laypersons as professors. It published simple textbooks to be used at each level of the courses.

This School offers three levels of courses, each consisting of two-hour sessions per week for 10 weeks, every Monday evening. The first level consists of the study of the nine encyclicals and one document of Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*; the second level consists of systematic study of the fundamental principles of social doctrine which are embodied in the documents dealt with at the first level; the third level consists of the practical application to concrete cases in the various fields of politics, business, social communications, environmental protections, and so forth.

The three levels are inter-linked. The first level is a prerequisite for the second one, which is in turn a prerequisite for the third one. Attendance is mandatory for the participant to be qualified for the certificate to be conferred at the end of each level of the courses. At the completion of all the three levels, a diploma is conferred which qualifies its holder to teach social doctrine at the parish.

So far about nine hundred lay faithful, religious, and clergy participated in the first level, about four hundred in the second level, and about two hundred in the third level. And among them some laypersons have been assigned a session of the regular catechesis for catechumens to teach them the social doctrine in their parishes.

Concluding Remarks

The challenge for Korea is to move towards restructuring of the economy based on a high-productivity, high-value-added strategy, while simultaneously sharing more of the benefits of economic growth with its workforce and continuing along the paths of democratic reforms.

All of the above-mentioned activities of the Church in South Korea aim at helping Korea to effectively respond to such a challenge with a view to building a more humane society. They are inspired by the social teachings of the Magisterium. Especially since the beginning of the 1980s, *Laborem Exercens* has been the main source of guideline for them, in particular with regard to the labor issues. The principle of the primacy of human labor over capital (*LE 12*), rights of workers (*LE Ch. IV*), a spirituality of work (*LE Ch. V*), human being as the subject of work and subjective dimension of work (*LE 6*) have been given due emphasis in her proclamation and witness of actions.

Although the Church is a tiny minority in Korea, she has never been afraid of proclaiming her social message to the people. She is well aware that “her social message will gain creditability more immediately from the witness of actions than as a result of its internal logic and consistency” (*Centesimus Annus 57*). In such witness of actions she has tried to do her best to work in alliance with all people of good will as well, especially with those who are

involved in various NGOs.