

# The Heritage Lectures

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# 6

## Papal Economics

**Jude P. Dougherty • Claes G. Ryn  
James V. Schall • William A. Stanmeyer**  
edited by  
**Philip F. Lawler**

  
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## Introduction

### I

On September 15, 1981, Pope John Paul II issued his third encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*, or *On Human Work*. Unlike many papal statements, which are of interest primarily to members of his Roman Catholic communion, this encyclical quickly captured the attention of readers from every faith, and from every political persuasion. The social teachings of the Pope reflect not simply the opinions of one man, but the accumulated beliefs and traditions of an ancient faith. Consequently, those teachings can influence the social and political thought of innumerable readers, Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Because they are written from an avowedly religious point of view, these teachings furnish a new perspective on political issues, and a useful counterweight against ordinary political rhetoric.

At the same time, papal statements are often cited by the proponents of particular political viewpoints, as evidence that the Pope supports their particular programs. And *Laborem Exercens* proved no exception to this rule. Within days after the publication of the encyclical, political analysts from every point on the ideological spectrum had claimed the support of the Pope—often for ideas that were mutually contradictory.

In order to sort out the various interpretations of the encyclical, one must first understand the unique tradition of papal social teachings. *Laborem Exercens* is only the most recent in a long line of “social encyclicals,” in which Popes throughout this century have addressed questions of political, economic, and social justice. In fact, John Paul II had originally planned to release *Laborem Exercens* on May 15, the 90th anniversary of the first famous social encyclical: *Rerum Novarum*, by Pope Leo XIII. The Pope’s schedule was disrupted, of course, by an attempted assassination and a long period of convalescence.

In recognition of the importance of this encyclical, and in the hope of helping intelligent readers to interpret the Pope’s ideas correctly, The Heritage Foundation organized a symposium on *Laborem Exercens*, which was held at the Catholic University of America on October 26, 1981. The essays presented in this volume are based on papers presented at that symposium. We

are grateful to the School of Philosophy and the Department of Politics at Catholic University for their help in arranging the seminar and ensuring its success.

*On Human Work*, the official translation of *Laborem Exercens*, is available through the National Catholic News Service in Washington. Throughout this volume, all references to the encyclical are based on that translation. In the text, numbers in parentheses refer to the numbered sections of the translated encyclical.

## II

Pope John Paul II, for all his undeniable virtues, is not a trained economist. And while Roman Catholics believe that the Pope is infallible when he speaks about faith and morals, his teachings on social and political questions are certainly not infallible. Why, then, are papal statements on such questions treated with so much attention and respect? Do they reflect anything more than the personal beliefs of a very intelligent amateur?

Obviously, the Pope's thoughts carry tremendous importance simply because of the author's moral authority. Papal encyclicals may not be infallible, but they are certainly treated with utter seriousness by the millions of people who look to the Pope for their spiritual leadership. Whether or not one accepts John Paul's religious authority, one cannot readily dismiss the ancient and powerful ethical tradition from which his thoughts emerge. Unlike most political leaders, the Pope appeals not to pragmatic interests, but to ultimate moral values.

For that same reason, however, the Pope's statements on social issues should not be interpreted simply as political responses to political problems. As the representative of a religion that aims toward perfection in an other-worldly kingdom, the Pope must constantly call upon his fellow Christians to make heroic demands on their own charity, and to strive for personal sanctity despite their manifest human weaknesses. No matter how well an earthly government functions, the Church will always point out its shortcomings, calling believers to pursue loftier goals. In short, while politics is the art of the possible, Christian morality is a search for perfection.

Nonetheless, as John Paul explains in the text of his encyclical, the Church does make certain specific demands upon secular governments. Most notably, Catholic teachings demand that the dignity of the individual be preserved against all encroachments. In keeping with that demand, the Church has traditionally invoked the so-called principle of subsidiarity, which asserts the primacy of the individual, the family, and the informal neighborhood as opposed to the State. Catholic social teaching is an affirmation of the importance of human freedom and dignity, and a constant warning against the overweening power of central government.

Having made these assertions, the Church has traditionally remained silent on the question of how best to pursue economic and social goals. Thus John Paul, in this and in previous statements, calls for a dramatic attack on poverty throughout the world; he does not stipulate how that attack should be conducted, nor indeed does he demand government programs as opposed to private charitable initiatives. These are questions best resolved by sophisticated economic analysis, not by moral suasion. In *Laborem Exercens*, John Paul mentions several possible approaches to effective labor relations. But ultimately the merits of these approaches must be subjected to empirical economic tests. The Pope does not prescribe solutions to the problems of human work; he simply insists that *some* solutions are urgently needed.

In the last analysis, John Paul points out, the problem of human work is an individual problem: it is the individual, through his efforts and his intentions, who gives special value to the tasks he performs. So the most pressing social need is not for grand governmental schemes, but for the construction of a sound, understandable philosophy of work. At its most stirring moments, *Laborem Exercens* insists that human labor is a holy undertaking—an active partnership in God's work of Creation. It is this understanding, and not any specific function of labor-management relations, that gives work its distinctive value in Christian theology.

Here, too, the encyclical provides a unique and valuable insight into the problems of contemporary American society. Our nation was founded by men who had a similar attitude toward the moral value of labor, and our economic and social institutions are constructed from that moral basis. But in recent years,

many social critics have complained that the moral and philosophical underpinnings of our social institutions have begun to crumble. If that is true, then *Laborem Exercens* provides a strong antidote for the nation's malaise. After all, the dignity of work is not simply a religious principle; it is a vital principle of our economic system.

One final point bears mention in these introductory remarks. All too often, readers with a strong political bias—liberals and conservatives alike—react strongly to the distinctive rhetoric of papal social statements. It is indeed true that Pope John Paul, like his predecessors, appeals to many of the same motives that are cited by liberals in the secular realm. But when the Pope calls for an ethic of peace, brotherhood, and sharing, is he simply echoing the demands of the political Left? Or, on the contrary, is the Left borrowing the language of an ethical system that has proven its power over a period of thousands of years? The intelligent reader can reach his own conclusion.

### III

By happy coincidence, the five essays contained in this volume follow a discernible pattern. The first essays concentrate primarily on the theoretical underpinnings of the papal social teachings, providing a valuable background for the reader who is not well acquainted with that tradition. Then gradually, the later essays delve into the concrete empirical evidence for (and against) the Pope's argument.

*Laborem Exercens* is a dramatic document in many respects, and its argument is not often heard in ordinary political controversies. But the encyclical adheres fairly closely to the main traditions of Catholic social teachings. Opening the proceedings, Jude Dougherty outlines the essential elements of that traditional social doctrine, and places John Paul squarely within the scope of previous papal declarations.

Claes Ryn follows by taking up one specific aspect of the Pope's argument: the idea of community. Too often, he argues, modern political analysts look upon "community" as an abstract, intangible agglomeration of persons. The Christian approach, in sharp contrast, insists on the dignity of the individual—the flesh-and-blood neighbor rather than the abstract vision of humanity.



James Schall begins his essay by pointing out the many contrasting readings that have been given to John Paul's arguments. Clearly, some of these readings must reflect a grave misconception of the Pope's ideas. But at least part of the problem, Father Schall points out, might stem from the somewhat obscure meaning of the word "work" as it is used in *Laborem Exercens*. Some clarification is in order, and perhaps clarification of this concept is the most important work to be done by interpreters of the encyclical.

However, no honest reader of the encyclical could possibly miss the steady emphasis on transcendent religious themes. It would be very difficult, William Stanmeyer observes, for an areligious reader to agree with the Pope; in fact it is fair to say that the entire argument of the encyclical presupposes a religious disposition. Still, working from that basic understanding, Stanmeyer finds several specific questions that could be addressed within the purview of the encyclical: for instance, the problems of bureaucracy, unemployment, and inflation.

—Philip F. Lawler

# The Work Ethic of John Paul II

JUDE P. DOUGHERTY

When I was asked to prepare this paper I had not yet read John Paul II's encyclical. I had read two newspaper accounts of *Laborem Exercens*, but still remained uncertain of its specific content and thrust. It occurred to me that it might be useful to sketch the Church's teaching on labor and then to consider the content of the encyclical against that tradition. When I say the Church's teaching, I am using the term loosely, for what I obviously mean is one layman's grasp of that teaching. Whether I have captured the tradition or not, I leave for the reader to decide. My method, following my first inclination, is to set forth ten points, which I think summarize the Church's teaching with respect to labor. I will then compare the teaching of *Laborem Exercens* with those ten points and attempt to state where it has broken new ground, if indeed it has.

From its inception, the Church has taught the dignity of labor. This attitude stems from the Gospel narratives themselves as well as from the view of man presupposed by the Gospels. The Gospels portray Joseph as a craftsman, and it is supposed that Jesus himself learned to use his hands as a carpenter in his father's workshop. But behind the Gospels is the conviction that man is both body and soul and that it is fitting that man works out his salvation with both. This doctrine is the cornerstone of Western monasticism, and it is, I believe, that monastic tradition which has shaped the Catholic work ethic in later ages.

1. Benedict prescribed manual labor for the monks who would follow his *Rule*. As a matter of fact, Benedict is credited with being the first intellectual in the history of the West to get dirt under his fingernails. The Greeks, by contrast, took a contemplative approach to nature; manual labor was the lot of the slave. Plato is said to have chided two disciples for making instruments by which to measure the motion of heavenly bodies. But for Benedict, manual labor was an important dimension of human activity. Most of the recruits to his early monasteries were, in fact, the sons of noblemen, and yet he prescribed work. In his own words, "The brethren must be occupied at stated hours in manual labor, and again at other hours in divine

reading." Benedict's conception of the monastic life is essentially social and cooperative. His *Rule*, as a discipline of the common life, differs from older rules in its strongly practical character. The Benedictine Abbey was to be a self-contained economic organism, like the villa of a Roman landowner. Because the monks were themselves the workers, the old classical contract between servile work and free leisure no longer obtained. According to the *Rule*, the abbot is the manager of the estate of the monastery. The *Rule* lays great stress on the equal treatment of all members of the community: noble or peasant, free or slave. Benedict's monasteries are credited with revolutionizing the order of social values as a result of their sanctification of work and poverty. The slave-owning society of the empire and the aristocratic warrior ethos gave way to an institution which stressed the value of manual labor. The effects of the new order were not long in coming. The disciplined and tireless labor of the monks brought back into cultivation the lands which had been deserted and depopulated since the age of the invasions. In the words of John Henry Newman, who wrote brilliantly about the period, "by degrees the woody swamp became a hermitage, a religious house, a farm, or abbey, a village, a seminary, a school of learning and a city." The whole Christian outlook toward labor is embodied in Benedict's *Rule* and that *Rule* was to become a norm in the Christian West.

2. Manual labor is seen not only as a human good, but as a necessity. Man may be the culmination of a hierarchy in nature but nothing is given without toil. The Christian sees this as God's way of presenting man with the goods of the earth. Nature exists for man and is to be used by man, but man must cultivate, shepherd, and construct. Man is to utilize nature's gifts, bound only by the admonition to use wisely.

3. The sense of community taken for granted within the monastic tradition is a model for secular society as well. The goods of the earth are held in common. The recognition of community implies that all are entitled to share. The assumption is that all are engaged in the productive process to the extent that their ability and station permit. Property owners do not have the right to do what they please with what they call their own, for they are only the stewards of their possessions.

4. Charity is crucial in any Christian theory of community. The Christian takes for granted the inequality of ability. Not all

can contribute to the same degree; similarly, there is no expectation that all will share to the same degree. There is the important awareness of moral failure. Some, although not ill endowed by nature, fail as a result of their own choices to develop their abilities or fail through laziness to contribute their fair share. They who have not in justice contributed have no claim in strict justice to share. In charity the community may provide for the ill endowed; it may even care for those who have willfully failed to acquire skills or squandered their talent and resources. But charity is not mindless. It cannot encourage shiftlessness or materially cooperate in evil.

5. It is evident that the doctrine of free will is an important factor in Christian attitudes toward work. To some extent individuals are what they are because of their free choices. No determinism robs man of responsibility for what he has become. By a law of nature men are brought to face the long-term consequences of youthful choices. Some have-nots have not because of their own moral failure. Poverty is not, as modern doctrine proclaims, always the product of external social and economic forces. Poverty is also the product of nature's ill-endowment or of culpable personal failure. Poverty is a symptom of a more radical flaw in nature or in human conduct. Men cannot be preserved from the consequences of their vice, ignorance, and folly.

6. The Church teaches that certain minimal goods are required as conditions for human freedom and growth. Spiritual growth is uppermost in mind. This requires a degree of material well-being, an amount of leisure. All are called to the moral life and to at least a minimal life of the mind. Religion presupposes reflection. In common with the Greek, the Christian affirms that contemplation is the end of human toil.

While manual labor is a human good, it is nevertheless more of a means to an end than an end in itself. There are many goods of the body, but the highest goods are the goods of the spiritual life of man: personal moral growth and art, science and wisdom. Property and material wealth are the condition of these distinctively human goods. The unquenchable curiosity of the human intellect and the consequent variety of taste require material means for their satisfaction. Personal growth also depends upon the associations one makes. Material means are required if one is to choose one's companions, to marry in accord with one's best perceptions, and to lead the life of the

mind. Apart from individual ownership of property, there can never be genuine individual freedom.

### Fair Return for Labor

7. A man has a right to the fruit of his labor. In a primitive agrarian society this principle would hardly require debate. But, when one hires oneself as a laborer to till another's land or work in another's shop, principles of equity need to be enunciated. A man may lack *real* property, but assuming normal health of the body, he is not without resources. The Church has taught in every period that a man by his labor, whatever the economic situation, is entitled in exchange for that labor the minimal goods of life, a living wage. Exploitation whether by feudal lord or factory owner is never sanctioned. An assumption underlying this teaching is that the earth with sufficient tilling will yield its fruit.

8. Industrial society complicates the enunciation of generic principles. Only a few factors need be mentioned to illustrate the complexity. Labor often is not directly related to the end-product. An individual or a factory may produce what is merely a component in a larger enterprise. Products themselves are bartered, their value often determined by the market. Mistakes can be made in production; the margin for error is great. Labor can be squandered; decisions to produce badly made. One may have invested in or hired out to a losing enterprise. The link between labor and marketable product is too easily broken. For effort expended there ought to be a just return, but there are no guarantees that an enterprise will be profitable. The risks attached to production sometimes fall on the laborer. The Church has taught that the risk is to be borne principally by the entrepreneur who stands to gain much from success. The laborer is entitled to a living wage even in a marginal enterprise or in one of dubious return. Labor is not to be exploited to bring a return to an ill advised venture.

9. If labor's rights are to be respected so, too, are those of owners and the community. The Church in modern times has affirmed the worker's right to organize and to strike under certain circumstances. But the strike is an extraordinary means: the common good must always be respected. Moralists have found the secondary boycott difficult to sanction and have

usually condemned strikes which result in the closing of essential public services.

The Church has also endorsed the formation of unions for another role that they play in the community, namely, their role as intermediate societies protecting the individual from larger or more powerful bodies which do not always have the individual's interest in mind.

In recent decades with the growth of union size and power, admonitions for union restraint are almost as frequent as appeals to justice directed at owners in a previous period. The call to prudence is sounded in all directions.

10. Opposition to socialism has been a constant feature of the Church's social teaching. This stems from the conviction that a sense of independence, self-reliance, self-respect, and economic power can only come from the possession of property. There is the belief that no system of insurance, nor any scale of wages, can provide man with those goods of soul which are an integral element of full and normal life, and which are second in importance to food, clothing, and shelter. Though aware of the baser tendencies of human nature, the Church has more confidence in the decency of a mercantile class than in the ability of government to legislate moral goals. The most cunningly devised social statutes, it is thought, will not compel men to act justly in their economic relations unless they are moved by a living and enlightened conscience. The voice of conscience will ordinarily have little effect if it is not recognized as the voice of God. Neither legal ordinances nor humanitarian appeals will be effective without the assistance and direction of religion.

### In Step with Tradition

The above decalogue is what I take to be the common moral teaching of the Church with respect to labor. Maverick sages and tutors apart, these are the teachings I heard as a youth. Thus it is not surprising that I found in John Paul's encyclical all the above and then some. I will turn to the "then some" in a moment, but it is worth noting simply because the press has made so much of the fact that the encyclical is not about Poland alone. It is not addressed to the Polish situation any more than it is to that in Bolivia. John Paul's voice carries a special ring to anyone who reads the news from his native land;

but the principles thought to bear on the Polish situation were similarly enunciated by his predecessors. To read the document in a parochial fashion is to miss its essential feature. Nor is it to be read for its novelty. Papal documents by their very nature are the last place one can expect new teaching. They are chiefly vehicles by which the established is reaffirmed. The Church does not discover morality but endorses the highest moral principles discerned by men. The Scriptures and the teachings of Christ are of the most general sort. The Church teaches in their light, but the specific teachings of the Church are the product of enlightened investigation. She carries in her doctrine not only the voice of Jerusalem but the wisdom of Athens, Rome, and medieval Paris as well.

If the encyclical of John Paul advances Papal teaching it does so, in my judgment, when it calls attention to several facets of the productive process which were not singled out in prior papal documents:

- 1) The psychological requirements of the work place;
- 2) The interdependence of nations by reason of the uneven distribution of the earth's raw materials;
- 3) The needs of migrant laborers; and
- 4) The employment and treatment of the handicapped.

A case can be made that on all of these issues the Pope is behind the times. Responsible corporations have long ago (if for no other than reasons of self-interest) adopted policies that make the work-load more varied and meaningful. Moral tracts on the relation of industrial nations to those which are mainly the exporters of raw materials are not wanting. The problems of migrant laborers have been addressed by governments, corporations, and voluntary organizations on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, federal guidelines on mainstreaming the handicapped are lengthier than the encyclical itself.

What then should one say of a document that simply reiterates common moral teaching? Much depends on one's attitude toward religious authority. For some, John Paul has the authority of a scholarly Reinhold Niebuhr, for others that of an evangelical Billy Graham, and for still others, he is in a unique way the Voice of Christ as mediated by His Church. By ordinary standards he is someone who commands respectful attention. But more needs to be said.

The encyclical brings together in an authoritative way the

best general teaching on problems affecting the place of work. In a period of rampant relativism such unification is at once more difficult and more necessary than it may seem. More difficult, because of the absence of a common way of thinking about things; more necessary, because people have no other place to look. Governments may outdo the religious mind in their concern for the laborer or the disadvantaged. Where those concerns are not crassly political, they may, in fact, reflect a religious world-view. But governments are not good at defending principles—even principles which lead to actions that are deemed expedient. The church as well as the unchurched need to be reminded of the unity of an outlook that is frequently assumed by both. It can be argued that much contemporary social doctrine which we take for granted is Christian in its origin and that its proper defense is Christianity itself. Though many of those values are to be found in other places, their fullness is nowhere to be found save in the tradition represented by John Paul.

It is likely that the teachings of *Laborem Exercens* can be endorsed by secular- and religious-minded alike, but I know of few intellectual systems which can justify the principles on which they rest, and of no world spokesmen for any of the alternative systems. The role may be uniquely Peter's.



# The Work of Community

CLAES G. RYN

Reading the encyclical *Laborem Exercens* one is reminded repeatedly of the long tradition of teaching from which it emanates and which it seeks to develop. John Paul's examination of work assumes a dual understanding of man's purpose. The ultimate end of man is to live in the kingdom of God. This destiny is revealed in the spirit of otherworldliness which finds its fullest expression in the life of Christ and in the life of the saints. But awareness of man's ultimate end beyond this world must not lead to neglect of the higher potentialities of our earthly existence. The latter should be fully developed in accordance with its own intended perfection.

Although John Paul does not here dwell on the point, catholic Christianity recognizes two distinct and yet intimately related ways to salvation. There is the way of those who would live now as though they were already in the heavenly kingdom; such vows as celibacy and poverty express the aspiration of holiness. But this type of witnessing is not the only way of serving God. Indeed, if actually practiced by all men, celibacy would mean the end of the human race. Poverty, if universally adopted, "would sink the world in squalor and darkness."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, as John Paul points out, the general command to men is, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it." (#4) Most men are expected to serve God by making the best of the various resources which have been placed in their care. *Laborem Exercens* is addressed primarily to work as "a fundamental dimension of man's existence on earth." (#4) Man's proper development through work in human society is of vital concern to the Church as having a direct bearing on his ability to reach his ultimate end. However, John Paul also guards against a secularizing preoccupation with the things of this world. He reminds his readers, in the words of *Gaudium et Spes*, that "earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom." (#27)<sup>2</sup>

1. Walter Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy* (New York: New American Library, 1955), 116.

2. See *Gaudium et Spes*, 39. For an extensive discussion of the relationship between specifically religious values and the values of "wordly" civilization, see Claes G. Ryn, "The Things of Caesar: Notes Toward the Delimitation of Politics," *Thought*, Vol. 55, No. 219 (December, 1980).

Using the term work in a sense which is perhaps broader than John Paul's, work is finally but another name for life, life being always an effort to master challenges and overcome obstacles. Man must work for his livelihood, but he must also work out his salvation. In the end, work is but another term for willing. We may introduce a distinction corresponding to the two ways to salvation and say that there is the work of otherworldliness, meaning the willing of that which holiness requires; and there is the work of human community, meaning the willing of that which the good life requires, including economic well-being. The purpose of work, John Paul contends, is "making life more human." (#3) It should contribute to human community, ultimately to community with God.

In its concern for man in society, John Paul points out, the Church is primarily interested in "the eternal designs and transcendent destiny" which God has "linked with him." But while the Church looks at human work first of all "in the light of the revealed word," John Paul freely grants that the wisdom and knowledge of philosophers and other scholars is indispensable to the proper understanding of man in society. (#4) In keeping with this recognition I shall draw on some worldly wisdom in order to discern and elaborate upon John Paul's view of the relationship of work to community and their respective meaning.

### Ideology vs. Community

The central message of *Laborem Exercens* will be misunderstood if its sociopolitical arguments are confused, as no doubt they will be, with ideological and pseudo-moralistic calls for the political transformation of society. The humanizing reforms desired by John Paul are not drawn from some abstract blueprint but spring from solidarity with concrete human beings working to improve their lot in particular historical circumstances. He assumes that reforms have to take into account the special needs and conditions of actual societies, firms and workplaces. His shunning of radical ideological blueprints is evident, most generally, from his respectful treatment of "the particular cultural and historical links" forming the basis of man's membership in society. (#10) More specifically, John Paul emphatically rejects the radicalism of Marxism and atomistic liberalism. This rejection is an example of his not regarding the past as an evil

heritage to be discarded. On the contrary, what he writes about man's dependence on the past closely parallels the thought of Edmund Burke. John Paul refers to society as "a great historical and social incarnation of the work of all generations." It is "the great 'educator' of every man." He argues that when work is done in the right spirit it "serves to add to the heritage of the whole human family." (#10) Viewed in this perspective, John Paul's notion of solidarity calls to mind the famous words of Burke that society is "a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born." Man's social nature is defined by his participation in "the great primeval contract of eternal society."<sup>3</sup> Beneficial reform, then, does not uproot man from his historically evolved social contexts but takes carefully measured steps to improve upon the heritage of the past.

For John Paul, as for Burke, society is not an undifferentiated mass of individuals. It is an organic fabric of human associations carrying forward the work of civilization. It is in his immediate social environment that man finds the most significant opportunities for community and personal development. The family is central. John Paul writes: "It must be remembered and affirmed that the family constitutes one of the most important terms of reference for shaping the social and ethical order of human work." (#10) In the family, man starts to develop many of the qualities which sustain society. In a similar vein, Edmund Burke contends that the source of warm feelings for society as a whole is in the affections that we have for the little "platoons" to which we belong. We may add that in a people consisting of disharmonious, dissolving families, disaffection with the larger society is likely to be common.

Among the contemporary scholars whose worldly wisdom offers confirmation of John Paul's defense of community is Robert Nisbet. Developing a tradition which goes back to Plato and Aristotle and beyond, Nisbet argues that man's social nature becomes manifest primarily in his "autonomous groups."<sup>4</sup> To live in community is not so much to be a part of humanity in general; it means first of all to be associated with particular

3. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955), p. 110.

4. Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953).

persons in groups which are far less than global or socially all-encompassing. Most men find their deepest sense of belonging in the family and in other freely chosen contexts of intimate human contact, such as the neighborhood church, union chapter, service club, school, or work place. Here the individual exists as a real person. He cares genuinely and directly for others and is cared for in turn. He listens with real interest to others and is listened to in turn. In his social groups man is not an isolated, passive being. He is somebody; he makes a difference; he is needed. He feels that he himself can and must contribute to the good life for himself and his fellow humans. The effect of social memberships at their best is to develop the human personality and to give a sense of security and meaningful purpose.

Labor unions and professional associations are examples of institutions which can provide a beneficial sense of economic security. But if they are nothing more than economic pressure groups, they are failing in their highest role, which is to be a bulwark for community. John Paul makes it clear that unions and similar associations must not be viewed as instruments of group egoism and class warfare. It is to the extent that they are motivated by solidarity in the real sense that they can contribute to the larger good of society. Pluralism enhances social harmony only if man's many groups are joined by the work of community. If that is the case, it can truly be said, in the words of John Paul, that "social and socioeconomic life is certainly like a system of 'connected vessels.'" (#20)

### Humanity: Real and Abstract

The tradition of social teaching to which *Laborem Exercens* belongs has given strong support to the old principle of subsidiarity. It should be noted that this principle runs contrary to any notion of social engineering. It is not deemed appropriate that government should mastermind the life of society with reference to some blueprint for the good society. The principle expresses a strong preference for meeting needs, as far as possible, where they are most strongly felt. Government should assume only those tasks which cannot be handled, or handled effectively, by any other organizations or groups closer to the citizens. It is assumed that decentralization and differentiation

of social life is desirable, partly to keep the solution of problems as close as possible to those who are immediately affected by them. Assessments of the principle of subsidiarity today must of course include consideration of its prudence and practicality in modern circumstances. However, this consideration would be incomplete without consideration of its moral significance.

It is essential to understand that there is a direct relationship between concern for man as a member of concretely existing intermediate groups, such as we find in *Laborem Exercens*, and a certain view of the nature of love and community. To grasp the central message of John Paul's encyclical, it is necessary to recognize the difference between the generalized humanitarian sympathy which is usually associated with modern ideological schemes and the concern for human welfare which inspires the pages of the encyclical. Failure to understand the difference between Christian love and expressions of a merely sentimental brotherhood of man is the source of endless moral and intellectual confusion in the contemporary world. The following analysis of the nature of love refers specifically to Christianity but applies more generally to the ethical life, whatever label may be attached to it. Obviously, morality is not a monopoly of Christians or, for that matter, of religious believers.

Those today who speak the most and the loudest about the plight of the disadvantaged and about the need to reform society tend to exhibit a generalized caring for nobody in particular. These lovers of humanity take great pride in their own elevated moral sentiments and expect our applause for being the conscience of the world. In righteous indignation they decry the meanness of those who do not share their views of what moral responsibility demands. And because the *language* of their sentiments is often that of Christian love and charity, the essential difference is easily overlooked. It is not noticed, for example, that the humanitarian sympathy on which so many modern people base their claim to moral worth has few, if any, prerequisites of moral character. In the classical and Judaeo-Christian tradition of ethics, love and charity are understood to be the fruits of long and sometimes difficult improvement of self. The great appeal of modern sentimental brotherhood, by contrast, is that it relieves man of moral effort. Nothing is easier than caring in the abstract for the suffering poor, or the exploited proletar-

iat, or the starving Third World. Indeed, a merely sentimental caring has the advantage of somehow always transferring real obligations to some agency other than oneself, such as government or an international organization. It is quite possible to bask in self-approbation for one's own noble moral feelings without having taken a single step to improve one's own character.

Christianity does not teach a self-congratulatory sentimental benevolence. It admonishes us: not to have warm feelings for humanity in general, but to love our neighbor. And to love one's neighbor is a personally demanding task requiring actual moral character. Genuine love asks of us—employers and employees, teachers, children, mothers and fathers—that we should care for living, breathing people in our immediate environment. And these “neighbors” may well be obstreperous, ugly, unlikeable individuals making uncomfortable demands on our time and energy. It is here and now, and not in the public arena of abstract moralizing, that moral character is really tested.

Needless to say, Christianity hopes and expects that love of neighbor will spread more broadly and inspire political and social life in general. One of the aspects of a society formed according to the principle of subsidiarity is to protect and to multiply opportunities for concrete, close-range association and thus to aid the work of community. The important work of government should of course also respect the highest moral goals and standards. But here as elsewhere the character of those in power is crucial. Standing on the worldly ethical wisdom of the ages as well as the revealed word, Christianity knows that the work of the moral life begins at home with reform of self and love of neighbor.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that the Christian understanding of love should go together with emphasis on the importance of man's most intimate groups for his development as a person. John Paul stresses that the Church has always given prominence to the role of the family in educating man for community. Having sprung forth and been challenged in the family and other intimate relationships, love may then come to spread, like rings on the water, to the entire human family. Indeed, the love of the saint knows no bounds.

In glaring contrast, the modern humanitarian sympathy which parades under the banner of “love” allows the individual to bypass the difficult effort of moral self-scrutiny and self-reform.

Except with God, Christianity associates universal love of man primarily with the exceptional man of character, the saint. Modern "love of man" presupposes no such difficult overcoming of self. It lets the individual go directly to the reform of society and, yes, the entire world. What the individual lacks in personal character he can make up in sentimental overflow and ambitious schemes for social engineering. The effects of this perverted form of moralism are potentially diabolical. The new morality makes it quite possible to be a passionate lover of humanity, like a Robespierre, a Marx or a Lenin, and to be a passionate hater of actual human beings. Surely, moral blindness and conceit are wholly dominant when the representative of the heavenly kingdom, the priest who administers the sacraments and preaches the word of love, is considered justified in also carrying a machine gun. "You be my brother or I shall kill you!"

Community in the real sense of the word is not some abstract brotherhood of man; the latter, for all its possible emotional intensity, is actually empty of all humanizing content. The work of community establishes a pattern of concrete social relationships. To summarize what has been argued so far: it is chiefly in his immediate groups that man's humanity is realized. The man of generalized benevolence may well be incapable of love for actual persons. The man of real character thrives as a member of social groups. It might be added that it is men of the latter type who are best equipped, provided they also have the necessary knowledge and prudence, to employ the powers of government for the improvement of their own society and the rest of the world.

### Assaults on Community

A terrible danger of the modern ideologies is that they threaten all genuine community and thereby the development of the essential nature of man. Whether predominantly individualistic or collectivistic, the economic view of life described by John Paul prepares the way for atomistic dissolution of society.

The most blatant and immediately threatening attack on community comes from the totalitarian movements. They correctly view the intermediate groups with deep suspicion, for these divide men's loyalties and counteract the centralization

of power. Hence the totalitarians seek to weaken or destroy these freely formed associations either by infiltrating or by forbidding them. Is there a more chilling example of the destruction of community than the Hitler Youth or Komsomol partisan informing on his parents? The final result of the totalitarian assault on the intermediate groups is the creation of a people of isolated, insecure, naked individuals. Instead of a people organized in diverse, overlapping, and spontaneously created associations, there appears the lonely crowd, the undifferentiated mass. And of course the totalitarians want that mass to march in step for the final victory of "brotherhood" in the world. Perhaps the ultimate perversion of community is the dehumanizing "brotherhood" of the rootless crowd roaring its consent to totalitarian slogans.

The same ultimate result is advanced in more subtle ways within our modern Western societies. Many would have government and society in general act in the spirit of an abstract individualism. No longer should citizens be treated with respect to their social roles and memberships, not as male or female, father or mother, member of a profession, citizen of a state or local community, but simply as—abstract individuals having abstract rights. Carried to its individualistic extreme, "equality before the law" requires that society disregard that which makes men into what they are. Before the bench of the law man must stand stripped of all the social roles and characteristics which define his personhood. The Equal Rights Amendment, in so far as it follows the same logic, offers an example of the same attempted depersonalization; the law and public policy must not favor or disfavor any social roles or arrangements, not even if these have been sanctioned or disapproved by hundreds of years of civilization. John Paul's moderate and balanced defense of the family and the role of the mother is opposite in spirit to a social ideology whose practical effect is the atomization of society. When, in the name of some abstract individual rights, society is not allowed to give preferential treatment to those roles and institutions which have proved most humanizing and ennobling over the centuries, it is also prohibited from protecting the social nature of man.

To take another example of the effects of abstract individualism, the formula "one man one vote" tends to disenfranchise men as members of social groups. The logic of this formula is



that democracy should not pay its respects to political subdivisions like states and localities by giving them special political influence and protection. In the United States, the fact that the States, regardless of population, are given two senators in the Congress is a particularly striking instance of such preferential treatment. "One man one vote," consistently applied, would give citizens political power only as members of the undifferentiated mass. The transformation of society for the sake of majoritarian mass democracy requires again that man's associations be ignored. But one has to ask this question: When the dissolution of the people into an egalitarian mass has finally been completed, so that everybody can truly be counted as one, has the individual gained or lost? When does he feel most important and influential; as an active member of groups, or as a member of that mass of equal citizens casting a ballot periodically to decide who shall be his ruler?<sup>5</sup> Whatever its moralistic pretensions, abstract individualism and egalitarianism represents a denial of man's specifically human nature. The "brotherhood" it seeks is realized in practice by destroying the social fabric of concrete community.

Perhaps the most humane and insightful of the economists of this century is Wilhelm Röpke. He warns against the *Vermassung* of modern society. Like John Paul he deplors the "proletarianization" of the working man. A society which radically departs from the classical and Judaeo-Christian traditions and which transforms itself from a "system of 'connected vessels,'" that is, from an organism of diverse and mutually supportive associations, into a mass of socially uprooted individuals, provides the worst environment for the economic work of society. Only in a people where central moral and cultural values are transmitted through strong social groups can economic production be properly subordinated to the higher ends of society. According to Röpke, the real alternative to *laissez-faire* capitalism is not socialistic collectivism or the welfare state as ordinarily conceived. "Government-organized relief for the masses is simply the crutch of a society crippled by proletarianism."<sup>6</sup> The only

5. The problem of community as related to two very different types of democracy, plebiscitary and constitutional, is treated in depth in Claes G. Ryn, *Democracy and the Ethical Life: A Philosophy of Politics and Community* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978).

6. Wilhelm Röpke, *A Humane Economy* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1971), p. 154.

real solution to the rootlessness of the modern working masses is to attack its sources, the twin curses of materialism and abstract individualism. Much like Robert Nisbet, Röpke would have society work toward conditions in which spontaneously formed human associations can thrive and have real influence. The basic unit of the good society is not the undefined abstract individual with abstract freedoms and rights but man manifesting his essential nature in his social memberships. Röpke is a proponent of the market economy as most compatible with a humane society, but he wants it understood that this economy is one thing where "atomization, mass, proletarianization, and concentration rule"; it is quite another in a society which seeks to absorb the central moral and cultural lessons of civilization and manages to integrate the individual into a "natural order" of genuine belonging. "In such a society, wealth would be widely dispersed; people's lives would have solid foundations; genuine communities, from the family upward, would form a background of moral support for the individual; there would be counterweights to competition and the mechanical operation of prices; people would have roots and would not be adrift in life without anchor."<sup>7</sup>

I cannot read John Paul's defense of human community against proletarianization, mechanization and "excessive bureaucratic centralization" without seeing the parallels between his concerns and those of social thinkers like Edmund Burke, Wilhelm Röpke and Robert Nisbet. (#15) John Paul's understanding of ethics, politics and economics can be explicated, substantiated and strengthened with reference to worldly wisdom like theirs, which is very close in spirit to his own thought.

Implied in what I have argued is a standard for judging the quality of life in various societies. Whatever their ideological claims or pretenses, do they actually provide their citizens genuine opportunities for the work of community? Does the particular society give the individual freedom, resources and encouragement to seek a life which richly enhances his existence as a social being, thus contributing to the completion of his specifically human nature, or does it leave man lonely, insecure and afraid?

7. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

## On Imitating the Creator

JAMES V. SCHALL

John Paul II's new encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*, "broke no new grounds either socially or theologically," wrote *Time* magazine, ever faithful to its own doctrines, in a self-revealing remark.<sup>1</sup> The *Washington Post*, however, cited a high Vatican official to the effect that the purpose of this new papal document was to inspire "new concepts that could unite workers and heal persistent divisions between capital and labor."<sup>2</sup> Polish sources seemed to consider the Pope finally to have found a way to justify capital by identifying it with historical, stored work. Italian sources did not believe the Holy Father was recommending a third sort of economic system, but rather that he was suggesting ways to humanize existing ones.<sup>3</sup>

By contrast, only three weeks after its publication, Malachi Martin darkly warned that the "Vatican's momentous message on workers has gone unheard," because "powerful forces within and without the Church of Rome (have) mounted a conspiracy of silence against it." Even granting that three weeks are enough time to decide how to assimilate such a complex document, Mr. Martin went on to announce that both Leo XIII and Pius XI had been "reversed" by John Paul II, who has now "severed the economic chain that has shackled Christendom to capitalism since capitalism was born in the West." Indeed, for Malachi Martin, John Paul II seemed to be someone fresh out of the Sixth Century, since the Pope sees "the work of human beings in its relationship with God and society through the lens that has not been used for 1500 years." There is even more: for John Paul II's vision is neither capitalist nor socialist but "anticipates man in a society that has never been."<sup>4</sup> Needless to say, if we suspect the Holy Father's thought is something from either the Dark Ages or Never-Never Land, we may well rejoice over "mounting a campaign of silence against it."

1. *Time*, September 28, 1981.

2. *Washington Post*, September 16, 1981.

3. *National Catholic Register*, October 18, 1981.

4. *Fairfax (Virginia) Journal*, October 9, 1981.

Henry Tanner, at *The New York Times*, stressed less utopian themes, such as what are labor unions and whether they ought to be political parties or tools of class-warfare (which the Pope said they should not).<sup>5</sup> Msgr. George Higgins, on the other hand, saw a polemical purpose, wherein *Laborem Exercens* would somehow "likely prove unpopular with economic conservatives," who ironically have been trying to suggest this more critical look at labor unions in papal documents for years.<sup>6</sup> Meantime, perhaps the leading "economic conservative" interested in religious matters is Michael Novak, who found the papal document "brilliant," coming from a man who actually knew something about Marxism, such as how it really works.<sup>7</sup>

On the whole, I did not find this encyclical as theologically profound as *Redemptor Hominis*, nor as philosophically pertinent as John Paul II's previous *Dives in Misericordia*, which latter addressed itself to the major socioeconomic issue of our era, namely the radical limits of justice and their relation to revelation. It goes without saying, of course, that the subject matters of these three documents differ widely in scope. Christology and mercy are closer to the heart of the faith than human works, in which alone, as Luther and the Council of Trent taught, we do not find our salvation. Human works, as John Paul II himself taught in *Redemptor Hominis*, are deepened by the gift structures of revelation. (#16-17) At the end of *Laborem Exercens*, John Paul II recalled this basic distinction: "Earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's Kingdom. Nevertheless, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God." (#27) Salvation comes to this race of men individually, so that there is no necessary reason why God's gifts cannot rebound in society, even making it more itself. (#25) Faith has its own sources and motives for action in the world and does not need to imitate or subsume modern ideologies to explain itself, as John Paul II taught also at Puebla. (III, 2-7) In *Laborem Exercens*, John Paul II tried to place the notion of human work in a larger context than that in which it is normally conceived. At the same time, he wished to concen-

5. *New York Times*, September 16, 1981.

6. *Catholic Standard*, September 24, 1981.

7. *National Review*, October 16, 1981.

trate on work, its nature and its limits. He based his approach upon Genesis, on the idea that man is to subdue the earth, that toil and effort are a part of work's reality. The Pope did not attempt to show the relation between the "increasing and multiplying" part of Genesis and the "subduing the earth," however much the possibility of one depends reflexively on the other. To exhaust the notion of work is not to exhaust the whole metaphysical range of reality, certainly, but work is an avenue by which we can begin to look at the whole.

### The Person as Center

The main thesis of *Laborem Exercens* is founded upon a theme—first explicitly stated, I believe, by Pius XII, though substantially always basic to Christian teaching—that the human person is the center, purpose, and end of human society and economic activity.<sup>8</sup> We should not miss the deep metaphysical import of this point, since it goes to the heart of the Thomism characteristic of this Pope's thinking: namely, that "societies," or "classes," or "nations," or "states," or "unions," or "corporations," or any other organizations or rational unities, do not transcend or absorb into themselves the human person in his religious destiny, which is alone what reaches God, for whom each person is specifically created.<sup>9</sup> By insisting that all these relations which flow from the activity of human work be grounded in the human person, the Pope takes a most crucial philosophic step to prevent any abstraction or ideological construct from gaining a sort of higher 'being' over the human person in his concrete existence.

The first step the Pope took, then, to be sure no ungrounded abstract realities could claim directive authority over the truth in persons, was to distinguish between work "objectively," in what is done, and "subjectively," in who does the work. Speaking in this latter sense, he then identified anything that any human being does, from housewife to thinker, from industrial worker to farmer and teacher, as "work." "And work means

8. Cf. John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, #219.

9. Cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, #8 and #13. Also the two addresses of John Paul II on St. Thomas, in *The Whole Truth About Man: John Paul II to University Faculties and Students*. J. Schall, ed. Boston, St. Paul Editions, 1981.

any activity by man, whether manual or intellectual, whatever its nature or circumstance. . . ." (Introduction; cf. #9) This procedure has the advantage of "equalizing," as it were, all men and women before God proportionately in "what" they do, whether king or pauper. The pursuit of each worldly vocation, then, at its innermost personal level as well as in the activity in itself, yields a proper dignity and eternal reward. This, of course, is not intended to deny that we can choose evil even in our works, but it serves to remind us that works are not somehow "separate" from us, the error John Paul II saw in the classical liberals. (#13) This is not unrelated to Luther's denial of a special privilege to the clerical vocation, a denial that emphasizes the worth of each human "work."

On the "objective" side, the Pope seemed to grant that the results of work could be distinguished according to its varying values, so that the "product" of a scholar would be different from that of a carpenter who made a chair. (#8) Even here, however, the Pope has refused to separate the technical, artistic, or technological products of human labor in such a way that their "existence" becomes unrelated to the labor that produced them or that uses them.

All the means of production, from the most primitive to the ultra-modern ones—it is man that has gradually developed them: man's experience and intellect. In this way there have appeared not only the simplest instruments for cultivating the earth, but also through adequate progress in science and technology the more modern and complex ones: machines, factories, laboratories and computers. Thus everything that is at the service of work, everything that in the present state of technology constitutes its ever more highly perfected "instrument," is the result of work. (#12, cf. also #13.)

This does not as such treat the question of ownership, which *Laborem Exercens* discusses in the context of a reaffirmation and statement of private ownership (#14), but it does seem to prevent any radical alienation of man from his own activity, which so concerned Marx.

If we compare the very incisive and profound reflections of

contemporary philosophers such as Yves Simon, Josef Pieper, and Hannah Arendt regarding the nature of "work," we see that there can be serious confusions caused by the Pope's expansive usage of the word "work," so that it comes to cover any sort of human activity. Josef Pieper especially was most concerned that the strict notion of "work" ought not to be equated with liberal or contemplative activities of man. Indeed, Pieper's *Leisure: the Basis of Culture*, is a careful warning of the danger of identifying "work" with "intellectual activity." There can be no doubt of a totalitarian danger in so identifying man with "work" that there is no place for any contemplative or revelational "openness" to his intelligence from God or nature, something the Pope takes care to clarify in other works. The classical distinctions between contemplation and action, making and doing, work and labor, art and politics, of which Hannah Arendt wrote in the *Human Condition* and the *Life of the Mind*, are also difficult to distinguish in the Pope's treatment of "work." Presumably, in so identifying work with all man's activities, even intellectual and artistic ones, the Holy Father did not intend to reverse his own Thomistic background, which would carefully distinguish, in Pieper's sense, the qualitatively different kinds of activity proceeding out of the human person, in which "work" would not be the highest or most important.

Moreover, in broadly identifying "work" with every activity of a person, the Holy Father did not deal in any precise fashion (as Michael Novak also noted) with those factors of economic life that more particularly contribute to subduing the earth for man's purpose. To be sure, the Pope re-emphasized that the individual persons want to be self-reliant and to be assured that their "obligation to work" also enables them "to know that in (their) work, even on something owned in common, (they) are working for themselves." (#15) There is a remarkable emphasis on private property in this document, evidently echoing the recent experience with public bureaucracies. Actually, the emphasis on a worker's interest in working for himself is not far from the classical economists' notion of "self-interest," purged perhaps of some of its extremes.

Furthermore, the Pope, in light of the general topics treated in any complete economic analysis, made two observations that he did not fully explain. The first was that "the key problem of social ethics. . . is that of just remuneration of work done. . . ."

(#19) Work is to be rewarded either in private or socialized systems according to the objective work done, that is, “a just remuneration of the work done.” This is to be accomplished through the “wage system.” Yet, there was no discussion about how this is to be determined on the basis of the work itself. The fact that the subjective worth of the individual’s work is, in a sense, infinite because of the person, does not give us any true estimate of the exchange value of the work product. Not even the various “rights” of the worker decide this in the abstract. Perhaps the solution lies in another remark of the Pope that “the first principle of the whole ethical and social order is in the principle of the common use of goods.” (#19) Thus, the goods workers need for themselves and their families become available to them through “the wage which (they) receive in remuneration for (their) work.” (#19) This “just wage” is said to verify “the justice of the whole socio-economic system.”

### The Missing Marketplace

What is paradoxical about these remarkable observations on wages and work is the lack of any explicit reference to the market as the immediate means by which goods produced finally reach the concrete people who need them, through the payment of a price. Just wages cannot be conceived by command nor in some abstract calculation, nor can they be conceived apart from some estimate of just prices, some sense of risk and competition. And just prices in a way look to the worker not so much as worker but as consumer. Yves Simon had suggested in his *Philosophy of Democratic Government* that, for the most part, the just price is most nearly calculated by its market price, a discussion itself arising from medieval and early modern Christian social thought. Thus, wages themselves—which, as the Pope admits, must be in relation to general business prosperity, something that takes into consideration what he called direct and indirect employment (#17)—must have a relation to the productive-distributive system by which in practice we freely deliberate about what goods and services are produced and on which ones we shall spend our wages. The encyclical, too, never goes into the related question of a reasonable profit as a reward for a new idea, product, process, or service made available to the common good. In the encyclical itself, the word “profit” is



always used with the adjectives "excess" or "inordinate" in relation to a strict interpretation of classical economic theory. (#11) Just profit, as something earned by the "work" of thought or sacrifice or hard work, is not discussed. Legitimate profit, with the loss to the economy and the workers when it is not present, is the other side of the relation between just price and just wage. It is in a sense directly related to the idea of creativity, which comes to be so central to this insightful document.

Thus, a further basic aspect of economic growth, upon which jobs and worker wages depend, is the direct human "work" aspect most clearly stressed by the Pope: that which relates "creation" to "work," on its human side. *Homo faber*, man the maker, is in a sense man the creator—a secondary creator, to be sure, but still someone who puts new things into the world in response to human needs and, even more, in response to human dreams. This is, of course, familiar to us under the terms of innovation or entrepreneurship. It is something more than the cycle of wage-price-market-profit. The closest the Pope comes to speaking of it is under the phrase "the virtue of industriousness" (#9), though presumably one could be industrious but not creative. All through the encyclical, there are indications of awareness of invention and innovation, especially in retrospect, when John Paul is looking at what modern productive economy has produced. (#12, #18) What perhaps needs more clarification is the close connection between the effective, just economy, and the human capacity for "newness," as Hannah Arendt called it: human creativity, productive growth, self-development, profit, and wage-price. This combination is what results in the better and new jobs that the Pope argues we need for every worker throughout the world.

The entire discussion of "capitalism" in the encyclical studiously avoided any adequate examination of 18th and 19th century economic history. In spite of the admitted horror stories, such a study would ask why, as the last century progressed, the workers in fact grew richer. This is still the greatest intellectual enigma in any socialist theory, one by no means solved by the Leninist theory of "imperialism."<sup>10</sup> Capitalism is almost always explained in its extreme theoretic form, which would corre-

10. See *Capitalism and the Historians*, edited with an introduction by F.A. Hayek; Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1954. Also Paul Johnson, *Will Capitalism Survive?* Washington, Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1979.

spond to few if any 20th century manifestations in which these extremes are radically modified precisely to answer the objections of classical theory. As a result, unfortunately, there is no accurate description of existing economic systems, their limits and controls, nor of their accomplishments in terms of freedom, justice, productivity, and efficiency. There is, however, a growing awareness of the drawbacks to state controlled development and distribution, even though the encyclical recognizes the need for a strong, moral state. (#18)

Therefore, while the position of "rigid" capitalism must undergo continual revision in order to be reformed from the point of view of human rights, both human rights in the widest sense and those linked with man's work, it must be stated that from the same point of view these many deeply desired reforms cannot be achieved by an *a priori* elimination of private ownership of the means of production. For it must be noted that merely taking these means of production (capital) out of the hands of their private owners is not enough to ensure their satisfactory socialization. They cease to be the property of a certain social group, namely the private owners, and become the property of organized society, coming under the administration and direct control of another group of people, namely those who, though not owning them, from the fact of exercising power in society manage them on the level of the whole national or the local economy.

This group in authority may carry out its task satisfactorily from the point of view of the priority of labor, but it may also carry it out badly by claiming for itself a monopoly of the administration and disposal of the means of production and not refraining even from offending basic human rights. Thus, merely converting the means of production into state property in the collectivist systems is by no means equivalent to "socializing" that property. We can speak of socializing only when the subject character of society is ensured, that is to say, when on the basis of his work each person is fully entitled to consider himself

a part owner of the great workbench at which he is working with everyone else. A way toward that goal could be found by associating labor with the ownership of capital, as far as possible, and by producing a wide range of intermediate bodies with economic, social and cultural purposes; they would be bodies enjoying real autonomy with regard to the public powers, pursuing their specific aims in honest collaboration with each other and in subordination to the demands of the common good. . . . (#14)

There is considerable evidence that many of these goals already exist in modern democratic economic systems in productive economies. Several authors are beginning to suggest too that many of these basic institutions and economic motives do arise from a philosophical insight into creativity, largely inspired by the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

The encyclical also speaks of rights to jobs (#18), leaving aside again, perhaps because of lack of attention to innovation and creativity in this regard, the question of how jobs are created, what social, political, and religious attitudes are necessary to cause economic growth.<sup>11</sup> P.T. Bauer, I think, has made it quite clear that the major causes of failure to develop are religious or attitudinal or cultural ones, so that the principal contribution of religion to the goal of more jobs, more attention to the poor, would be to emphasize those ideas of creativity, risk, accountability, savings, and service that are within religion's own tradition. At the beginning of *Laborem Exercens*, there is the following statement about what the Pope would like to see happening to the national and world economy:

These new conditions and demands will require a reordering and adjustment of the structures of the modern economy and of the distribution of work. Unfortunately, for millions of skilled workers, these changes may perhaps mean unemployment, at least for a time, or the need for retraining. They will very probably involve a reduction or less rapid increase in

11. "Where Will the Jobs Come From?" *The Economist*, January 3, 1981.

the material well-being for the developed countries. And they can also bring relief and hope to the millions who today live in the conditions of shameful and unworthy poverty.

### Prospective Answers

Aside from the somewhat static thesis sometimes implied here, which sees wealth mainly as sharing what already exists instead of creating something more, I think it can be argued that all of these things the Pope desires are in fact taking place. Anyone familiar with the work of Norman Macrae, Peter Drucker, Willard Beckermann, Paul Johnson, and others who stress both the productive side of the world economy and the way jobs are being exported to the Third World, because of innovation and growth, will suspect that the ideals of the Pope are being widely discussed in other settings, in a context of entrepreneurship, capital transfers, competition, intermediate economic structures, adequate reward, and concern for the poorest.

There are several aspects of this most stimulating document that might be reflected about, such as the re-stressing of the idea of the living family wage that occurred in earlier papal documents, the question of "corporation" related to the idea of unions, the lack of attention to the question of actual success or failure of states in terms of their performance, and the question of the real nature of a modern corporation. None the less, the spirituality of work, how man comes closer to God by working and therefore making his life and those of others more complete, these are certainly valuable contributions of John Paul II. The relation of divine and human creativity to growth in economic and cultural experience, the difference between "materialism" and a healthy Incarnationalism which understands the value of matter, the reminder that work is also related to suffering and sacrifice, are also important themes.<sup>12</sup> "Only man is capable of work, and only man works, at the same time by work occupying his existence on earth." (#1) Thus, work as the Pope sees it becomes a particular mark of man and of his uniqueness. It is the mark of a person operating within a community of persons,

12. Cf. S. Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Way to God*; Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978.

persons for whom their bodies, the earth are normal parts of life. Karol Wojtyla, the philosopher of the "acting person," has thus begun to spell out how this activity reaches our creative endeavors to subdue the earth as a sign of the dignity of human life.

The uniqueness of this Encyclical, in my opinion, is that it betrays all the marks of a document open finally to a complete understanding in papal thought of the innovative, productive nature of an economy directed to and by human persons. Creativity is indeed the right word.

## Interpreting *Laborem Exercens*

PROFESSOR WILLIAM A. STANMEYER

It is indeed a privilege to join this company of scholars, many of whom I have known as personal friends for some years, in meditating on Pope John Paul II's new encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*, "On Human Work." I am fortunate that the luck of the draw, or the whim of the Chairman, positioned my remarks after those of Drs. Dougherty and Ryn and Father Schall, because I have profited by their insights and may be more able to avoid saying too much or too little about a given theme in this essay.

For a five-year period concluding in 1968, I had the privilege of teaching social philosophy to undergraduates; and during much of that time I taught a course expressly titled "Papal Social Encyclicals." We studied and augmented with outside readings the encyclicals: *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*; the one on Atheistic Communism and the one on Christian Education of Youth; and the last two of this genre, *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*.

I was struck at the time by the ease with which various ideologically motivated groups could pick and choose a phrase here, a passage there, to prove their pre-conceived positions. For example, because Pope John XXIII used a word which was usually translated as "socialization," those who would draft the Pope into their own ideological army claimed he had endorsed Socialism. Conveniently overlooked were passages (such as #53) stressing the priority of the individual person or the importance of decentralizing society's decision-making through adherence to the principle of subsidiarity; and the original Latin text, which used the words *socialium rationum incrementa*, which is better translated "increase in social relations and social organizations" rather than the misleading "socialization."

I have a hunch that *Laborem Exercens* may have to endure the same treatment. The attempt to forestall such a fate is presumably one of the purposes of this symposium. With that goal in mind, I turn to the first major point.

### The Spiritual Nature of Work

In dealing with any statement by the present Pope, we must remember that this is a man who is very much a practical philosopher. He is to the fields of philosophy and theology what most of our nation's Founding Fathers were to the fields of law and government. He combines a concrete and "existential" grasp of particulars with a remarkable ability to generalize and abstract—a natural, though rare, combination—fitting for a man who himself has been a manual worker and, later, a writer of a theological doctoral dissertation on "The Problem of Faith in Saint John of the Cross."

Therefore it is with some hesitation that one begins the task of analyzing the Pope's thought. Though the encyclical is long and, to a cursory reader, somewhat repetitious, it does have some profound insights to which, one fears, he may not do justice without greater analysis and reflective commentary from others. The basic point about the spiritual nature of work is an illustration. One suspects that those generals in the ideological wars will try to draft the Pope into their army without admitting that his spirituality makes him very much a conscientious objector in the attacks by materialism against the remnant of Christian principle still animating the corpse that once was Western Civilization.

The Pope seeks to prevent this distortion of his teaching at the outset, by basing his argument on the Book of Genesis: the fact that God created this universe, that we work "to subdue, to dominate the earth" and to reflect "the very action of the creator of the universe." (#4) The reason this is important to man is, in the words of the Pope, the fact that:

...as the 'image of God' he is a person, that is to say, a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself, and with a tendency to self-realization. (#6)

He stresses the point of God's hand throughout the Encyclical; thus, "At the beginning of man's work is the mystery of creation." (#12) For the Pope, work is always tied up with the transcendent and eschatological goal of man; he states that there needs to be:

. . .An inner effort on the part of the human spirit, guided by faith, hope, and charity. . .[so that] the work of the individual human being may be given the meaning which it has in the eyes of God and by means of which work enters into the salvation process. . . (#24)

Thus John Paul's view of labor is part of his broader view of man, the universe, and God—and anyone who attempts to take a passage here or a point there to grind some *a priori* axe of his own should, if he is honest, publicly admit or reject the traditional Christian understanding of the Fall and Redemption and ultimate transtemporal destiny of man in Christ. If he accepts these teachings, they give a definitive gloss to the words' meaning. If he rejects these teachings, he is hypocritical in claiming the words while casting aside their inner spirit and life.

### The Role of Women

In the section titled "Work and Personal Dignity," the Pope mentions that toil

is familiar to women, who sometimes without proper recognition on the part of society and even of their own families bear the daily burden and responsibility for their homes and the upbringing of their children. (#9)

and later he makes some statements which will not endear him to the feminists:

Experience confirms that there must be a social re-evaluation of the mother's role, of the toil connected with it and of the need that children have of care, love and affection in order that they may develop into responsible, morally and religiously mature and psychologically stable persons. It will redound to the credit of society to make it possible for a mother—without inhibiting her freedom, without psychological or practical discrimination, and without penalizing her as compared with other women—to devote herself to taking



care of her children and educating them in accordance with their needs. . *Having to abandon these tasks in order to take up paid work outside the home is wrong from the point of the good of society and of the family when it contradicts or hinders these primary goals of the mission of a mother.* (#19. Emphasis added)

A paragraph later he re-affirms the traditional view that men and women have different, complementary callings:

But it is fitting that they should be able to fulfill their tasks *in accordance with their own nature*, without being discriminated against and without being excluded from jobs for which they are capable, but also *without lack of respect* for their family aspirations and *for their specific role*. . .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.* (#20. Emphasis added)

Phrases such as “primary goals of the mission of a mother” and “tasks in accordance with their own nature. . .their specific role. . .what is specific to them. . .the family, in which women as mothers have an irreplaceable role” embody positions that the modern sophisticated world, with its plans for “day-care centers” and working wives, rejects. The Pope reiterates elemental truths, though one wishes he had spelled out the rationale for his position more fully: the fact, for instance, that many psychologists have discovered the importance of “bonding” by a young child with a permanently present and loving adult—usually the mother—for that child’s healthy psychological growth; and one wishes that he had spelled out its consequences more completely: the fact, for instance, that the tax codes of various nations, including I would say the United States, need revision to encourage married women to remain with their children rather than pursue an alternative “career.” We could do this, for example, by permitting tax credits for funds the

husband might deposit into a retirement fund for his homemaker-wife, a fund she would have if she left her children with the babysitter and worked for a company as a junior executive. I see potential support, in the Pope's words about not "penalizing her as compared with other women," for such provisions in the Family Protection Act now before the U.S. Senate—but I fear the generality of his comments will strip them of their practical impact.

### Utter Rejection of Marxism

The Pope rejects the "Economism and Materialism" of the Marxists (#13). Indeed, he rejects the theoretical infrastructure, if one may so call it, of the Marxist thesis: the antithetical clash between capital and labor. He asserts without equivocation:

that capital cannot be separated from labor; in no way can labor be opposed to capital or capital to labor, and still less can the actual people behind these concepts be opposed to each other. . .

Opposition between labor and capital does not spring from the structure of the production process or from the structure of the economic process.

Later in the same section (13) he insists on "the primacy of the person over things":

The break occurred in such a way that labor was separated from capital and set in opposition to it, and capital was set in opposition to labor, as though they were two impersonal forces, two production factors juxtaposed in the same "economistic" perspective. This way of stating the issue contained a fundamental error. . .the error of economism. . .an error of materialism. . .

A moment later he removes any doubt about the application of this analysis to Communism:

. . .it is obvious that materialism, including its dialectical form, is incapable of providing sufficient and

definitive bases for thinking about human work. . . In dialectical materialism too man is not first and foremost the subject of work. . . but continues to be understood and treated. . . as a kind of "resultant" of . . . production relations prevailing. . .

Nor does the Holy Father lend his support to various forms of Western socialism, with their crusades to "nationalize" the means of production and thereby, in an abstract sense, to "make social" the ownership and control of property. While condemning, as had his predecessors, "'rigid' capitalism" (#14) and while reiterating the Church's position that there is a "universal destination of goods and the right to common use of them," he points out that

many deeply desired reforms cannot be achieved by an *a priori* elimination of private ownership of the means of production.

The reason is that the Socialist Appropriators who replace the Capitalist Exploiters amount to only one more "ruling class" likely to commit the same anti-personalist sins in the name of social government as did the private entrepreneurs they replaced:

For it must be noted that merely taking these means of production. . . out of the hands of their private owners is not enough to ensure their satisfactory socialization. They cease to be the property of a certain social group, namely the private owners, and become the property of organized society, coming under the administration and direct control of another group of people. . .

This group in authority may carry out its work satisfactorily from the point of view of the priority of labor; but it may also carry it out badly by claiming for itself a monopoly of the administration and disposal of the means of production and not refraining even from offending basic human rights. Thus, merely converting the means of production into state property in the collectivist systems is by no means equivalent to "socializing" that property.

To me, this is simply a clear-headed comment by a man who has either carefully meditated on Milovan Djilas's book, *The New Class*; or spent a long time living in a country like Poland, or both.

### An Alternative to Marxism and Capitalist Individualism

The Papal social encyclicals have consistently sought a *via media* between liberal capitalism and Marxist/Fabian socialism. Pope John Paul continues in the same direction as Leo XIII and Pius XI: He condemns general government collectivization and centralization, as had Leo in *Rerum Novarum* (#7-24): e.g.,

...the fundamental principle of Socialism which would make all possessions public property is to be utterly rejected because it injures the very ones whom it seeks to help, contravenes the natural rights of individual persons, and throws the functions of the State and public peace into confusion. Let it be regarded, therefore, as established that in seeking help for the masses this principle before all is to be considered as basic, namely, that private ownership must be preserved inviolate. (#24)

And as had Pius XI:

We make this pronouncement: Whether considered as a doctrine, or an historical fact, or a movement, Socialism, if it remains truly Socialism...cannot be reconciled with the teachings of the Catholic Church because its concept of society itself is utterly foreign as to Christian truth. (*Quad. Anno*, #117)

If Socialism, like all errors, contains some truth...it is based nevertheless on a theory of human society peculiar to itself and irreconcilable with true Christianity. Religious socialism, Christian socialism, are contradictory terms; no one can be at the same time a good Catholic and a true Socialist. (*Quad. Anno*, #120)

Without perhaps the ringing rhetoric of his predecessors, John Paul continues this tradition.

And as had his predecessors, he rejects *laissez faire* capitalism. He declares (#14) that the “exclusive right to private ownership of the means of production” is not “an untouchable ‘dogma’ of economic life.” Rather, “The principle of respect for work demands that this right should undergo a constructive revision both in theory and in practice.”

He then illustrates with possible “adaptations of the sphere of the right to ownership of the means of production”:

proposals for joint ownership of the means of work, sharing by the workers in the management and/or profits of businesses, so-called shareholding by labor, etc.

He urges that

A way toward the goal [of considering oneself a part owner] could be found by associating labor with the ownership of capital, as far as possible, and by producing a wide range of intermediate bodies with economic, social, and cultural purposes. . .

Here again the reader fears the Pope’s words may be misapplied by those who do not realize how far, in some ways, industrialized nations like the United States have gone to implement, in a practical way, such ideas. For example: Sears has long had a “profit-sharing” program for its employees; more recently companies have begun paying their employees in stock; to supplement their regular wages; and the rapid growth of ESOPs—Employee Stock Ownership Plans—in the last couple of years suggests that we are on the brink of perhaps wholesale adoption of some of the Pope’s general suggestions on widening worker ownership of the means of production. Finally, as the Pope points out, “. . .the justice of a socioeconomic system. . .deserves. . .to be evaluated by the way in which man’s work is properly remunerated. . .In every case, a just wage is the concrete means of verifying the justice of the whole socioeconomic system. . .” In America, wages are generally far *higher*, compared to the return in terms of productivity that the worker gives to his employer, than they are in such nations as Japan and West Germany—another reason to reject any claim that the Pope is condemning American “welfare capitalism.”

### Some Weaknesses

I turn now to what strike me as some weaknesses in the encyclical, due perhaps to the Pope's recognition of the misuse his enemies in Poland might make of his words or perhaps to the failure of some of his advisors to recall the twisting some phrases in *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris* were given. I make these comments with some hesitance, considering the eminence of the writer compared with the commentator; still, an honest reviewer must mention what seems more bitter than sweet.

First, I notice the absence of explicit reiteration of the principle of subsidiarity. That principle had been a keystone of the earlier social encyclicals. Briefly, it teaches that "larger" or "higher" social and governmental groups are "subsidiary" to the primal units, the individual and the family; and that one should transfer an essential task to these "higher" groups only after giving the "next higher" group or unit the first opportunity to "solve" or deal with the task; that one goes up through a hierarchy and always tries, as soon as possible, to transfer the task back "down" to the primal unit. Concretely, education of children is a task for the family, then for private groups and associations (including, but not limited to, churches), neighborhoods, cities, states, and nation—in that order. Thus, caring for the elderly and infirm is a task for the family, then for private groups and associations, and so on. Subsidiarity is a key to the Pope's "personalist" social philosophy, because it combines power, authority, and responsibility as close as possible to the problem: namely, in the individual and the primary group, the family.

There is no doubt that Pope John Paul agrees with this. He stresses the lineal continuity of his words with his predecessors. He stresses the importance of the family. He condemns any "system of excessive bureaucratic centralization" (#15) and the mere transfer of ownership to the state. Indeed, he strongly suggests the point in the sentence immediately following the last words quoted:

associating labor with the ownership of capital. . .and producing a wide range of intermediate bodies with economic, social, and cultural purposes, they would be bodies enjoying real autonomy with regard to the

public powers, pursuing their specific aims in honest collaboration with each other and in subordination to the demands of the common good, and they would be living communities both in form and in substance in the sense that the members of each body would be looked upon and treated as persons and encouraged to take an active part in the life of the body (#14-15).

I am reminded here of the medieval Guilds, of the writings of Robert Nisbet in such books as *Community and Power* (sometimes titled, *The Quest for Community*), and of recent thoughts by Michael Novak on "intermediating groups." I also suggest that the "real autonomy" the Pope urges for these groups makes sense only if the principle of subsidiarity is honored: that is, only if they have something to do and the state permits them to do it. Thus there is no doubt that the Pope supports the principle, though leaving it to inference.

Second, he introduces the concept of the "Indirect Employer" (#17) an idea which contains considerable potential for misunderstanding. For he applies it "to every society and in the first place to the State." I think more is lost than gained, in clarity of thought, when one suggests that the State is the employer of us all—even indirectly. What the Pope means, it appears, is that the state creates the context and the conditions of employment and thus the justice of its socio-economic rules, exactions, and arrangements is a factor in realizing the humanization of work and the just rights of labor.

Third, the Pope has some thoughts on unemployment (#18) which do not do justice to the problem in an industrialized nation such as the United States. First of all, his words may be read to suggest that the *mere fact* of unemployment is in itself "the opposite of a just and right situation." This is somewhat oversimplified. In a mobile society with seasonal adjustments, with many bankruptcies removing employers from economic activity even as the creation of numerous new companies and businesses adds to the employment market, there is certain to be an unemployment rate of 4 to 7 percent most of the time. Employment is related to productivity, and over the long haul it is better for an unproductive worker to be out of a job for a time—perhaps while he goes to school to be retrained—than to continue paying him for a job in which he does nothing

useful or helpful to meet society's real needs for goods and services. With the advent of the automobile, many carriage- and harness-makers became unemployed; but it would not have served the health of society for the government, say, to subsidize the harness-making industry to keep them in their jobs. I believe that when the Pope says unemployment "in all cases is an evil," one must distinguish: it is an economic evil if it is permanent and wide-spread and not the fault of the worker (whose pride, in some cases, insists on a high-paid job or none at all, as in the case of the P.A.T.C.O. employees who are now out of work), but it may sometimes be a moral good for him—forcing him to reassess his proper role and seek more diligently to find a truly productive job. If they are not general and systemic, pockets of temporary and episodic unemployment can sometimes be an economic good for society: if the unemployment derived, for instance, from the bankruptcy and dissolution of companies simply not meeting the real needs of the changing society. Indeed, it is only through temporary unemployment that laborers, skilled and unskilled, become available to move to businesses being formed or expanding. Without transitional unemployment, the labor force could not move from a dying industry to a growing one. Where, for example, would the burgeoning computer industry or solar heat industry obtain workers and technicians except largely from prior employment in technical jobs no longer economically desirable? Thus the Pope's words on unemployment leave something to be desired, especially since they will surely be co-opted by the ideological crusaders who want government to be "the employer of last resort," something it cannot do, because it really does not have the money to pay them; and it does not *produce* anything of serious value for society.

### Unemployment and Inflation

A footnote: the Pope's comments about the unemployment of young people also are insufficient. In the United States a sizeable number of unemployed teenagers are without a job because of the minimum wage and other government rules, which price low-skilled labor out of its market, giving the potential employer incentives to *cut* his work force and even to automate, where he can, to avoid the frustrations—and costs—of



dealing with unreliable and overly mobile, yet high-priced, trainees. In light of many studies over the last 20 years (e.g., those of black economists Thomas Sowell and Walter Williams), there is no doubt that teenage and young-adult unemployment in the United States is due primarily to the political distortions introduced into the economic labor market by a well meaning but naive federal government seeking to legislate a wage that is disproportionately high compared with what these young would-be workers might produce.

Finally, the encyclical is silent about inflation, which robs all laborers, manual and intellectual, of the fruit of their toil. In the Pope's theory, the public authority—ultimately, the national government—is responsible for the *conditions* requisite to promote the common good. Yet in the United States and many other industrialized countries the main cause of inflation is: the national government. Thus the public authority, charged with the duty to protect its citizens, also robs them—by creating *fiat* currency, debasing the money already in circulation; and by borrowing enormous sums so that it can spend more than its tax revenues, thus pushing interest rates so high that all workers are damaged. For example, the construction workers in housing are presently unemployed at *twice* the rate of the general population; and only the rich can afford home mortgages—even while the government obligates itself to pay exorbitant service-on-the-debt (in the U.S., over \$90 billion this year). Such a policy contains considerable immorality: the theft of personal savings, the destruction of habits of frugality and thrift, the deception undergirding the government pretense of compassion which masks its self-indulgent failure to control its own appetite for spending, a mentality of greed and envy animating hundreds of factions elbowing each other out of the way to get their slice of someone else's pie, a collective prodigality that makes the Prodigal Son of the Gospel look ascetic compared to our nation. Like unemployment, inflation is a crushing burden for the laborer and it deserved some attention in a Letter such as this.

Despite these strictures, this is an excellent document. It blends a good deal of practical wisdom with the alpha and omega of reality, the spiritual dimension. It reiterates the Church's basic teachings that private enterprise is a good system, though subject to abuse; and that Marxist totalitarianism is a fraud, not only because of its economic failures but primarily

because it fails to admit the true nature of man. It reiterates the need for moderation in this area; as for example, its point (#20) that "a strike remains. . .an extreme means," and the last resort; and that "when essential community services are in question" there can be no "right to strike." It insists, rightly, that we have a human nature which, in essentials, will not change—and thus women's distinctive role is the upbringing of children. But most of all it reminds us that the value of work is not what is produced externally, but the inner spiritualization of the person who works, and thus that even menial and hidden labor, if done "in and through Christ" is of great value. Thus I say, if any Marxist seeks to co-opt the Pope in this Letter, let us first ask him to answer the ultimate question for mankind the last 2,000 years: "What think ye of Jesus Christ?"

# 6

# The Heritage Lectures

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With the publication of his encyclical *On Human Work*, Pope John Paul II plunged into the debate about the value of labor, and the proper approach to economic life in modern society.

Recognizing the importance of the Pope's ideas and the reactions that they have elicited, The Heritage Foundation brought several outstanding scholars together soon after the publication of the encyclical, to discuss its meaning and its implications. The results of that seminar provide a unique insight into modern economic theory and its ethical dimensions.

This seminar was co-sponsored by the School of Philosophy and the Department of Politics at the Catholic University of America.

  
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