

# Prospettive sul lavoro

Percorsi interdisciplinari

A cura di Maria Aparecida Ferrari







PONTIFICIA UNIVERSITÀ DELLA SANTA CROCE

# PROSPETTIVE SUL LAVORO

Percorsi interdisciplinari

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a cura di  
Maria Aparecida Ferrari

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# SOMMARIO

<i>Presentazione</i> .....	7
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## I. AFFACCIARSI ALLA STORIA:

### PROGRESSO DELLA COMPRESIONE DEL LAVORO

BRAD S. GREGORY

<i>Work in the Protestant and Catholic Traditions Compared: A Historical Analysis</i> .....	13
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CONCEPCIÓN PEIG, M. VICTORIA ROQUE

<i>Aportaciones al estatuto ontológico del trabajo desde la teología</i> .....	29
--	----

JENS ZIMMERMANN

<i>Beyond Competing Paradigms: The Dignity of Work in Lutheran and Catholic Social Ethics</i> .....	43
---	----

BERNARD ŁUKASZ SAWICKI OSB

<i>La creatività quale misura del valore etico del lavoro. Un confronto fra tradizione monastica, Riforma e comunismo</i> .....	61
---	----

MARIA AJROLDI

<i>La spiritualità del lavoro nelle rappresentazioni medievali</i> .....	79
--	----

## II. PANORAMA TEOLOGICO:

### VARIAZIONI E PUNTI D'INCONTRO

PABLO BLANCO SARTO

<i>Un confronto temerario. Sacerdozio comune e ministeriale in Lutero e in Escrivá</i> .....	93
--	----

SOMMARIO

CATALINA BERMÚDEZ MERIZALDE <i>Dos perspectivas sobre el trabajo profesional, una mirada comparativa: Martín Lutero y Josemaría Escrivá</i> .....	111
ULF THOENE, ÁLVARO TURRIAGO-HOYOS <i>Luther, the Protestant Reformation, and Laying the Foundations for Vocational Education</i> .....	125
ROBERT WIELOCKX <i>Thomas d'Aquin sur la symbiose des intentions de Paul fabricant de tentes (tisserand) et missionnaire</i> .....	135
CECILIA ECHEVERRÍA FALLA <i>La transformación del trabajo en la cultura secular. Consideraciones en torno a la cuestión en W. Pannenberg</i> .....	147
MIGUEL ALFONSO MARTÍNEZ-ECHEVARRÍA ORTEGA, GERMÁN SCALZO <i>El sentido del trabajo en Max Weber</i> .....	165

III. GUARDARE INNANZI: TRAGUARDI POSSIBILI

MICHAËL GONIN <i>The Contribution of the Reformation's Concept of Vocation to Business Ethics</i> .....	187
MARIA HELENA GUERRA PRATAS <i>Family and work: a shared task</i> .....	201
IGNAZIO GENOVESE <i>Custodi dei beni del creato: la cooperazione uomo-donna nella teologia cattolica e luterana</i> .....	217
CHRISTINE GAUTIER <i>Human work and self-realization, a thomistic approach</i> .....	229
MARIA APARECIDA FERRARI <i>"Amare il prossimo come se stesso" mediante il lavoro professionale</i> ....	247

## PRESENTAZIONE

*Prospettive sul lavoro* è una raccolta di studi che si concentrano su un aspetto trasversale della storia, della cultura e dell'esistenza di ciascun uomo: il lavoro nella sua inesauribilità di significato e mutamento che incide sulla quotidianità e sulle trasformazioni epocali. Navigando in questo mare, il libro getta l'ancora nel periodo che va dalla Riforma protestante fino a oggi.

Gli studi di carattere interdisciplinare raccolti in questo volume rappresentano parte degli interventi presentati al Convegno "The Heart of the Work" (19-20 ottobre 2017 – Pontificia Università della Santa Croce – Roma), organizzato in occasione di due anniversari: il 500° della Riforma protestante e il primo centenario della Rivoluzione russa del 1917, con il proposito di esaminare la concezione cristiana del lavoro professionale nella tradizione protestante e in quella cattolica.

Il primo gruppo di studi è raccolto sotto il titolo *Affacciarsi alla storia: progresso della comprensione del lavoro*, perché gli scritti ivi raccolti si occupano dello sviluppo della comprensione del significato del lavoro raggiunta nel tempo. La prima relazione è di Brad S. Gregory, che si concentra sul senso del lavoro nella teologia cattolica e in quella protestante, avendo come referente implicito il "Vangelo del Lavoro" esposto nell'enciclica *Laborem exercens* di Giovanni Paolo II. Sulla stessa linea si colloca la comunicazione di Concepción Peig e M. Victoria Roque, che riprendono il Magistero contemporaneo insieme al contributo di alcuni studiosi sulla piena integrazione del lavoro come categoria teologica. L'intervento di Jens Zimmermann mette, invece, in discussione l'idea che nella teologia di Lutero vi sia una separazione fra la fede e la responsabilità sociale, e avanza la proposta di realizzare in questo ambito uno sforzo propriamente ecumenico, giacché la vocazione umana al lavoro è universale, radicata nell'essere fatti a immagine di Dio. Bernard Łukasz Sawicki sostiene che il tentativo compiuto dalla Riforma luterana di



spostare gli ideali monastici dal chiostro alla città – come fa, del resto, anche la concezione comunista del lavoro – servano paradossalmente per confermare la validità e l'insostituibilità del lavoro monastico caratterizzato dalla creatività e dal valore etico. Il testo di Maria Ajroldi contesta, invece, l'idea che nel medioevo non ci sarebbe stata nessuna valorizzazione teologica del lavoro, poiché – come dice l'autrice – mosaici e rilievi, sculture e affreschi dell'arte cristiana mostrano una palese comprensione del suo significato per la vita dei fedeli.

La prospettiva teologica caratterizza il secondo gruppo di interventi, intitolato *Panorama teologico: variazioni e punti di incontro*. Pablo Blanco Sarto analizza i principali punti della teologia cattolica sul sacerdozio ministeriale e della proposta di Lutero sul sacerdozio universale dei cristiani, e conclude l'analisi con un riferimento agli insegnamenti di san Josemaría Escrivá sull'interdipendenza fra il ruolo santificante del laico e il ruolo santificante del sacerdote. Segue lo studio di Catalina Bermúdez Merizalde, che approfondisce la dimensione professionale del lavoro nella teologia di Lutero e in quella di san Josemaría, differenziate dall'antropologia di fondo dei rispettivi approcci e dalla diversa comprensione del valore redentore delle opere umane. Il contributo di Ulf Thoene e Álvaro Turriago-Hoyos esamina le idee di Lutero sull'educazione, valutandone l'applicazione fatta dai clerici e dagli educatori protestanti nella Germania dei secoli XVIII e XIX, e si concentra in particolare sul progetto educativo di August Hermann Francke, segnato dal pietismo e dalla convinzione del rapporto fra esercizi di pietà e sviluppo di competenze professionali e di efficienza. Il contributo di Robert Wielockx parte dalla distinzione tra due tipi di lavoro nella vita di san Paolo, quello del fabbricatore di tende e quello del suo ministero pubblico di evangelizzatore. L'Apostolo rivendica sia il diritto alla remunerazione per il suo ministero pubblico, sia la sua libertà a non farlo valere esercitando, invece, un lavoro civile per guadagnarsi la vita e sollevando da questo onere la comunità (cfr. 1 Ts 2,9). L'autore espone poi la dottrina di san Tommaso secondo cui nei due casi l'intenzione dell'Apostolo è la stessa: come fabbricatore di tende e come ministro della Chiesa, non vuole altro che servire portando i pesi degli altri (cfr. Gal 6,2); e questa sarebbe l'unica "anima" dei suoi due "lavori".

La comunicazione di Cecilia Echevarría si occupa dell'interpretazione del lavoro di W. Pannenberg e della sua denuncia delle ambigue conseguenze della secolarizzazione moderna, dall'anonimato del lavoratore alla crisi ecologica; inoltre, analizza la proposta del teologo luterano di ricomprendere il lavoro alla luce di una nuova lettura dell'incarico divino di "lavorare e dominare" la terra. Nell'ultimo studio di questa sezione Germán Scalzo e Miguel Alfonso Martínez-Echevarría Ortega osservano che la tensione fra rivelazione e natura, che contraddistingue il protestantesimo, è presente anche alla radice del pensiero di Max Weber e determina alcune conseguenze fondamentali sul senso del lavoro nella sociologia weberiana.

La terza sezione, *Guardare innanzi: traguardi possibili*, ha una prospettiva etica e approfondisce diversi aspetti della libertà nell'esercizio del lavoro professionale. Michaël Gonin mette in evidenza l'importanza della tradizione cristiana per l'etica degli affari, sia perché la richiama verso un orizzonte di finalità che supera la sola ragione del profitto, sia in quanto chiarisce la relazione tra i problemi di *business ethics* e la concezione umana della vita, della società e della trascendenza. La cooperazione uomo-donna è contemplata in due comunicazioni. Maria Helena Guerra Pratas parte dall'odierna situazione sociologica della donna nel mondo del lavoro e dal suo rapporto con la crisi della famiglia e l'insufficienza di rinnovo generazionale. La sua tesi è che l'attuale crisi, soprattutto europea, che non si risolve col materialismo marxista né mediante l'etica protestante del lavoro, debba fare appello alla dottrina cattolica: la cura del creato affidata da Dio alla persona umana, maschio e femmina insieme, e lo stretto legame fra lavoro e famiglia. Ignazio Genovese tratta del diverso paradigma della cooperazione uomo-donna nell'ambito luterano-protestante e in quello cattolico, e propone una sintesi in cui il lavoro si fonda sulla personalità irripetibile di ciascun individuo e sulla socialità in termini di originaria reciprocità e complementarietà. Christine Gautier riprende vari passi della teologia di san Tommaso d'Aquino per evidenziare alcune virtù che, riscoperte dall'uomo di oggi, rendono più raggiungibile il perfezionamento di se stessi e l'impegno lavorativo. Maria Aparecida Ferrari analizza, alla luce della

## PRESENTAZIONE

comprensione luterana del lavoro e di quella cattolica, l'applicazione del principio "amare l'altro come se stesso" nell'esercizio della professione.

È doveroso chiudere questa presentazione del primo dei cinque volumi che compongono gli Atti di "The Heart of the Work", esprimendo la nostra gratitudine a quanti hanno contribuito allo sviluppo delle giornate del Congresso e a quelli che hanno lavorato a questo libro, pregevole strumento per approfondire le prospettive umane e cristiane sul lavoro.

I. AFFACCIARSI ALLA STORIA:  
PROGRESSO DELLA COMPrensIONE  
DEL LAVORO



# WORK IN THE PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC TRADITIONS COMPARED: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

*Brad S. Gregory\**

My aim in this paper is to offer some reflections on Protestantism and Catholicism in relationship to work, seen in historical perspective. I will do so by taking a longer-term approach, beginning with some thoughts on Christianity and work in history more generally and about Christian commentary on work prior to the Protestant Reformation. Such a perspective is implicit in the most substantial papal document on work and its theological as well as human significance in the modern era, St. Pope John Paul II's *Laborem exercens*, his encyclical about work written in 1981 for the ninetieth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum*.

Considering the centrality of human work to human life regardless of the historical period or civilization in question—from the time of the domestication of animals and settled agriculture several thousand years ago up to the present—relatively little serious theological reflection has been dedicated to the subject of human labor per se in the history of Christianity. It really is quite remarkable. Without some forms of sustained work, human beings die; even in the most elementary expressions of foraging for food, or hunting, or fishing, labor is indispensable to human survival and therefore a prerequisite for the possibility of human flourishing en route to the ultimate human goal of *beatitudo* with God. This fundamental indispensability of work characterizes every society and every culture since ancient times. As Pope John Paul II wrote in *Laborem exercens*, «work is part of “what is old”—as old as man and his life on earth», including as it does «any activity by man, whether manual

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\* University of Notre Dame.

or intellectual, whatever its nature or circumstances»<sup>1</sup>. In most if not all eras and in most human societies throughout history, most people have spent most of their waking hours working. So *prima facie* we might reasonably think that an activity in which—in its various expressions and in the variety of forms it has taken—most Christians have spent most of their time engaged during their lives would have inspired a rich tradition of theological reflection. We might reasonably have thought there were substantive, serious treatises and an insightful homiletic tradition addressing questions such as “How in their ordinary daily work do human beings follow Christ?” or “In what ways is the activity of a man working in the fields, a woman running a household, or an artisan weaving wool or cobbling shoes or carving wood related to the Gospel?” But this is not so. Despite the seeming obviousness of the importance of work in human life—daily labor, in whatever capacity—it is not a theme that was taken up *per se* in a sustained way for theological reflection in the early Church among the Church Fathers, or in medieval monasticism or scholasticism.

Readers of *Laborem exercens* might well get a different impression. In his encyclical, Pope John Paul II seeks briefly to give a historical picture about the impact of Christianity on the character of human labor in the ancient Mediterranean world, which in the first century, of course, was under the political sway of the Roman Empire. From what he says, it sounds as though Christianity brought about a revolution in the understanding of human labor:

«*The ancient world* introduced its own typical differentiation of people into classes according to the type of work done. Work which demanded from the worker the exercise of physical strength, the work of muscles and hands, was considered unworthy of free men, and was therefore given to slaves. By broadening certain aspects that already belonged to the Old Testament, Christianity brought about a fundamental change of ideas in this field, taking the whole content of the Gospel message as its point of departure, especially the fact that the one who, while *being God*, became like us in all things devoted most of the years of his life on earth to *manual work* at the carpenter’s bench [...]. Such a concept practically does away

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<sup>1</sup> St. JOHN PAUL II, *Laborem exercens*, §2, 14 September 1981, accessed online at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091981\\_laborem-exercens.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html) (31.3.2018). Subsequent references to the encyclical *Laborem exercens* (LE) are given parenthetically by section number in the body of the text.

with the very basis of the ancient differentiation of people into classes according to the kind of work done» (LE §6; italics in original).

In principle, perhaps, but certainly not in practice, were traditional ancient categories broken down by the divine condescension of the incarnation that simultaneously ennobled simple, humble work as modeled by Jesus—whether in the decades after Christ’s death and resurrection, while Christianity was still a fledgling but growing movement in the second and third centuries, or after Constantine gave his imperial stamp of approval to Christianity in the second decade of the fourth century, or once Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of the Empire in 380. Imperial support for Christianity did not alter the deeply hierarchical character of the Roman Empire in socioeconomic terms, including the persistence of slavery, nor indeed did the Christianization of medieval Europe, whether during the missionary endeavors of Benedictines and others in the sixth through the tenth centuries, or after the Gregorian revolution of the eleventh century. The presumptive fact that Jesus spent his young adult years in “manual work at the carpenter’s bench”, prior to taking up his public ministry and following his baptism by John the Baptist, was not something emphasized by patristic writers, who were preoccupied instead with the importance of Christ’s moral teachings and the implications of the incarnation for human redemption, salvation, and the understanding of God. In this they were only following the Gospel narratives themselves, which say not a word about Jesus between the incident when his parents find him teaching in the Temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2,41-51) and the annunciatory preaching of John the Baptist. Christ as simple craftsman, as humble laboring carpenter, is incidental if not irrelevant to the development of Christology and moral theology in the early and medieval Church.

Papal encyclicals are not works of historical scholarship, and it would be a mistake to expect them to be. But at the same time, it is important to the faith and to Catholic truth claims that what encyclicals say about the past not be mistaken, and it is preferable that they not be misleading. It seems that *Laborem exercens* is misleading, however, in the way it implies that a personalist understanding of human beings, in which for every person the purpose of work is «to realize his humanity, to fulfil the calling to be a person that is his by reason of his very humanity»



(LE §6), was something achieved by the advent of Christianity itself with respect to work, and has characterized either the Church's teaching or the Christian tradition more broadly from the ancient world to the modern era, by its emphasis on the human subject and the primary importance of the subjective character of work because «the one who carries it out is a person, a conscious and free subject, that is to say a subject that decides about himself» (LE §6). Section 7 of *Laborem exercens* opens with this sentence: «It is precisely these fundamental affirmations about work that always emerged from the wealth of Christian truth, especially from the very message of the "Gospel of Work", thus creating the basis for a new way of thinking, judging and acting» (LE §7). One might interpret this statement by distinguishing between *creating a basis for* a new way of thinking, judging, and acting as opposed *actually* to thinking, judging, and acting in new ways, but it seems to me that is about the most charitable reading one can give to Pope John Paul's assertion. The next sentence of the encyclical jumps all the way to the modern period and the forms of materialistic and economic thought that accompanied the industrial era—forms of thought that are, to be sure, incompatible with traditional Christian views about human beings and human flourishing. But there is almost nothing in the encyclical about the first seventeen centuries of Christian history, between the advent of the Gospel's supposed revolution in the conceptualization of labor and the period of the industrial revolution. The industrial revolution indeed brought about a massive transformation of human society, beginning in Britain at the end of the eighteenth century and spreading to other European countries and North America in the nineteenth. The associated disruptions led eventually to the Church's attempts to address radically new social and economic conditions, including new forms of industrial labor, in modern Catholic social teaching, beginning with *Rerum novarum* and influenced by theologians such as Archbishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler of Mainz (1811-1877)<sup>2</sup>. There are no references to patristic sources in *Laborem exercens*, nor do any of the four references to Thomas Aquinas's works in the encyclical concern labor in a substantive or direct way (cf LE §§9, 14, 15).

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<sup>2</sup> Georges GOYAU, *Ketteler, Wilhelm Emmanuel, Baron von*, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 8, Encyclopedia Press, New York 1913, pp. 629-631.

We can find scattered remarks in the Church Fathers about labor that might at least be seen as compatible with what *Laborem exercens* states about the ennobling, transformative character of labor rooted in the example of Jesus' work as a carpenter. St. John Chrysostom writes in a homily on 1 Corinthians, for example, that when you «see one driving nails, smiting with a hammer, covered with soot, do not therefore hold him cheap, but rather for that reason admire him, since even Peter girded himself and handled the dragnet and went fishing after the resurrection of the Lord»<sup>3</sup>; and St. Augustine, referring to St. Paul, states that «the Apostle then would not disdain either to take in hand any work of peasants, or to be employed in the labor of craftsmen», and more generally, he writes that whatever work is done innocently and without fraud «is good»<sup>4</sup>. There are other remarks, too, that fit better with ideas discussed by John Paul II at the end of his encyclical, almost as an afterthought, but which seem more representative of the preponderant emphasis throughout most of the history of Christianity about the theological significance and spiritual meaning of work. This tradition sees in human labor not the individual development of God-given human capacities and the subjective realization of human personhood, but an opportunity for co-suffering with Christ through the unpleasantness of taxing work. Hence, for example, Chrysostom in his commentary on Gen 3,19 glosses God's punishment of Adam thus: «I curse the ground so that it will not in future yield its harvest as before without tilling and ploughing; instead, I invest you with great labor, toil and difficulty, and I am ensuring that everything you do is achieved only by sweat [. . .]. Nor will this continue for a short period or brief space of time: it will last all your life»<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> St. John CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, on 1 Cor 8,13, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first ser., vol. 12, ed. Philip Schaff, Christian Literature Publishing, Buffalo 1889, homily 20.12 (translation slightly modified), accessed online at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/220120.htm> (31.3.2018).

<sup>4</sup> St. AUGUSTINE, *Of the Works of Monks*, trans. H. Browne, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff, Christian Literature Publishing, Buffalo 1887, chap. 14, accessed online at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1314.htm> (31.3.2018).

<sup>5</sup> St. John CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on Genesis, 1-17*, trans. Robert C. Hill, Catholic University of America Press, Washington 1986, p. 244.

The sixth-century *Rule of St. Benedict*, «a school for the Lord’s service», as the prologue puts it, shaped a monastic tradition known for prayer and work—*ora et labora*<sup>6</sup>. There is certainly a stress on the importance of “good works” inspired by scripture and geared toward the imitation of Christ throughout the Rule, most explicitly in the seventy-two “instrumenta bonorum operum” in Chapter 4. Yet despite the original importance of manual labor in monastic life, the terse and flexible Rule includes very little commentary on or theological reflection about it. Chapter 48, devoted to manual labor, begins with reference to a concern common also among patristic authors: «Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore, the brothers should have specified periods for manual labor as well as for prayerful reading»<sup>7</sup>. The remainder of the chapter is given mostly to recommended allotments of time to be devoted to each type of activity at different times of the day through the major divisions of the liturgical year. There is nothing at all about the meaning or purpose of work beyond the avoidance of idleness. Elsewhere, the Rule stipulates that «no one will be excused from kitchen service, unless he is sick or engaged in some important business of the monastery, for such service increases reward and fosters love», yet there is no explication at all about what that increased reward might be<sup>8</sup>. Chapter 57, on the craftsmen in the monastic community, mentions the danger of pride and little else: «If there are artisans in the monastery, they are to practice their craft with all humility, but only with the abbot’s permission. If one of them becomes puffed up by his skillfulness in his craft [...] he is to be removed from practicing his craft and not allowed to resume it unless, after manifesting his humility, he is so ordered by the abbot»<sup>9</sup>. Taken together, it seems fair to say that these prescriptions and warnings, minimal as they are, are not oriented toward labor as a central means of realizing one’s humanity except insofar as it helps one avoid idleness and practice the self-discipline essential to those seeking to follow Christ:

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<sup>6</sup> St. BENEDICT OF NURSIA, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, ed. Timothy Fry, O.S.B., Vintage, New York 1998, p. 5; the Latin phrases in this paragraph are taken from the text accessed at <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/benedict.html> (31.3.2018).

<sup>7</sup> *Rule of St. Benedict*, cit., p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

«the labor of obedience will bring you back to him from whom you had drifted by the sloth of disobedience»<sup>10</sup>.

What about St. Thomas Aquinas? Surely in the breadth of the *Summa Theologiae*, one might think, there must be some substantive analysis of labor, considering its centrality in the lives of his thirteenth-century Christian contemporaries, including in bustling cities such as Paris and Cologne where the Angelic Doctor studied and taught. In one sense, of course, much of what Aquinas says in his exhaustive analysis of human acts, in his treatment of virtues and vices, applies more specifically to the acts involved in work, regardless of one's occupation or the type of labor involved. But it is striking that there is no consideration of labor per se. In the *Secunda secundae*, after 170 questions on the three theological and four cardinal virtues, Aquinas devotes 11 questions to different types and states of life. Not one concerns lay life per se, nor are any dedicated to a state of life that involves manual labor<sup>11</sup>. The traditional distinction between the contemplative and active lives, rooted in the Gospel story of Mary and Martha, serves as a basis for analyzing the relative merits of ecclesiastical and religious life that focus respectively on action or contemplation. St. Thomas was certainly aware of the reality of physical work outside religious life; he notes that «under manual labor are comprised all those human occupations whereby man can lawfully gain a livelihood, whether by using his hands, his feet, or his tongue»<sup>12</sup>. But “active life” is not extended to include any explicit consideration of anyone who grew the crops, tended the sheep, sheared the wool, wove the cloth, cut the trees, fashioned the furniture, constructed the wagons, harvested the grapes, made the wine, dug and maintained the wells, cut and hauled the stone, laid the bricks, and constructed the buildings—or any of the many other forms of labor that surrounded Aquinas and other thirteenth-century university professors, and on which their own lives depended in crucial ways. Again, despite eleven questions about the ecclesiastical and religious states, there is no discussion of the lay state of Christian life. Status is analyzed fundamentally according to the

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Prologue, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> St. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the Dominican English Province, 5 vols. Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Ind. 1981, vol. 4, II-II qq. 179-189, pp. 1923-2010.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 187 a.3 r.

distinction between freedom and servitude and with respect to internal and external acts, considered as such<sup>13</sup>.

Aquinas's most explicit remarks in the *Summa* on manual labor per se are found in II-II, q.187, a.3, when he is addressing whether the members of religious orders are bound to engage in it (in other words, even here the mention of labor is indirect and oblique). In this discussion, St. Thomas says that manual labor is directed toward four things: above all and chiefly to the obtaining of food (and here he refers to Gen 3,19, the same passage on which Chrysostom was commenting, «by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread»), as well as to combating idleness (as we saw also with Saint Benedict), to curbing concupiscence through disciplining and occupying the body, and finally to obtaining provisions for almsgiving. The first is a matter of necessity, insofar as human beings cannot live without food; the others are not necessary, insofar as their ends can be obtained by means besides work. Without belaboring the point, it seems fair to say that what Aquinas says about work—human labor per se—is minimal, indirect, mostly abstract, and not theologically expansive. It is quite distant from the exalted terms in which John Paul II describes work, and in which we might have thought labor had been regarded and experienced during the history of the Church, based on what *Laborem exercens* implies about the transformative “Gospel of Work” following the advent of Christianity.

A brief exposition cannot come close to being comprehensive, of course. But I suspect that expanding the range of sources would reinforce the impression conveyed by the few cited here about the impoverished character of theological reflection on and writing about the spiritual significance of human work as such for most of the history of the Catholic tradition. It would seem that there is very little in the ancient, medieval, or (as we shall see) even the early modern Church comparable to the deliberate, self-conscious awareness of and reflection on labor that is characteristic of modern Catholic social teaching from *Rerum novarum* through the documents of Vatican II, *Laborem exercens*, and the other papal encyclicals up through Pope Francis's *Laudato si'*. The substantive beginnings of this sort of more positive theological reflection

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 183.

on the meaning of work can be seen, it would seem, in some Renaissance humanist writers such as Giannozzo Manetti (1396-1459) in Florence or Benedetto Morandi (d. 1478) in Bologna, both of whom expressed more affirmative, constructive ideas about human work than much of the preceding tradition as part of their more exalted view of human beings<sup>14</sup>.

Perhaps the fact that Jesus was a carpenter, and that work is addressed in various ways in scripture, provided the basis for a Christian revolution in the understanding of work. If so, it seems not to have expressed itself very robustly in the early or medieval Church. Why not? Why was work regarded as a hedge against idleness, a bridle against concupiscence, even an expression of divine chastisement, and chiefly as a means of acquiring food but not as a path to human fulfillment or of self-realization along the lines implied by Pope John Paul II's personalism?

In all likelihood, the principal reason is that most work for most people in premodern history consisted of grueling, repetitive, and personally unfulfilling agricultural labor. It was not exciting, fascinating, or rewarding. It was heavily dependent on the vagaries of weather, shadowed by the threat of crop failure, and heavily influenced by diseases that adversely affected flocks of sheep, goats, and other animals, as part of human life lived close to the rhythms of the natural world and always subject to the possibility of subsistence crises that might augur famine. Ancient, medieval, and early modern Europe was not a world in which most men—and much less so, most women—had much choice about what they wanted to do with their lives. It was not a world in which most people (and again, women far less than men) had the opportunity for formal education, something rightly emphasized in modern Catholic social teaching as critical for the development of human beings' God-given gifts, or as *Laborem exercens* puts it, as something that is «always valuable and an important enrichment of the human person» for «becoming a human being is precisely the main purpose of the whole process of education» (LE §§8, 10).

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<sup>14</sup> Charles TRINKAUS, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols. (1970), University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Ind. 1995, vol. 1, pp. 247-248, 281-282.

It stands to reason, then, that there was little Christian reflection about what understandably was *not* regarded as a crucial path to human fulfillment in ancient, medieval, and early modern Christianity, and that instead work was understood primarily in negative, punitive, unpleasant terms. This does not imply, of course, that it was without value or went unredeemed, but rather that its principal connotations for most Christians, to the extent they reflected on the matter, would have been along the lines of what Pope John Paul mentions only at the very end of *Laborem exercens*: a matter of suffering, and of co-suffering with Christ, «by enduring the toil of work in union with Christ crucified for us», whereby a Christian «shows himself a true disciple of Christ by carrying the cross in his turn every day in the activity that he is called upon to perform» (LE §27). Lives of unchosen, grueling agricultural labor tend to lend themselves to this Christian experience and understanding of work, more than to a notion of personalist realization of God's gifts through the incremental fulfillment of one's freely chosen vocation, whether in premodern Europe or today.

Let us turn now to the Protestant Reformation. One of the ironies of *Laborem exercens* is that in its esteem for human work of all kinds, including those that are the preserve of lay Christians, it is knowingly or not the heir to a tradition that begins in an influential way with Martin Luther (1483-1546). In the premodern world dominated still by agricultural labor and characterized by artisanal crafts in the burgeoning towns of early sixteenth-century Europe, Luther spoke forcefully of the spiritual value of ordinary labor as part of his polemic against pious actions (or "works") as contributions to a Christian's process of salvation. This was a corollary of his new theology of faith, grace, and salvation. As he puts it in his *Treatise on Good Works* from the spring of 1520, God «is served by everything, whatever it may be, that is done, spoken, or conceived in faith»<sup>15</sup>. The key, according to Luther, is faith, and the feeling of certainty that in his view accompanied it; it was this which sanctified work and made it pleasing to God, regardless of what it was. «All individuals are able to tell and feel whether or not what they do is

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<sup>15</sup> Martin LUTHER, *Treatise on Good Works*, in *The Annotated Luther*, vol. 1, *The Roots of Reform*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2015, p. 268.

good. If their hearts are confident that their work is pleasing to God, then it is good even if it were something as trivial as picking up a straw»<sup>16</sup>.

Still, Luther's revaluation of the place of human labor in Christian life, and of its theological significance regardless of its particular expressions, is more nearly related to his rejection of the distinction between the clergy and laity as traditionally understood—it is a corollary of Luther's "priesthood of all believers" and his sanctification of lay life right alongside that of the clergy (a view that was not officially and forcefully articulated in the Catholic tradition until *Lumen gentium* during Vatican II). This position is expressed powerfully by Luther in his even more polemical treatise of 1520, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*. There he says, in deliberately provocative fashion, not only that «A cobbler, a blacksmith, a peasant—each has the work and office of his trade», but also that «they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and everyone should benefit and serve everyone else by means of their own work or office, so that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, just as all the members of the body serve one another (cf. 1 Cor 12,14-26)»<sup>17</sup>. Luther's view of clerical ordination and status, as well as his rejection of the monastic life in which he had taken vows and lived more than ten years, are of course incompatible with the Catholic position that was strongly reaffirmed by the Council of Trent. But his unabashed exaltation of ordinary lay work in all its expressions started something new in Western Christianity, an affirmation that complemented Renaissance humanism from a theologically more overt yet anthropologically much more pessimistic starting point. Something analogous could be said about John Calvin (1509-1564), with his strong sense of Christian *vocatio* that applied equally but differently to clergy and laity, men and women, and which would of course become central to Max Weber's extremely influential thesis about the Protestant work ethic. The survival and institutionalization of the Reformation in both its Lutheran and Reformed Protestant forms, in different regions in Europe, brought these ways of thinking about Protestant laypeople and Christian labor into the modern era.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 384.



Catholicism in the sixteenth century saw new attention given to Christian vocation, too, and to what is often called “discernment,” in ways rife with implications for human labor insofar as different sorts of work tended to accompany different vocations<sup>18</sup>. Here the influence of Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* is almost impossible to overstate, considering how widely they were administered and adaptively practiced—and as a matter of sheer numbers, it seems obvious that the large majority of those who made the exercises ended up not becoming Jesuits, but rather more self-conscious, more spiritually self-aware members of the laity. Yet the main concern of the *Exercises* is not labor per se, but rather the discernment of God’s will for one’s state in life, whether the clerical or married state, as a crucial means to one’s sole proper end: «for the praise of God our Lord and for the salvation of my soul»<sup>19</sup>. The Ignatian emphasis on discernment certainly had a major influence on the reflective self-deliberation of Catholics about vocation, more of whom, like their Protestant contemporaries, were also becoming better educated in larger numbers in the sixteenth century as part of a catechetical push common to rival confessions in the Reformation era. But we do not find in Ignatius as much reflection on or attribution of spiritual meaning to work per se, across all its forms, as we do in Luther or Calvin.

What about the great French devotional writer and Doctor of the Catholic Church who was influenced by Ignatian spirituality and education himself, St. François de Sales (1567-1622)? His *Introduction to the Devout Life* famously—and in a manner quite unlike the fifteenth-century *Imitation of Christ*, for example—emphasizes the compatibility of serious Christian devotion and love of God and neighbor with every station and vocation in life. In Chapter 3 of Book 1, entitled “Devotion is Suitable to Every Vocation and Profession”, St. François writes that God bids Christians «to bring forth fruits of devotion, each one according to his kind and vocation. A different exercise of devotion is required of each—the

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<sup>18</sup> On Catholic writing on and reflection about vocation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, I am indebted to Christopher J. LANE, *The Diversity of Vocations: Choosing a State of Life in Early Modern France*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame 2015.

<sup>19</sup> St. Ignatius LOYOLA, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. Anthony Mottola, intro. Robert W. Gleason, Image Books, Garden City, N.Y. 1964, pp. 82-83, quotation on p. 82.

noble, the artisan, the servant, the prince, the maiden, and the wife; and furthermore such practice must be modified according to the strength, the calling, and the duties of each individual». Relatedly, later in the same chapter, he says forcefully that «It is an error, nay more, a very heresy, to seek to banish the devout life from the soldier's guardroom, the mechanic's workshop, the prince's court, or the domestic's hearth»<sup>20</sup>. In a sense, we can see in this universal adaptability of devotion to every occupation a Catholic response to Luther's priesthood of all believers and his emphasis on the sacred character of lay work in the world. And yet the emphasis is different. The focus of François de Sales's *Introduction to the Devout Life* is not work, and the treatise does not offer a theological reflection on the meaning or spiritual significance of human labor. Rather, the focus is *devotion*, understood properly as the love of God realized most fully, and his main point is the compatibility of devotion with all types of Christian lay callings. De Sales emphasizes devotion, Ignatius concentrates on discernment, but neither says much about human labor as such—certainly not in anything like the sense that Pope St. John Paul II reflects on it in *Laborem exercens*.

It seems fair to way say that it is only in modern Catholic social teaching, beginning in the nineteenth century and first expressed with magisterial *gravitas* in *Rerum novarum*, that we find a serious, robust Catholic reflection on the theological significance of work per se. If that is true, it seems unlikely that the reason for the appearance then of these ideas derived from theological reflection on the Gospel message, or the fact that Jesus presumably spent most of his life as a humble carpenter, or biblical passages and parables that mention work or different occupations in the ancient Mediterranean world, and so forth. That message, Jesus' work, and those biblical passages had been around for over eighteen hundred years before they began to inspire sustained Catholic theological reflection.

It seems likely that human labor per se finally became a focus for Catholic theology when it did, beginning in the nineteenth century, not for reasons internal to theological reflection, but above all because of the enormous changes that were being wrought by the industrial revolution.

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<sup>20</sup> St. Francis DE SALES, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Vintage, New York 2002, 3.1, pp. 7-8.

Technological innovation and the creation of wealth made possible new human possibilities that hitherto had been unimaginable, and made it increasingly realistic to think about more forms of human work as desirable, interesting, and fulfilling rather than as unchosen, repetitive drudgery. At the same time, the concentration of the new wealth in the hands of a small number of rich entrepreneurs, in conjunction with large numbers of factory workers laboring long hours in novel forms of soul-crushing and often physically dangerous toil, posed new problems for traditional theological questions about justice. What now was the common good? How should wealth best be distributed to pursue it realistically? Did rising affluence and growing aspirations for material comfort constitute an intrinsic threat to the ascetic self-denial central to Christ's message and to the Catholic tradition? How were states that protected individual rights and fostered education for more and more citizens to be leveraged for the flourishing of all members of society, rather than becoming the mechanisms for the enrichment of the few and the impoverishment of the many? The theological meaning of labor and prospects for thinking in terms of choice, fulfillment, and the realization of one's talents and human potential emerged within Catholicism less for theological reasons per se, as they did in Protestantism beginning in the sixteenth century, than for reasons spurred by the radically changed social and economic realities brought about by nineteenth-century industrialization in Europe.

These questions about wealth and its distribution, social justice, human flourishing, and the common good are broadly speaking the ones that remain with us today and constitute concerns central to modern Catholic social teaching from *Rerum novarum* through *Laudato si'*. We encounter them today not in their nineteenth-century forms, obviously, but in expressions that have been extended, globalized, and transformed, and continue to be transformed, by more recent revolutions in communications, mobility, and economic policy and practice. Different theological meanings of work for both Catholics and Protestants remain alive and well today; the principal ways in which Christians in different traditions and churches make sense of work tend to be shaped partly by the sort of work they do, the situations in which they find themselves, and the opportunities they have (or lack thereof). Pope John Paul II's beautiful

vision of the primacy of the subjective meaning of work, and of the way in which, through education and freedom and dedication, one incrementally realizes the potential to become the person God has called one to be, is likely to make the most sense to those who are in objective situations of political stability, socioeconomic opportunity, sustained education, and job security. By contrast, the Latin American immigrants who work long hours in the backbreaking labor of picking fruit and vegetables in the United States, as well as the millions of men, women, and children who work in the factories of China, Bangladesh, Vietnam, and other countries to make so many of the things wealthy Westerners buy, if they are Christians are probably more likely to identify with labor as the toil through which we suffer with Christ, whose passion dignifies and redeems our suffering. Finally, the profound job uncertainty and instability in recent decades created by the combination of neoliberal economic policies and ever-increasing levels of manufacturing automation might well have created the conditions for a new spirituality of Christian work—one focused less on the personalist realization of a stable vocation than on a renewed awareness of one's life, including one's work, as a *peregrinatio*, a pilgrimage in which the final goal is clear but not the path one will travel to reach it—a journey in solidarity with Jesus, the son of man who had nowhere to lay his head in this life (Matt 8,20). All three of these basic meanings of work, along with others, are legitimate, understandable, and applicable to Christians' lives today, depending partly on the circumstances in which they find themselves. They are reminders of the one who is always with us and who sustains and supports us regardless of the work we do and how we do it.