



February 2014

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### Recommended Citation

Jose H. Gomez, *All You Who Labor: Towards a Spirituality of Work for the 21st Century*, 20 NOTRE DAME J.L. ETHICS & PUB. POL'Y 791 (2006).

Available at: <http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ndjlepp/vol20/iss2/11>

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# ALL YOU WHO LABOR: TOWARDS A SPIRITUALITY OF WORK FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

JOSÉ H. GOMEZ\*

The Catholic Church has a long history of vital concern for the American worker and continues to make decisive contributions on such issues as the rights of workers, wages and workplace conditions, the social welfare of those unable to work, and the just operation of the national economy.<sup>1</sup>

The Church's social concern flows directly from its religious and spiritual mission to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. That gospel, which is the revelation of God's love for the world and his desire for the sanctity and salvation of every man and woman, sheds light on all aspects of human life—from matters of personal morality to socioeconomic and geopolitical questions. Nothing that touches upon the human person so beloved by God is alien to the gospel, or beyond the care and reflection of the Church. The Church never advances a political agenda or technical policy solutions. Rather, it proposes principles for reflection, criteria for judgment, and guidelines for action. Its constant concern is to bear witness to God's saving love by promoting the authentic development of the human person, the common good of society, and by generally trying to "make [human] life more human."<sup>2</sup>

These motivations impel the Church always to be aware of the realities and concrete circumstances in which men and

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1. See generally TIMOTHY A. BYRNES, *CATHOLIC BISHOPS IN AMERICAN POLITICS* (1991); MICHAEL WARNER, *CHANGING WITNESS: CATHOLIC BISHOPS AND PUBLIC POLICY, 1917–1994* (1995). On labor issues, see FRANCIS L. BRODERICK, *RIGHT REVEREND NEW DEALER: JOHN A. RYAN* (1963); JOHN A. RYAN, *A LIVING WAGE: ITS ETHICAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS* (1906); JOHN A. RYAN, *SOCIAL DOCTRINE IN ACTION* (1941).

2. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, *GAUDIUM ET SPES: PASTORAL CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD* No. 38 (1965) [hereinafter *GAUDIUM ET SPES*]; see also POPE JOHN PAUL II, *ENCYCLICAL LETTER REDEMPTOR HOMINIS* No. 14 (1979) (discussing man's endeavor "to make human life ever more human"). On the Church's mission and social doctrine, see PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *COMPENDIUM OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH* Nos. 60–83 (2005) [hereinafter *COMPENDIUM*]; *CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH* Nos. 2419–25 (Libreria Editrice Vaticana trans., 2d ed. 1997) [hereinafter *CATECHISM*].

women live and labor. Today, authorities in many fields agree that we have entered a period of profound change in the organization of work, driven by the “globalization” of trade, labor, and finance. There are many signs of the challenges that this new moment poses for the American worker. The increasingly bitter debates over immigration and the impact of international trade agreements on domestic farm and factory economies are only one such sign. We also have the phenomenon of chronic “under-employment,” the rise of “non-traditional” forms of work, and the obvious and pressing needs for reform of national policies on minimum wages, health insurance, and social security. We might add, too, the rising tide of corporate fraud and crimes against investors and employees, and the ongoing disputes over the obligations of retailers and other corporations to their employees and the communities they serve. Finally, another sign of this new moment is the persistence of vast disparities of wealth between and within nations, alongside the emergence of global industries that have nothing to do with human needs but instead are based on the promotion of lifestyles of irresponsible and unbridled materialistic consumption.<sup>3</sup>

The Church must and will continue to promote solutions to these issues consistent with the objective good of the human person. Here, however, I would like to focus on what I believe to be a deeper, underlying crisis in our understanding of the meaning and value of human work. As a society, we do not seem to have any clear sense of what work is, what work is for, and how the work of the individual is related to the work of others and the goals of a free, just, and ordered society.

This crisis is reflected in many of the specific issues affecting American workers today. For instance, influential voices in the immigration debate blame Mexican-Americans’ poverty on their supposed lack of a “work-ethic,” a deficiency further said to be rooted in the Catholic religious traditions and heritage of the people. There is much that is offensive and patently wrong in this line of attack, which I will address later in this article. However, it should be noted here that the argument begs questions that are never answered about work’s reason and purpose. The same is true in the calls for greater corporate ethics and accountability in the wake of egregious criminal scandals. Here again, we see signs of the need for a new public philosophy of work—a philosophy that, I would argue, must be grounded in a *spirituality*

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3. See COMPENDIUM, *supra* note 2, at Nos. 309–22; NICHOLAS DiMARZIO, LABOR DAY 2005: WORK, POPE JOHN PAUL II, AND CATHOLIC TEACHING (2005), available at <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/2005final.pdf>.

of work based on the Christian gospel, the historic foundation of our national laws, institutions, and values.

In this paper, I would like to lay the groundwork for the development of such a spirituality of work. Such a spirituality of work will embrace the world of work in its totality, from the work done in fields, factories, and shops, to that done in laboratories, corporate boardrooms, homes, theaters, and artistic studios. One of the symptoms of our current crisis is the tendency to define "labor" too narrowly, as physical and manufacturing work. This, of course, excludes from moral reflection the vast majority of human activity. The starting point for a spirituality rooted in the gospel, then, would be to consider work as "any human activity—paid or unpaid, in the home or outside it, manual or intellectual—chosen and carried out at least partly for the sake of some good result beyond the activity itself."<sup>4</sup> This would include not only my activity as a Catholic priest and archbishop, but the work of civil servants, parents, homemakers, charitable volunteers, and corporate executives, to mention just a few.

"[H]uman work is *a key, probably the essential key*, to the whole social question."<sup>5</sup> And the key to understanding human work is to be found in the religious and moral perspectives developed in the historic experience of the Catholic Church. These perspectives provide rich soil for the growth of a spirituality that understands work as both a divine and human reality, a natural and supernatural activity. While framed in the context of the truth revealed about the human person in the scriptures and the millennia of Catholic experience, I hope it will be clear to all people of good will that a spirituality of work will have much to contribute to the building of a better society.

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4. 2 GERMAIN GRIEZ, *THE WAY OF THE LORD JESUS: LIVING A CHRISTIAN LIFE* 754–55 (1993). On work considered philosophically and theologically, see M.D. CHENU, *THE THEOLOGY OF WORK: AN EXPLORATION* (Lilian Soiron trans., 1963); JOSÉ LUIS ILLANES, *THE SANCTIFICATION OF WORK* (2003); EDWIN G. KAISER, *THEOLOGY OF WORK* (1966); YVES R. SIMON, *WORK, SOCIETY, AND CULTURE* (Vukan Kuic ed., 1971); MIROSLAV VOLF, *WORK IN THE SPIRIT: TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF WORK* (1991); Yves R. Simon, *The Concept of Work*, in *THE WORKS OF THE MIND* (Robert B. Heywood ed., 1947), *reprinted in* *PHILOSOPHER AT WORK* 7 (Anthony O. Simon ed., 1999). Cf. STEFAN CARDINAL WYSZYNSKI, *ALL YOU WHO LABOR: WORK AND THE SANCTIFICATION OF DAILY LIFE* (1995).

5. POPE JOHN PAUL II, *ENCYCLICAL LETTER LABOREM EXERCENS* No. 3 (1981) [hereinafter *LABOREM EXERCENS*].

# I. REVILED FOR THE WORK OF THEIR HANDS: LABOR IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

In its infancy, the Catholic Church was ridiculed for drawing its ranks from among ordinary manual laborers and slaves. Celsus, a second-century Greek, criticized the Church for being made up of "wool-workers, cobblers, laundry-workers, and the most illiterate and bucolic yokels."<sup>6</sup> Christians were, he added, foolish disciples of a manual laborer born of "a poor woman of the country, who gained her subsistence by spinning, and [whose husband was] a carpenter by trade."<sup>7</sup>

We now know that this observation about the early Christians' social status was not altogether accurate, and that in fact, the early Church was drawn from a cross-section of the population, ranging from slaves and laborers to small-business owners and the very wealthy.<sup>8</sup> But that Celsus regarded such a critique as decisive in discrediting the emerging Church indicates the extent of contempt for ordinary labor among the wealthy, educated, and powerful of the period. Such contempt may also explain a curious remark St. Paul made in his first letter to the church in Corinth, a wealthy center of the ancient world: "[W]e labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless . . . when slandered, we try to conciliate . . . ."<sup>9</sup>

Although qualifications would need to be made in a more detailed study, it is true that "at the time of Christ the disdain for manual labor was rampant in Hellenistic culture."<sup>10</sup> Put simply, manual work was deemed unfit for the free man or woman and was considered the province of slaves. Cicero spoke contemptuously of "craftsmen, petty shopkeepers, and all the filth of the

6. WAYNE A. MEEKS, *THE FIRST URBAN CHRISTIANS: THE SOCIAL WORLD OF THE APOSTLE PAUL* 51 (1983) (quoting ORIGEN, *AGAINST CELSUS* bk. 3, ch. 55 (Chadwick trans., 1965)).

7. *Id.*

8. On the class makeup of the early Church, see RODNEY STARK, *THE RISE OF CHRISTIANITY* 29-48 (1997); see also MEEKS, *supra* note 6, at 51-73.

9. 1 *Corinthians* 4:12-13.

10. ARTHUR T. GEOGHEGAN, *THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS LABOR IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND ANCIENT CULTURE* 30 (1945); see also COMPENDIUM, *supra* note 2, at No. 265; LABOREM EXERCENS, *supra* note 5, at No. 6 ("The ancient world introduced its own typical differentiation . . . . 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."); Hilary Armstrong, *Work in Ancient Greece and Rome*, in *WORK: A SYMPOSIUM* (J.M. Todd ed., 1960); George Ovitt, *The Cultural Context of Western Technology: Early Christian Attitudes towards Manual Labour*, in *THE WORK OF WORK* 71, 71-94 (Allen J. Frantzen & Douglas Moffat eds., 1994).

cities,"<sup>11</sup> a view echoed throughout classical literature. Even to work for another person for wages was considered a sign of slavery. Aristotle, in his *Politics*, dismisses those who, like "slaves and tame animals with their bodies minister to the necessities of life."<sup>12</sup>

Why was manual labor so disdained? The answer is complex and is tied up with ancient ideas about human nature and freedom. It seems that for the later classical writers, any work that was a *necessity*—an occupation that must be performed to provide for the basic requirements of life, such as food, shelter, and clothing—was considered animal-like, beneath the dignity of free men or women.<sup>13</sup> This in fact was one of the ancients' justifications for slavery.<sup>14</sup> Slaves would perform the manual and menial tasks needed to provide for the livelihood of their masters, thereby affording their masters the leisure to do the things fitting for free men and women, such as philosophy, the arts, government, athletics, and so forth.

Here we see a differentiation and stratification of labor that persists today, despite the universal abolition of slavery. Even in modern post-industrial economies, intellectual labor in all its forms remains far more highly regarded, and remunerated, than manual labor related to the providing of life's necessities. The distinction made by the Enlightenment philosopher John Locke between "the labor of our body and the work of our hands"—the former meaning the toil for human necessities and the latter designating more creative pursuits—is a prejudice that continues to color our considerations of work and working.<sup>15</sup>

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11. See KAISER, *supra* note 4, at 28–43.

12. Felice Battaglia, *Work*, in 4 *DICTIONARY OF THE HISTORY OF IDEAS* 530–35 (Philip P. Wiener ed., 1973); William E. May, *Work, Theology of*, in *THE NEW DICTIONARY OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT* 991–1002 (Judith Dwyer ed., 1994). It should be noted that a minority of scholars believe the supposed ancient contempt for labor is overstated. See ROBERT M. GRANT, *EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIETY: SEVEN STUDIES* 66–95 (1977) ("Such a notion comes from taking rhetoricians and philosophers too seriously, especially Plato."). But see KAISER, *supra* note 4, at 28–43 (assembling the classical sources and evidence).

13. HANNAH ARENDT, *THE HUMAN CONDITION* 73–74 (1958) (summarizing the Greek and Roman view in her wide-ranging study of ancient and modern attitudes toward labor: occupations "undertaken not for their own sake but in order to provide the necessities of life, were assimilated to the status of labor . . . . To labor meant to be enslaved by necessity.").

14. On the defense and justification of ancient slavery, see *id.*

15. See May, *supra* note 12, at 991 (quoting JOHN LOCKE, *SECOND TREATISE ON GOVERNMENT* § 26 (1689)).

## II. THE BIBLICAL WORLD OF WORK

By contrast, we find a much different view of work in the Bible. Work, in all its many varieties, is presumed to be a natural duty of the human condition, and it is also highly esteemed. It should be noted that, unlike the sacred books of other ancient world religions, the Bible is not primarily a corpus of moral laws or wisdom teachings. Although it does contain these elements, along with other literary and religious styles of writing, the Bible, as canonized and preserved in the Church, presents itself essentially as a historical text detailing God's interventions in the world on behalf of a people He chose and called His own, a people who were to be the vanguard of a worldwide family of God that would embrace men and women of every race, culture, and nation. This is important to keep in mind because it reminds us that the biblical concept of work is not an abstraction, or a set of ideal prescriptions. Rather, it grows out of the nearly four thousand-year-old historical experience of a people who found themselves at different times living as nomads, as slaves, as familial members of a tribal confederation, as royal subjects, and as exiles.

The forms of economic activity depicted in the Old Testament range from rural and agrarian to family- and village-based handicrafts to a highly differentiated urban economy, with state-centralized industries and foreign commerce. The Old Testament mentions dozens of occupations, including doctors, pharmacists, artisans, blacksmiths, scholars, sailors, builders, musicians, shepherds, and more.<sup>16</sup> The great patriarchs of Israel were all identified with their occupations. Abraham was a herdsman,<sup>17</sup> Noah was a farmer,<sup>18</sup> Isaac and Jacob likewise worked the land.<sup>19</sup> King David was a shepherd.<sup>20</sup> The Old Testament law includes numerous provisions and protections for laborers<sup>21</sup> and foreign guest-workers,<sup>22</sup> as well as regulating interest rates and terms<sup>23</sup> and mandating social security for the weak.<sup>24</sup> Israel's prophets frequently condemned exploitative business prac-

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16. For a more complete list and biblical citations, see LABOREM EXERCENS, *supra* note 5, at No. 26.

17. See *Genesis* 12:16.

18. See *id.* at 9:20.

19. See *id.* at 26:12, 27:28.

20. See *1 Samuel* 16:11.

21. See *Leviticus* 19:13; *Deuteronomy* 24:14-15.

22. See *Exodus* 22:20-21.

23. See *id.* at 22:25.

24. See *Deuteronomy* 24:20, 26:12. Cf. *Exodus* 22:24; *Deuteronomy* 15:6, 23:21.

tices,<sup>25</sup> and the biblical wisdom literature offers opinions on the moral challenges facing merchants and salesmen,<sup>26</sup> in addition to praising manual labor<sup>27</sup> and condemning idleness.<sup>28</sup>

The positive appraisal of work continues in the New Testament. Here, too, the attitude regarding work seems to flow naturally out of the social circumstances of Jesus and the early Church. Jesus' first apostles were commercial fishermen, small property-holders able to own boats and employ others to work them.<sup>29</sup> Paul earned his living as a tent-maker<sup>30</sup> and occasionally boasts that he worked with his own hands to provide for his needs and the needs of those around him.<sup>31</sup> Jesus himself spent the better part of his life on earth working as a carpenter in his father's family business.<sup>32</sup> His parables are often set in the context of work and industry—the farmer sowing seed,<sup>33</sup> the woman making bread,<sup>34</sup> the laborers in a vineyard.<sup>35</sup> Work is a “given” in the world of the New Testament and it was assumed that, with the exception of priests and special ministers, the vast majority of believers would be ordinary persons who worked for a living. Work was taught to be a requirement or a duty,<sup>36</sup> and Christians were warned not to associate with anyone who refused to work.<sup>37</sup>

### III. THE GOSPEL OF WORK

The Bible, then, can in one sense be read as a *book of work*—inspired by God, written by working persons, and intended to be read and heard, by and large, by other working persons. And while the Bible contains no explicit “doctrine” concerning human labor, the Catholic Church has long drawn from its pages the outlines of a *gospel of work*, to use the happy phrase of the late and beloved pontiff, John Paul II.<sup>38</sup>

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25. See *Jeremiah* 22:13; *Ezekiel* 22:12; *Isaiah* 58:13.

26. See *Sirach* 26:29–27:3, 42:5.

27. See *id.* at 7:15.

28. See *Proverbs* 6:6–11.

29. See *Mark* 1:20.

30. See *Acts* 18:3.

31. See *id.* 20:34; *1 Thessalonians* 2:9.

32. See *Mark* 6:3; *Matthew* 13:54–55; Paul H. Furfey, *Christ as Tekton*, 17 CATH. BIBLICAL Q. 324–55 (1955). Cf. LABOREM EXERCENS, *supra* note 5, at Nos. 6, 26; CATECHISM, *supra* note 2, at No. 531.

33. See *Matthew* 13:4–8.

34. See *id.* at 13:33.

35. See *id.* at 20:1–16.

36. See *1 Thessalonians* 4:11.

37. See *2 Thessalonians* 3:7–12.

38. LABOREM EXERCENS, *supra* note 5, at No. 6.



God himself is presented in the Bible as *working*. God's activity in history—from the very first moments of creation, through His redemption and on-going care for Israel, through the healings and other divine actions of Jesus—are frequently described using the ordinary Hebrew and Greek terms for work and the products of work. God's actions in creating the world are described anthropomorphically as "work,"<sup>39</sup> and all that He created, including men and women, are described as His "works."<sup>40</sup> His great "works" in delivering Israel from Egypt and in defending Israel from its enemies are celebrated.<sup>41</sup> Jesus, likewise, is described performing "mighty works,"<sup>42</sup> and affirms Himself: "My Father is working still, and I am working."<sup>43</sup>

As the Scriptures describe God working, so likewise the biblical portrait presents work as fundamental to the identity and nature of the human person. Human persons are made in the image of God<sup>44</sup> in order to enjoy everlasting personal communion with God and with one another as holy children of God, and to work with God in bringing His loving plan for the world to completion. This mandate is expressed in the very first pages of the Bible in terms of cultivating and subduing the earth.<sup>45</sup> The Bible shows us that the sin of the first human couple resulted in hardship, toil, and suffering becoming part of the lot of human work.<sup>46</sup> But the basic mandate given to humanity was never changed.

The biblical understanding of work is built on these pillars—of man and woman created in the image of their Creator, of their primordial vocation or calling to share as God's children in His continued work in the world, through their work building God's kingdom on earth. Work, for the biblical writers, is a fundamental duty given to all men and women. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might," says the *Book of Ecclesiastes*.<sup>47</sup> Paul echoes this, telling new Christians that "every one

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39. *Genesis* 2:2.

40. *Psalms* 8:3–6, 145:10.

41. *Judges* 2:7, 10.

42. *Mark* 6:2, 14.

43. *John* 5:17.

44. *See Genesis* 1:26–27, 5:1–3, 9:6.

45. *See id.* at 2:15, 20; *Psalms* 8:6–7; *Wisdom* 9:2–3. On the *imago Dei*, I am following, generally, the INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, COMMUNION AND STEWARDSHIP: HUMAN PERSONS CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD (July 23, 2004), available at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20040723\\_communion-stewardship-en.html#\\_edn1](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040723_communion-stewardship-en.html#_edn1).

46. *See Genesis* 3:17–19.

47. *Ecclesiastes* 9:10.

should remain in the state in which he was called"<sup>48</sup>—meaning that the Christian life is to be lived *in* the world, in the world of work.

"We are [God's] workmanship, created . . . for good works," Paul writes in another place.<sup>49</sup> Work in the Bible has three purposes: to give glory to God, to provide for basic needs for oneself and one's family, and to serve the needs of neighbors.<sup>50</sup> Christians should consider themselves to be "God's fellow-workers."<sup>51</sup> The Bible warns against worshipping the products of human labor, both the false idols that can be fashioned with human hands or the money that can be earned by human work. The "love of money is the root of all evils,"<sup>52</sup> the New Testament warns. Jesus himself warned that "mammon," or money, can become a false god,<sup>53</sup> and again that it is possible to gain the whole world and yet lose the most precious thing—one's very soul.<sup>54</sup>

By work men and women participate in the work of their Creator, and their Creator's "work" provides the model for their own. As in creating the world, God worked from morning until evening, so do men and women.<sup>55</sup> And as God worked for six days and rested on the seventh, so this rhythm of work and worship should govern all human work: "Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord . . . for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day."<sup>56</sup>

The Sabbath is the key that unlocks the deepest meanings of human labor in the Bible.<sup>57</sup> In the beginning, the Sabbath was given to Israel as a perpetual sign of God's covenant—the

48. 1 *Corinthians* 7:20.

49. *Ephesians* 2:10.

50. See 1 *Corinthians* 10:31; *Ephesians* 4:28; 2 *Thessalonians* 3:10–12; *Revelation* 9:20.

51. 1 *Corinthians* 3:9, 16:16; 2 *Corinthians* 8:23.

52. 1 *Timothy* 6:10; *Hebrews* 13:5.

53. *Matthew* 6:24.

54. *Mark* 8:36.

55. *Psalms* 104:23.

56. *Exodus* 20:8–11, 23:12; *Genesis* 2:15; 3:23.

57. On the meaning of the Sabbath for Israel and the Church, see JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER, 'IN THE BEGINNING . . .' A CATHOLIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE STORY OF CREATION AND THE FALL 25–32 (Boniface Ramsay trans., 1995); JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER, *Liturgy—Cosmos—History*, in *THE SPIRIT OF THE LITURGY* 24–34 (John Saward trans., 2000); JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER, *The Resurrection as the Foundation of Christian Liturgy: On the Meaning of Sunday for Christian Prayer and Christian Life*, in *A NEW SONG FOR THE LORD: FAITH IN CHRIST AND LITURGY TODAY* 59–77 (Martha M. Matesich trans., 1997); see also POPE JOHN PAUL II, APOSTOLIC LETTER *DIES DOMINI* (1998).

unbreakable bond of love by which He desires to make all men and women His sons and daughters and to dwell with them in a communion of love.<sup>58</sup> This divine-human communion is the "rest" promised by the Sabbath—tools are laid down and the burdens, physical and mental, of everyday labors are temporarily relieved. For Israel, the Sabbath was a day of memorial celebration and thanksgiving. The only "work" proper to the Sabbath was the work of worship—the people praised God and gave thanks to Him for the gifts of creation, for liberating their ancestors from slavery in Egypt, and for His continued blessings and presence in their midst.

The Old Testament Sabbath reveals a kind of "theology of work." Sacrifice, the basic form of biblical worship, involves offering the "firstfruits" of creation and human labor to God, in thanksgiving for His bounty, and in recognition that everything belongs to God, that all the fruits of labor—the harvest of the fields, the livestock, and so forth—are gifts and blessings received from "the hand of God."<sup>59</sup>

Catholics, following the teachings of Christ and the apostles, see the Sabbath of creation fulfilled in the Sabbath of the new creation, which was inaugurated by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Since the night of His resurrection, Catholics have celebrated the Sabbath of "the Lord's Day," Sunday, the day of His rising.<sup>60</sup> Jesus taught that He was the "Lord . . . of the Sabbath" and that the "Sabbath was made for man."<sup>61</sup> Following Christ's command, we continue to celebrate the Lord's Day in a form of worship we call the Eucharist—praising and thanking God as our Creator and Redeemer.<sup>62</sup> In the Eucharist, we give thanks to God for liberating us from sin and death through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and we receive the blessings He promised—we who labor are given rest and a sharing in the divine life of Christ.<sup>63</sup> And in the Eucharist, we anticipate the definitive Sabbath "rest" of eternal life in God's kingdom.<sup>64</sup>

58. See *Exodus* 31:16.

59. *Deuteronomy* 16:15; *Ecclesiastes* 2:24. Looking at the feasts of Israel in the context of other Near Eastern religions, we see a celebration of "man's joy in possessing the earth through his work, in knowing that he is the master of nature, and that he derives his happiness from his real share in his god's fruitful work. We might almost say that these ancient feasts contain 'a theology of work.'" THIERRY MAERTENS, *A FEAST IN HONOR OF YAHWEH* 35 (Kathryn Sullivan trans., 1965) (emphasis added).

60. *Revelation* 1:10.

61. *Mark* 2:27–28.

62. CATECHISM, *supra* note 2, at Nos. 2175–76.

63. See *Matthew* 11:28.

64. See 2 *Thessalonians* 1:6–7; *Hebrew* 3:7–4:11; *Revelation* 14:13.

The Eucharist, instituted by Christ on the night before He died,<sup>65</sup> likewise reveals a distinctive "theology of work." This can be seen most vividly in the prayers of offering said by the priest in celebrating the Eucharist:

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation.  
Through your goodness we have this bread to offer,  
which earth has given and human hands have made.  
It will become for us the bread of life.

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation.  
Through your goodness we have this wine to offer,  
fruit of the vine and work of human hands.  
It will become our spiritual drink.<sup>66</sup>

There is perhaps no finer summary of the biblical "gospel of work." The biblical gospel of work continues in the Christian liturgy. There, we fashion the goods of the earth into sacrifices that we offer in thanksgiving and praise to the Almighty Father, the Lord of creation; in our worship, the fruits of our labor are transformed by his Holy Spirit into efficacious signs through which we receive the blessings of God's own life. In the worship of the Mass, we fulfill the biblical mandate that we offer all of ourselves—our work, our sufferings, our struggles, and joys—as "a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."<sup>67</sup> Later writers, beginning with St. Benedict, would call this spiritual offering—*opus Dei*, "the work of God."<sup>68</sup>

#### IV. WORK IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

It is true that work never became the subject of doctrinal debate or development in the centuries following the apostolic era. In fact, there is no sustained Christian social teaching or reflection on the meaning of work until the industrial revolution and the challenge of Marxism and liberal capitalism. In part this reflects a reality that we have already pointed out—that for the church, work is among the "givens" of the human condition. We do find in the writings of church leaders and saints vigilant exhortations regarding the proper Christian order of society, including instruction on such specific issues as working conditions, wages, and the duty of the rich to provide a charitable

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65. See 1 Corinthians 11:23–29.

66. THE SACRAMENTARY 370–71 (Catholic Book Publ'g Co. 1985).

67. Romans 12:1.

68. See Ecclesiastes 11:5; John 6:29; see also CATECHISM, *supra* note 2, at Nos. 347, 1368.

"safety net" for the poor, those unable to work or otherwise provide for themselves.<sup>69</sup>

For many centuries, however, theological and spiritual reflection on the meaning and purpose of work was not fully developed. Some scholars believe this owes largely to the influence of the monastic movement, with its spiritual emphasis on withdrawal from the world of commerce and the marketplace. In the monasteries, these scholars argue, work was valued only as an ascetical means, a kind of preventative medicine to help the monks avoid sinful pursuits. "[W]ork is seen basically as a means of fighting idleness, the mother of all vices."<sup>70</sup> This view is encapsulated in a saying popular among the first monks in Egypt: "a monk who is working is struck by one demon, whereas an idler is destroyed by innumerable spirits."<sup>71</sup>

Despite this rather negative view of work, it is nonetheless possible to find themes and insights that foreshadow and point to a positive spiritual understanding of work. The first thing to notice is that church writers presumed daily work to be the natural mode of life for lay people—that is, for the vast majority of believers. Defending the Church against charges of "otherworldliness," Tertullian, Chrysostom, and others, often listed the various occupations that believers held—they were farmers, shoemakers, weavers, smiths, carpenters, traders, housebuilders, curriers, bakers, and more.<sup>72</sup> Clement of Alexandria, writing in the early years of the third century, reminded new converts that there was no need for them to abandon their occupations: "Practice farming, we say, if you are a farmer; but while you till your fields, know God. Sail the seas, if you are devoted to navigation, but meanwhile call on the Heavenly Pilot."<sup>73</sup>

In Clement, we see an intuition that ordinary work is somehow connected to the transcendent realities of the faith, an intuition that will not be fully developed until closer to our own day.

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69. See generally DAVID BATSON, *THE TREASURE CHEST OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS: FAITH, CARE, AND COMMUNITY FROM THE APOSTOLIC AGE TO CONSTANTINE THE GREAT* (2001); RAY C. PETRY, *CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY AND SOCIAL THOUGHT* (1956); WALTER SHREWING, *RICH AND POOR IN CHRISTIAN TRADITION* (1948); Roman Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving in Early Christianity*, J. FOR THE STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT SUPP. SER. 77 (1993).

70. ILLANES, *supra* note 4, at 37.

71. JOHN CASSIAN: *THE INSTITUTES* bk. 10, ch. 23 (Boniface Ramsey trans., Dennis D. McManus et al. eds., 2000).

72. See KAISER, *supra* note 4, at 123–26.

73. *Exhortation to the Heathen*, FATHERS OF THE SECOND CENTURY: HERMAS, TATIAN, ATHENAGORAS, THEOPHILUS, AND CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA ch. 10, at 276–77 (Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson eds., 2004).

Following the apostles' words and example, early church writers considered work a duty, and even the church's great masters of prayer and the spiritual life boasted of doing their own work. Abbot Pambo, one of the so-called Desert Fathers, boasted on his death bed that in his entire life as a monk, "I do not call to mind that I have eaten bread save what my hands have toiled for."<sup>74</sup> The believer was to work—not only to provide for himself or herself, but to give to the poor. It was said of the early monk, St. Anthony, that "he worked . . . with his hands . . . and part he spent on bread and part he gave to the needy."<sup>75</sup> *The Shepherd of Hermas*, an important and widely read second-century devotional tract, counsels: "[O]ut of your labor, which God gives you, give generously to all who are in need."<sup>76</sup>

For the monk and for ordinary believers, work was a duty. Its opposite, idleness or sloth, was condemned harshly in the oldest known texts outside of the Bible. The *Didache*, probably written in the mid-first century, insists that the disciple should not "live idle," but instead should "work for his living."<sup>77</sup> *The Epistle of Barnabas* says believers should shun such "men who do not know how to provide food for themselves by labor and sweat."<sup>78</sup>

The *Didascalia Apostolorum*, from the early third century, condemns able-bodied men and women who choose to live off charity rather than work, warning them of "woe from God" for, in effect, stealing food from the mouths of truly needy.<sup>79</sup> Those who make themselves unfit for work by drunkenness or dissolute living are likewise chastised.<sup>80</sup>

The early Church writers also took the biblical teaching to its next logical conclusion—forbidding believers to work in certain jobs deemed to degrade the souls of workers and others. Some of these prohibited professions seem obvious—for instance, prostitutes and pimps, those who make idols, and military executioners; others are not so obvious, such as actors, gladi-

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74. See KAISER, *supra* note 4, at 136 (quoting UMBERTO BENIGNI, STORIA SOCIALE DELLA CHIESA 20 (1915)).

75. ATHANASIUS: SELECT WORKS AND LETTERS § 3, at 417 (Philip Schaff ed., 1891).

76. See KAISER, *supra* note 4, at 83 (quoting THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS 215 (J.B. Lightfoot & J.R. Harmer trans., Michael W. Holmes ed., Baker Book House 1989) (1891)).

77. See KAISER, *supra* note 4, at 84 (quoting THE DIDACHE § 12:3–5).

78. See *id.* at 96 (quoting *The Epistle of Barnabas* 10:4 (cited in THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS, *supra* note 76, at 175)).

79. See *id.* at 96 (quoting DIDASCALIA APOSTOLORUM ch. XVII, at 154 (R. Hugh Connolly trans., 1969)).

80. See *id.*

ators, and others involved in arena entertainment.<sup>81</sup> But in drawing up these lists, we see for the first time the Church analyzing the world of work in light of the gospel. These lists also reflect an important understanding—that one's work has an influence on one's sanctity and standing before God, and that one's work likewise effects, for good or ill, the sanctity of one's neighbors.

We are also able to detect a nascent appreciation for the supernatural significance of work. In his book on the "literal meaning" of *Genesis*, Augustine writes that God originally intended man and woman to cooperate with Him through their work, so that "the gifts of God's creation come forth in a joyful and abundant harvest with the help of man's effort."<sup>82</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch picked up on the New Testament notion of "stewardship" to urge his followers to "train together . . . rest together . . . as God's managers, assistants, and servants."<sup>83</sup>

We even glimpse the beginnings of an understanding that work and prayer are complementary duties of the human person, a prescription for living later captured in St. Benedict's rule for his monks, *ora et labora* ("work and pray"). But even before that we find advice being given to believers about the necessary relationship of prayer to work.

The *Apostolic Constitutions*, a fourth-century text, recommends that believers set aside time to pray and even to study the truths of the faith prior to the start of every work day.<sup>84</sup> The *Didascalia Apostolorum* suggests that work and prayer are two sides of the same coin, advising, "whenever you are not in the Church, devote yourselves to your work; so that in all the conduct of your life you may either be occupied in the things of the Lord or engaged upon your work."<sup>85</sup>

In a remarkable passage written on the monks of Egypt, St. John Cassian sees their prayer as work and their work as prayer. "For just as they reserve hardly any time for leisure, so neither in

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81. HIPPOLYTUS, ON THE APOSTOLIC TRADITION ch. 16 (John Behr ed., 2001), available at <http://www.bombaxo.com/hippolytus.html>.

82. 2 AUGUSTINE, THE LITERAL MEANING OF GENESIS bk. 8, ch. 8 (John Hammond Taylor trans., Johannes Quasten et al. eds., 1982).

83. *The Letters of Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch to Polycarp* ¶6 (quoted in THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS, *supra* note 76, at 117); see also 1 *Corinthians* 4:1–2; *Ephesians* 3:2; 1 *Peter* 4:10.

84. See KAISER, *supra* note 4, at 102 (quoting THE CLEMENTINE HOMILIES: THE APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS bk. VIII, ch. XXXII, at 246 (Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson eds., 1869)).

85. KAISER, *supra* note 4, at 96–98 (quoting DIDASCALIA APOSTOLORUM ch. XVII, at 154 (R. Hugh Connolly trans., 1969)).

fact do they place a limit on spiritual meditation," he said.<sup>86</sup> "The upshot is that it is hardly possible to determine what depends on what here—that is, whether they practice manual labor ceaselessly thanks to their spiritual meditation or whether they acquire such remarkable progress in the Spirit and such luminous knowledge thanks to their constant labor."<sup>87</sup>

This insight anticipates by 1500 years the crucial spiritual finding that work can be consecrated or dedicated to God through prayer and that work itself can be a form of prayer, a path to dialogue and relationship with God. St. Jerome, too, sensed that work can be "sanctified" or made holy through a vow or an offering of one's self and one's work to God. The tasks of daily work should be performed, not only for themselves and the needs they provide for, but as "service of the Lord." He said, "you must offer to Christ not only your money but yourself, to be a 'living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service,' and you must imitate the son of man who 'came not to be ministered unto but to minister.'"<sup>88</sup>

The early monasteries became important workshops for Catholic ideals concerning an integrated life of prayer and work, contemplation and action.<sup>89</sup> St. Pachomius organized his monasteries in Egypt according to trades, counting not less than forty different occupations among his three hundred monks, including tailors, smiths, carpenters, dyers, tanners, shoemakers, gardeners, copyists, and camel-drivers.<sup>90</sup> The monastic day was divided into hours of prayer and hours of work. But even work was to be done silently and prayerfully, according to Pachomius' rule. St. Serapion, another Egyptian monastic leader, prescribed that the first three hours of the day be spent in prayer, followed by six hours of work.<sup>91</sup>

Though they sought to withdraw themselves for work and prayer, the early monks were anything but aloof from the wider community. The Benedictines, for instance, developed land, built roads, repaired bridges, and fed the hungry.<sup>92</sup> Historians

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86. CASSIAN, *supra* note 71, at 46. Cf. ILLANES, *supra* note 4, at 31–32.

87. CASSIAN, *supra* note 71, at 46.

88. ST. JEROME, THE PRINCIPAL WORKS OF ST. JEROME, Letter LXVI, No. 12 (1892).

89. REMBERT SORG, TOWARDS A BENEDICTINE THEOLOGY OF MANUAL LABOR 20 (1951).

90. See HERBERT B. WORKMAN, THE EVOLUTION OF THE MONASTIC IDEAL 155 (1913); see also KAISER, *supra* note 4, at 137.

91. See KAISER, *supra* note 4, at 136–37.

92. See G. Cyprian Alston, *Benedictine Order*, in 2 THE CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA 443, 456 (Charles G. Herbermann ed., 1907).



also credit the monks' teaching and example with greatly increasing popular respect for manual labor, revealing that labor has its own dignity and that work elevates rather than demeans the human spirit.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, later in the Middle Ages, the Church organized guilds of tradesmen and craftsmen. The guilds are widely credited with promoting the professionalization of work through the cultivation of important workplace virtues such as honesty, integrity, and attention to quality and detail.<sup>94</sup>

## V. THE "LITTLE WAY" AND THE "OPUS DEI"

There were other developments in the history of spirituality which focused attention on the layperson's unique role in the world and the spiritual value of his or her labor. In the main, however, Catholic reflection on work did not make any significant advances until the late 19th century and early 20th century. This is the period of the pioneering papal social encyclicals and the important letters of the American bishops on the social order.<sup>95</sup>

In 1955, Pope Pius XII instituted a special feast to be celebrated each May 1 in honor of "St. Joseph the Workman." Presenting the earthly father of Jesus as the model for workers, the Pope stressed the need for workers to understand "the dignity of human labor and the principles which underlie it."<sup>96</sup> The prayers written for the feast, and the biblical passages selected to be read, emphasized God as "the maker of the world" and the human person as "constituted . . . to labor on the earth and care for it."<sup>97</sup> The divine significance of human work is affirmed in that "Christ, the Son of God, deigned to work with his hands" and that "the Lord, King of kings . . . deigned to be reckoned the son of a workman."<sup>98</sup>

But perhaps the most significant development was the teaching of a nun who died in her early twenties and performed no work outside the Carmelite monastery that she had entered when she was fifteen. St. Thérèse of Lisieux articulated a profound spirituality for sanctifying the ordinary tasks of daily life, a spirituality that came to be called "the little way." For Thérèse, every moment held the potential for doing something beautiful for

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93. See 1 RODGER CHARLES, *CHRISTIAN SOCIAL WITNESS AND TEACHING: THE CATHOLIC TRADITION FROM CENTESIMUS ANNUS 69-70* (1998).

94. See *id.* at 212, 226.

95. For a good historical overview of the church's social encyclicals, see COMPENDIUM, *supra* note 2, at 87-104.

96. THE SACRAMENTARY, *supra* note 66, at 631.

97. *Id.*

98. *Id.*

God: "The holiness to which we should aspire does not consist in notable deeds or special favors from God, but in the sanctification of all works, no matter how humble, of human living."<sup>99</sup>

This teaching, which called for performing even the least action for the love of God and the love of neighbor, had a seminal impact on Catholic spirituality in the 20th century. Numerous holy men and women applied this teaching to the world of labor, including, among others, Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, foundress of the Missionaries of Charity; the Servant of God Dorothy Day, foundress of the Catholic Worker movement; and the soon-to-be Blessed Charles de Foucauld, founder of the Little Brothers and the Little Sisters of Jesus.

Perhaps the most prophetic and influential of Thérèse's spiritual "children" was St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer (d. 1975), founder of Opus Dei ("The Work of God"), a movement of lay people and clergy committed to the sanctification of ordinary life and every day work.<sup>100</sup> For him, work was a part of the supernatural vocation given by God to each person, and a means by which the person grows closer to God and transforms the world in accord with the will of God. "All the ways of the earth, every state in life, every profession, every honest task can be divine," he taught.<sup>101</sup>

St. Josemaría was the first saint to articulate a spirituality of ordinary work, and his teachings anticipate the official church teaching of the Second Vatican Council<sup>102</sup> and Pope John Paul II on the themes of holiness and human labor, teachings that we will draw from below.

## VI. THE CATHOLIC WORK ETHIC

One conclusion to be drawn from this swift survey of work in the Catholic tradition is that there is—and has been since the

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99. WEAPONS OF THE SPIRIT: SELECTED WRITINGS OF FATHER JOHN HUGO 13 (David Scott & Mike Aquilina eds., 1997).

100. In his seminal work, *The Way*, St. Josemaría echoes Thérèse's "little way" in chapters titled "Little Things," "Life of Childhood," and "Spiritual Childhood." ST. JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ, *THE WAY* (A. Byrne trans., Scepter (U.K.) 2001). In the early editions especially, Escrivá seems to hold Thérèse up as a measure for the Christian's exceeding love for Christ: "Be daring: tell him that you are crazier about him than . . . little Thérèse." *Id.* at 151. He used her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*, in the formation of Opus Dei's first members. See 2 ANDRÉS VÁZQUEZ DE PRADA, *THE FOUNDER OF OPUS DEI: THE LIFE OF JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ* 326 (Scepter trans., 2003); ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX, *STORY OF A SOUL: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX* (John Clarke trans., 1976).

101. ILLANES, *supra* note 4, at 137.

102. Of direct importance for a spirituality of work, see GAUDIUM ET SPES, *supra* note 2, at Nos. 33–39, 63–72.

beginning—a distinctively Catholic ethos concerning labor. A longer study would make it possible to demonstrate how deeply this ethos is reflected not only in the economic history of Europe,<sup>103</sup> but also in the official prayers of the church, especially in the Divine Office, or Liturgy of the Hours, as well as in the official teachings of the Church.

The existence of an ancient Catholic ethos is important to keep in mind, especially in the context of American debates over immigration. Just last year, a prominent American public intellectual warned that Hispanics, particularly Mexican-Americans, pose a severe threat to the American way of life by their refusal to conform to supposed American economic values and their consequent failure to truly assimilate into the American mainstream. At root, this scholar contended, was a clash between the values fostered by the Hispanics' "culture of Catholicism" and those of "America's Protestant culture."<sup>104</sup>

What is remarkable in light of our sketch of the long Catholic tradition concerning work is the set of "values" that this scholar associated with Hispanic Catholics: a disregard for punctuality and timeliness, carelessness with regard to the quality and completion of work, a lack of self-initiative and ambition, and an "acceptance of poverty as a virtue necessary for heaven."<sup>105</sup>

His conclusion: short of widespread conversion by Hispanics to evangelical Protestantism, their "values" would not "evolve" quickly enough to change their "lagging educational and economic progress and slow assimilation into American society."<sup>106</sup>

Such an argument betrays deep prejudices and even deeper scholarly errors that can be traced back to German sociologist Max Weber's classic essay, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.<sup>107</sup> This is not the place to rehearse Weber's thesis that the teachings of the Reformation's Calvinist wing fostered the values conducive to capitalism, while "the permanent, intrinsic character" of Catholic beliefs was antithetical to capitalist develop-

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103. CHARLES, *supra* note 93, at 148, 196, 205–06, 229; *see generally* R.H. TAWNEY, *RELIGION AND THE RISE OF CAPITALISM* (1926).

104. SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON, *WHO ARE WE? THE CHALLENGES TO AMERICA'S IDENTITY* 253–54 (2004).

105. *Id.*

106. *Id.* It should be noted that, on all of these points of criticism, Huntington is careful to support his arguments with quotes from only "thoughtful Mexicans and Mexican-Americans." However, the impression that he is merely giving a credible-sounding vocabulary to traditional nativist bigotry remains unavoidable.

107. MAX WEBER, *THE PROTESTANT ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM* (1958).

ment.<sup>108</sup> Obviously it remains an influential work, although his conclusions have been widely disputed. Scholars have demonstrated that Weber had little more than a superficial understanding of Catholic beliefs and that even his interpretation of Calvin's teachings was questionable. More importantly, we now know that his data on European economic development in the years before the Reformation was "erroneous," that, in fact, a market economy and capitalism existed in Europe as early as 1050–1250 when "the religion of everyman was overwhelmingly Catholic."<sup>109</sup>

Still, as we see in the current immigration debate, Weber's wrong-headed assumptions about the "other-worldliness" of Catholicism persist. This further suggests the need to articulate an accurate Catholic understanding of work as the basis for the development of a broader public philosophy of work.

## VII. THE SANCTIFICATION OF WORK

More than a work "ethic," the Catholic Church has a spirituality of work, a vision of work in light of God's plan for the universe. In fact, I would argue that there is no institution or school of thought in the world of the 21st century that offers a more compelling and integrated understanding of the meaning of human work and its relationship to human nature and human destiny. As we have seen, this understanding is the fruit of more than two thousand years of experience and reflection. To conclude this Article, then, I would like to sketch in a summary fashion some of the contours of a Catholic spirituality of work and its possible practical implications for the American worker at this new moment in the global economy.

An authentic spirituality of work would begin by affirming that human work is a dimension of God's plan for creation and for each human person. The world in which we work is in itself the work of the divine Creator. "Of old thou didst lay the foun-

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108. The final edition of Weber's work was published shortly after his death, in 1921, and attempted to address the criticisms of the first edition, published in 1904–1905. See *id.* at 39–40. For a balanced summary discussion of Weber's arguments, see PETER L. BERGER, *THE CAPITALIST REVOLUTION* 99–102 (1986). Cf. MICHAEL NOVAK, *THE SPIRIT OF DEMOCRATIC CAPITALISM* 40–48 (1982).

109. CHARLES, *supra* note 92, at 205–06; see generally GERHARD UHLHORN, *CHRISTIAN CHARITY IN THE ANCIENT CHURCH* 104, 110 (1883) (discussing capitalism in ancient Rome); George Ovitt, Jr., *The Cultural Context of Western Technology: Early Christian Attitudes Toward Manual Labor*, in *THE WORK OF WORK: SERVITUDE, SLAVERY, AND LABOR IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND* 71 (Allen J. Frantzen & Douglas Moffat eds., 1994). See generally RODNEY STARK, *THE VICTORY OF REASON: HOW CHRISTIANITY LED TO FREEDOM, CAPITALISM, AND WESTERN SUCCESS* (2005).

dation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands," the Psalmist tells us.<sup>110</sup> The heavens and earth are made according to a divine plan formed before the foundation of the world and hidden for ages, revealed finally by Jesus Christ.<sup>111</sup>

Each person is given a special part in that primordial plan. Each person is destined from before creation to be God's holy sons and daughters. His will for each one of us is our sanctification, meaning that we are to share ever more deeply in His life by patterning our lives after that of His son, Jesus, through the grace of His Holy Spirit, and our acts of filial love for God and brotherly love for our neighbor.<sup>112</sup> The Church's sacraments serve this ongoing transformation of the human person into a more perfect image of the Creator.<sup>113</sup>

And in this divine plan, our daily work, again undertaken in imitation of Christ, is meant to serve as a path to our sanctification. In other words, our everyday work is a means of achieving the purpose for which each of us was created. And following the teaching of Christ, this means any honest work. Jesus compared the work of building His kingdom to the manual labor of pickers in a field, to the labor of fishermen, to the ownership and operation of a vineyard, and He spoke of scholarly work as well.<sup>114</sup> Therefore, we can no longer limit our consideration of labor to those professions that our economy and society labels "working class" or "blue collar." The Catholic vision encompasses work in its totality—manual and intellectual, owner and worker, laborer and management.

Indeed, one implication of a Catholic spirituality of work is that "the basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person."<sup>115</sup> Hence, we must resist any temptation to "objectify" human labor, to define people by the work they do, or to conceive of workers as mere objects, "instruments" in the mechanism of production. This objectification and instrumentalization of labor can happen in many subtle ways in the modern economy and workplace. But we must insist that work has its own intrinsic value, and that workers are always more than human resources, always more than producers of wealth for nations or shareholders.

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110. *Psalms* 102:25.

111. *See Ephesians* 1:4, 10; 3:7.

112. *See 1 Thessalonians* 4:3; *Romans* 8:29; *2 Peter* 1:4.

113. *See Colossians* 3:10.

114. *See Matthew* 4:19; 9:37; 13:52; 20:1–16; *John* 4:35–38. *Cf. LABOREM EXERCENS*, *supra* note 5, at No. 26.

115. *LABOREM EXERCENS*, *supra* note 5, at No. 6.

This spirituality of work, while insisting on the fundamental rights for workers as persons created in the image of God, also insists on specific responsibilities. Through our work, God intends each of us to provide the means for our own livelihood and that of those entrusted to our care—spouses, children, elderly parents, members of our extended family. God intends also that our work serve the members of the larger human family—our neighbors in our communities, our nation, and the world.

As important as these duties are, our daily work has a far greater meaning in God's plan. By means of our work, we are to achieve the holiness for which we were created.<sup>116</sup> He has given us the goods of the earth and the strength—physical, mental, and spiritual—to work with these goods in fashioning a world fit for creatures made in the divine image. We must respond to that call with “faith working through love,”<sup>117</sup> the love that Jesus called for, the love of God with all our hearts, minds and strength, and the love of our neighbor as ourselves. At minimum, this means that no matter what work we do, we may never take it lightly or perform our tasks with mediocrity. To the contrary, the only appropriate response to God's call and gifts is work well done, with all the creativity, industriousness, and virtue that we can muster.

All have a divine vocation to “work out [their] salvation,” as Paul said.<sup>118</sup> But work is the particular calling of the laity—that is, the ordinary faithful who are not called to the priesthood or religious life. “The vocation proper to lay people . . . is to make their way to God while doing this world's work . . . to bring glory to God and the reign of Christ *in and through that work* . . . .”<sup>119</sup>

Through work, each of us is to make our way to God. But our individual labors do not only concern us. We work with others, for others, and in the service of God's saving plan, that His kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. We are each given “the noble duty of working to extend the divine plan of salvation to all men of each epoch and in every land.”<sup>120</sup> Because Christ shared in human work, our work now becomes a means by which we participate in His plan for the world's salvation.<sup>121</sup> We

116. CATECHISM, *supra* note 2, at Nos. 2427–28.

117. *Galatians* 5:6.

118. *Philippians* 2:12.

119. YVES CONGAR, *LAY PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH: A STUDY FOR A THEOLOGY OF THE LAITY* 374 (Donald Attwater trans., Newman Press 1957).

120. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, *LUMEN GENTIUM* No. 33 (1964) [hereinafter *LUMEN GENTIUM*].

121. POPE JOHN PAUL II, *APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION REDEMPTORIS CUSTOS* No. 22 (1989).

become co-creators, "fellow-workers for the kingdom of God," as St. Paul liked to say.<sup>122</sup> We follow Christ by taking up His yoke and committing ourselves to "sharing lovingly in the work that Christ came to do."<sup>123</sup>

We are to transfigure this world, to bring all peoples to the worship of God through the works of our hands and minds and the bounty of His creation. Our work in every field of endeavor must be at the service of our fellow men and women. This means that we should work to ensure that the fruits of the earth are distributed justly among all men and women and that all men and women have an opportunity to work. But it also means that our work should illuminate the world, filling it with the saving light and Spirit of Christ, daily conforming the affairs of this world ever more closely to the will of God.<sup>124</sup>

Here, an authentic spirituality of work should caution us against turning work into an idol: a false god. This is a particular temptation in all forms of work, but it seems to be especially worrisome in economies and cultures based on consumerist and materialistic models. We must insist that *having* is not *being*. This is the clear message of the Gospels, repeated throughout the history of the Church. All that we have, even what we have worked for or created, has been given to us by God. We are called, then, to offer back what we have to God in thanksgiving and to use His gifts to serve our brothers and sisters.

We join our work to Christ's redemptive work through prayer and sacrifice, performing our daily duties in a spirit of self-offering to God, dedicating ourselves to accomplishing God's will. This offering of our work begins in the Eucharist. There we lift up our hearts and place all our work, hardships, sufferings, and toil, on the altar with the bread and wine. We are praying that these things, our spiritual sacrifices, will be acceptable to God. In this way, everything we do can be sanctified and made a holy act of worship.

The smallest, most obscure jobs or tasks we perform—the changing of a diaper, the picking of crops in the hot sun, the writing of an article—can give glory to God, if it is performed from the deepest motives of the love of God and the love of neighbor. As St. Paul said: "Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men."<sup>125</sup> And again: "Whether you eat

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122. *Colossians* 4:11; see also *1 Corinthians* 3:9; *1 Thessalonians* 3:2.

123. *Matthew* 11:29–30; *LABOREM EXERCENS*, *supra* note 5, at No. 27.

124. *LUMEN GENTIUM*, *supra* note 120, at No. 31, 36.

125. *Colossians* 3:23.

or drink, or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God.”<sup>126</sup> Always, our work is to be oriented to worship, the rest of the Lord’s Day. We begin each week in worship, renewing our vow to serve Him through our work, partaking of a supper of brotherly fellowship in which the fruits of man’s cultivation are changed into the Lord’s body and blood, giving us a foretaste of the banquet we will one day eat in heaven.<sup>127</sup>

### CONCLUSION

I offer these perspectives on the spirituality of work in the hopes of contributing to a new public conversation about the meaning and value of work in America. Of necessity this spirituality expresses and reflects the worldview of the Bible and the Catholic faith. I hope, however, that people of good will may discover in this spirituality insights and principles that are well-suited to address the concerns of the contemporary workplace.<sup>128</sup>

An authentic spirituality of work encourages all to see their labor, not as drudgery or a burden, but as an opportunity for service—to God, to family, to co-workers and stakeholders, to our communities, our nation, our world. To homemakers, employees, employers, and investors alike, this spirituality counsels hard work and due diligence, seeking pride in a job well done. It should discourage two disabling and unhealthy tendencies in the modern workforce—sloth and shoddy workmanship on the one hand, and a frenzied “workaholism” on the other. A proper spirituality of work should lead us all to keep the motives and priorities for our work in proper perspective. Finally, for those whose daily work gives them authority and responsibility over the lives and livelihoods of others—employers, managers, investors, shareholders—this spirituality calls them to ensure that their work always has the bottom line of serving the true good of the human person.

Today’s new realities offer us the opportunity to look afresh at the meaning and value of work, to see work not only as the means by which men and women provide daily bread for themselves and their loved ones. We have the chance to consider work in its fullness, as participating in a plan that is higher and

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126. 1 *Corinthians* 10:31.

127. GAUDIUM ET SPES, *supra* note 2, at No. 38.

128. Pope John Paul II, A New Solidarity Based on Work: Address to the International Labour Organization (June 15, 1982), in *PATHS TO PEACE: A CONTRIBUTION* 41–48 (Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations 1987).



more marvelous than we can imagine. It is a noble and holy work in itself to begin the task of creating a new public philosophy of work. May the Lord give success to the work of our hands, hearts, and minds.