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John Paul II's theology of works

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POPE JOHN PAUL II'S THEOLOGY OF WORK

Work occupies a lot of space in human life. All the people are participating in the process of work. However, the attempt at embracing what work is poses certain problem. It reveals to us that there is certain chasm between work we do and the comprehension of work. Referring to work, Pope John Paul II bridges this chasm by putting a man in the centre – man understanding his work. It is difficult to understand what work is, if the meaning of a working man is not appropriately identified. Theories of work marked by an anthropological error may lead to the situation in which work will backfire on man. Let us try and respond to the call and follow the idea of Pope John Paul II in order to understand the theology of work.

1. Basic premises of the theology of work

In his teaching on work, the Pope combines the revealed truth and the experience of life. This attitude lacks the juxtaposition of the world or care for earthly matters and eternal matters. It recognises the value of effort, competence in actions and knowledge and incorporates it in the image of work issues. Thus, the theology of Pope John Paul II combines the description of the Book of Genesis, care for salvation with the problems of e.g. workers of the Gdańsk Shipyard (Stocznia Gdańska).

The Pope's explanations of the essence of work take very often as the starting point the passage from the Book of Genesis, in which the world forms reality given to man's control and where work is a significant element of calling: *To a man God created in his own image and after His likeness, God said unto them, "replenish the earth, and subdue it"* (cf. Gen. 1:28)[1].

[1] Jan Paweł II. Przemówienie: *Praca służy człowiekowi i społeczeństwu* (Rzym, 01.05.2000) nr 1. W: http://www.opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_pawel_ii/homilie/jubileusz_pracy_01052000.html (wydruk z dnia 12.05.2012 w archiwum autora artykułu).

Therefore, work has been inscribed in human nature in the act of creation. It is a manifestation of likeness to God in His creative dimension: *a man is an image of God, inter alia, due to the call received from his Creator to subdue the earth, to have dominion over it. By fulfilling this call, man, each human being, reflects the actions of the Creator of the universe himself*[2]. *Therefore, in the God's plan work is not only law but also responsibility. It is necessary to utilise earth's resources for the good of every man and society and it helps directing human activity at God by facilitating the fulfilment of His call to "subdue the Earth"* (1 Cor. 10:31)[3].

Inasmuch as there is continuation between God's activity of creation and creative activity of man and not conflict, Christianity, too, forms no obstacle to active care for the world. Just the opposite – it encourages it[4]. Care for salvation does not change the necessity of worldly involvement. The Holy Father reflected it by referring to St. Paul, who chastened the Thessalonians giving up their jobs to await parousia: *These words are referred to by Paul the Apostle writing to Christians in Thessaloniki: For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" and he cautions "that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread"* (2 Thess, 3:10, 12)[5].

The Pope stresses the fact that dignity of work is particularly enhanced in the New Testament: *The Son of God was not ashamed of the profession of a carpenter and did not refrain from living the everyday life. (...) the significance of the life of Christ is clear: He belongs to the "world of work", He recognises and respects man's work; furthermore: He views work, its various types, with love, noticing a particular trait of man's likeness to God – Creator and Father – in each type of work*[6].

Christianity presents the Son of God, born into the family of the carpenter – Joseph – doing manual labour, thus demonstrating that it is not specificity that defines work but dignity of a man doing it: *in this case it fundamentally redefined the terms by coming from the whole content of the evangelical message, above all from the fact "that He who, being God", has become similar to us in every aspect (cf. Hbr. 2:17; Philippians 2:5-8), having devoted the majority of his years spent on earth to work in the carpenter's workshop, to "manual labour". This circumstance is in itself the most meaningful "message of work", demonstrating that the type of activity performed is not above all the basis to measure the value of man's work but the fact that he who performs it is a person. The sources of dignity of*

[2] *LE nr 4.*

[3] Jan Paweł II. Przemówienie: *Praca służy człowiekowi i społeczeństwu* nr 1.

[4] Cf. KDK nr. 21, 39, 43, 57; K. Wenzel. Mała historia soboru watykańskiego II. Kraków 2007 s. 178.

[5] Jan Paweł II. Przemówienie: *Praca służy człowiekowi i społeczeństwu* nr 1.

[6] Tamże nr 2. Cf. LE nr 26.

work should not be sought above all in its objective dimension but in the subjective one[7].

Work remains in a certain intimate very real relation with Him who loves man fully, who demonstrated fundamental measure of love in the history of man and the world – the ultimate measure: of redemption and salvation[8]. Human's work is imperfect. It gains perfection through Jesus Christ. It becomes involved in the world transformation process leading to perfection through the act of cross, through crises and suffering. It forms the element of act leading to what the Author of the Apocalypse calls *the new heaven and the new earth*[9]. This perspective should form the source of eschatological hope which is not supposed to mean comfort for the future in the beyond but is to provide motivation to zeal and eagerness in making this earth perfect[10].

Thus, in his teaching Pope John Paul II complements the creation dimension of work with the redemptive one. Man invites God to his life through work marked with effort, tiredness and sacrifice. This becomes a part of the bread and wine symbolism chosen by the human Son as the way to come. God does not come in sacred creations of nature like holy trees, stones, fire or water. God came through the way of fruits of man's work – by consecrating bread and wine. Work becomes the act of building the way for God as any work has its share in the creation of bread and wine. So does our work[11].

The Pope somehow reminded of this truth in his letter to artists. He quoted the poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid, saying: *Beauty is to enthuse us for work – the work (enthuse us) to be resurrected* [Polish: Bo piękno na to jest, by zachwycało do pracy – praca, by się zmartwychwstało"[12]. The intention of the author of these words was that work inspired by love, being a form of beauty, is on the one hand the deepest motive for man's creative activity, and on the other – it is the way to salvation[13].

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[7] LE nr 5.

[8] Cf. Jan Paweł II. Przemówienie do przedstawicieli świata kultury zgromadzonych w kościele Świętego Krzyża (Warszawa, 13 czerwca 1987) nr 6. W: http://ekai.pl/biblioteka/dokumenty/x494/przemowienie-do-przedstawicieli-swiata-kultury-zgromadzonych-w-kosciele-swietego-krzyza-warszawa/?print=1 (wydruk z dnia 12.01.2012 w archiwum autora artykułu)

[9] EE nr 20.

[10] Cf. Ap 21, 1; K. Wenzel. Mała historia soboru watykańskiego II s. 180.

[11] M. Spieker. Etyczny filar demokracji. W: http://www.tygodnik.com.pl/ludzie/tischner/spieker.html (wydruk z dnia 11.01.2011 w archiwum autora artykułu).

[12] C.K. Norwid. Promethidion. Rzecz w dwóch dialogach z epilogiem. Część *Bogumił*: „Bo nie jest światło, by pod korcem stało; Ani sól ziemi do przypraw kuchennych, Bo piękno na to jest, by zachwycało; Do pracy – praca, by się zmartwychwstało".

[13] Jan Paweł II. Przemówienie do przedstawicieli świata kultury zgromadzonych w kościele Świętego Krzyża (Warszawa, 13 czerwca 1987) nr 5. Cf. Cz. S. Bartnik. Kultura i świat osoby. Lublin 1999 s. 327.

Man's work is his basic way of living life on earth[14]. It is not historically determined but results from the very nature of a human being. It is reflected by the biblical faith. The Pope recognizes it as the starting point for the regular lecture on work theology comprising a creative, redemptive and salutary aspect[15].

2. STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS OF THE NATURE OF WORK

Let us here refer to the image of man's work. A bricklayer builds a house for a family. The bricklayer knows how to lay bricks. He knows how to connect them, what tools to use for the wall to be even, how to enhance the structure of the house for it to be safe. What is needed to perform this work? It is necessary to have capital – ownership, tools, materials. Knowledge of work is also needed. There is no good work without certain understanding of it, without understanding the fundamentals of construction, construction technology, etc. Does the bricklayer need knowledge of the solid state physical theory? Does he need in-depth knowledge of geology? It may be debated by shifting the boundary between knowledge that is necessary and one that is not. Certainly, there is necessary knowledge. Necessary knowledge covers the builder's belief that his work will be appreciated, that he will be justly remunerated for this work and that it will be good for him and for the people it will serve[16]. Without such knowledge it is not certain whether the builder will perform his work well. Awareness of just payment and good it will bring is of different nature than knowledge of wall geometry or laying bricks. Knowledge of fairness and humanitarianism of work is ethical knowledge, whereas knowledge of materials and tools is economic and technical knowledge[14].

Therefore, to build a house one needs capital, work and worker with knowledge necessary to work[17].

Considering these three dimension, the Pope puts emphasis on the fact that man is always in the centre of work-related issues. Man who will gain control over capital and the reality of work. There is no theology of work without recognising the subjective dimension of work, that is of man. Both the value of capital and the value of work equal the value of man of work. This reflects the morality of

[14] Cf. LE nr 4; S. Wyszyński. Duch pracy ludzkiej. Konferencje o pracy. Włocławek 1946 s. 17-36.

[15] Cf. LE nr 4; Cz. S. Bartnik. Ręka i myśl. Teologia pracy, odpoczynku i świętowania. Katowice 1982 s. 49-51.

[16] Cf. KUL. Sprawiedliwość gospodarcza. Bibliografia, adnotowania, wypowiedzi. W: http://www.kul.pl/sprawiedliwosc-gospodarcza,art_1778.html (wydruk z dnia 10.01.2012 w archiwum autora artykułu).

[17] Cf. J. W. Gałkowski. Człowiek i praca. Próba filozoficznej analizy pracy. Warszawa 1980 s. 11-39.

work to which Pope John Paul II paid a lot of attention, for the man to be always first. Morality understood in this way saves man from being alienated from work because work lacking moral sense becomes senseless work losing its basic meaning, i.e. the best interest of man[18]. The Pope notices the tension between ethics and technique, technical thinking as opposed to ethical thinking, man's dignity and capital. However, he underlines that work organisation, treating man solely as mechanism or element of a greater whole or treating man's work as a product, is a harmful utopia.

3. THREAT TO THE RIGHT ORDER

Materialism and economism are threats the Pope mentions in the *Laborem Exercens*. The fundamental mistake in the modern history of Europe was treating work as a kind of a product purchased from a worker by the employer. This was accompanied by the development of new socio-economic forms, e.g. capitalism in various extreme forms. The Holy Father notes: *(...) the "danger" of treating man's work as sui generis "commodity" or anonymous "power" necessary for production (even the "manpower" term is used) is "constant", it exists in particular when the whole recognition of the economic issues is marked with premises of materialistic economism*[19].

The dimension of work in question leads to objectification of man, to disturbance of the working order and the person is treated as an element of production, as manpower. Man in the process of work is treated as material means of production. The mistake of economism consists in the sole purpose of profit. The mistake of materialism consists in ascribing greater value to capital over man and spirituality of work. It is most important, however, that there are real people behind capital and work. If these values are opposed, this leads to social disorder and antagonising the social groups. This is incompatible with the structure of work and order of social life[20].

Another source of danger is separation of capital or means of production from the world of work. This leads to the situation, of which history of the 19th and 20th century provides examples, when a narrow group of owners of means of production maximised profits at the expense of limiting the share of workers in profits on their work. This lead to the impoverishment of the working masses and to excess exploitation of their health. This practice resulted in the polarisation of two ideological circles – liberalism and communism with Marxist ideology[21].

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[18] Cf. RH nr 15; Cz. S. Bartnik. Kultura i świat osoby s. 324-326.

[19] LE nr 7.

[20] Cf. Tamże nr 14.

[21] Cf. Tamże nr 11; Cz. Strzeszewski. Praca ludzka. Zagadnienia społeczno-moralne. Lublin 1978.

In theory, Marxism was to lead to abolishment of class differences and of private ownership. However, separation of capital from work inevitably lead to antagonisation of the aforementioned values[22]. It consisted in contrasting capital with work. It lead to organising and inspiring work in communism not for the people but against them, in the context of fight between social groups or nations. Marxism also abolished private ownership to which man, by nature, has right[23].

4. Moral dimension of work

The greatest focus in John Paul II's theology of work is given to the ethics of work[24]. The ethics of work draws attention to the value represented by a worker. To John Paul II, ethics – understood as the cognition of good and evil – became more important as an aspect of work than the social and economic dimensions of labour. It was in this very field that the Pope criticised the aspirations of economism, materialism, or communism.

The moral dimension of work results from the fact that work is "work for something or someone." First and foremost, work improves the worker himself. In this sense, it is "the work for oneself," or more precisely – the work on oneself. Work is a good thing for man since, as John Paul II taught, it is *a good thing for his humanity – because through work man* not only transforms nature, *adapting it to his own needs, but he also* achieves fulfilment *as a human being and indeed, in a sense*, becomes "more of a human being."[25] Work that suits human dignity, that highlights and augments it, refines a human being. This is why industriousness is a virtue. Nevertheless, work can also be used against man and strip him of this dignity, become a pointless toil. Therefore, John Paul II emphasized that: *All this pleads in favour of the moral obligation to link industriousness as a virtue with* the social order of work, *which will enable man to become, in work, "more of a human being" and not be degraded by it not only because of the wearing out of his physical strength (which, at least up to a certain point, is inevitable), but especially through damage to the dignity and subjectivity that are proper to him.*[26]

Understood as a process whereby man and the human race "subdue the earth," work corresponds to this basic biblical concept only when throughout the process man manifests himself *as the one who "dominates."* This statement gives priority to man over capital and to ethics over technology. This dominion, in a certain sense, refers to the subjective dimension even more than the objective one: this

[22] Cf. CA nr. 22-29.
[23] Cf. Tamże nr 15.
[24] Cf. J. Majka. Rozważania o etyce pracy. Wrocław 1986 s. 12-14.
[25] LE nr 9.
[26] Tamże nr 9.

dimension conditions *the very ethical nature of work.* In fact, there is no doubt that human work has an ethical value of its own, which clearly and directly remains linked to the fact that the one who carries it out is a person, a conscious and free subject, that is to say a subject that decides about himself.[27]

A very important aspect in the morals of work is "the work for another." Work can be reasonable and satisfying exclusively when man does it for others and with other people as co-workers. Man does not work only for himself, but sacrifices himself for another person. Thus, work is not simply a means to achieve one's goals, but is supposed to benefit others. Without such reference, the moral dimension of work becomes distorted. By working for himself alone, man lets himself be closed in the narrow circle of egoism, and work comes to serve the purpose of securing future wealth. This way, work loses the link with 'today,' ceases to bring immediate benefit to the lives of particular persons. Without this link, the place of the worker is taken by work itself, and labour becomes work for the mere sake of work. Hence, work is replaced by the religion of work and is exploited by totalitarisms.

In the Marxist theory, work was targeted against somebody, it was "the mobilisation of forces," "the strategy of work," or "a struggle." The communist states of the East advocated the concept of work as a struggle against Western imperialism. John Paul II described it with these words: *It is worse still, when some assert: "the battle comes first" – even when the struggle is a class struggle. It is all too easy for the other or the others to become "the enemies," those whom it is necessary to fight, annihilate, instead of those with whom it is necessary to seek common ground, those with whom it is necessary to consider how the burdens should be shouldered. 'Carry on each other's burdens.'"*[28] The Holy Father opposed social solidarity to class struggle[29]. And the key to understanding this solidarity is work[30].

The primary beneficiary of work is family. Through family, work reaches the nation. A family needs sources of livelihood, thus work constitutes an essential factor in exercising one's natural right to start a family. Another area where work and family interact is upbringing. Since it allows man to realise himself, work plays a major role in self-development and education within the family: *In a way, work is a condition for making it possible to found a family, since the family requires the means of subsistence which man normally gains through work. Work and industriousness also influence the whole* process of education *in the family,*

[27] Cf. Tamże nr 4.
[28] Gal 6,2.
[29] Cf. ChL nr 37.
[30] CA nr 10.

for the very reason that everyone "becomes a human being" through, among other things, work, and becoming a human being is precisely the main purpose of the whole process of education. Obviously, two aspects of work in a sense come into play here: the one making family life and its upkeep possible, and the other making possible the achievement of the purposes of the family, especially education. Nevertheless, these two aspects of work are linked to one another and are mutually complementary in various points.[31]

The third domain of reference for work within the proper ethical and social order is the wider community that shapes a man. One of the many meeting points for the reality of work and the social life is related to the fact that, by growing within a certain society, an individual benefits from the fruits of the past generations' labour. In a way, the society becomes a man's educator through providing him with the environment for growth, that is *a great historical and social incarnation of the work of all generations.*[32] At the same time, a man's work takes on a social character as it integrates him into the effort of generations, and an individual's activity contributes to the common good of the society.

Work within such a meaning leads to the discovery of the community-building value of work, and the sense of community provides a foundation for solidarity at work, that is for a relationship between workers. By reminding us to "Carry on each other's burden", John Paul II emphasized that a human being is not alone, but lives with others, through others, and for others. The entire human existence has a community dimension – and a social dimension. This dimension cannot be translated into reducing a human being, its talents, capabilities, or tasks. It is precisely from the point of view of the community that each person should be granted enough space. One of the key tasks of the wider community is to create this space so that every man can develop himself, his personality and his vocation through work. This individual growth, this space within the social life is, at the same time, a condition of common good. If man is deprived of these possibilities, if social order imposes too narrow boundaries on human possibilities and initiatives – even if it is motivated by some "social" reasons – it works, unfortunately, against the society. Against its good – against the common good.

5. MORAL PRINCIPLES RESULTING FROM THE DIGNITY OF WORK

1. Labour has priority over capital. The demand that man subdue the earth gives rise to an ethical principle because everything created using the resources available to the human race, including the capital or the means of production, has

[31] LE nr 10.
[32] Tamże.

played a role that is instrumental, inferior to man. The earth with its resources should serve man through work. The Holy Father concludes this as follows: *This truth, which is part of the abiding heritage of the Church's teaching, must always be emphasized with reference to the question of the labour system and with regard to the whole socio-economic system. We must emphasize and give prominence to the primacy of man in the production process,* the primacy of man over things. *Everything contained in the concept of capital in the strict sense is only a collection of things. Man, as the subject of work – and independently of the work that he does – man alone is a person. This truth has important and decisive consequences."*[33]

2. Man has the right to private property. The property should, however, be acquired through work, and the ownership of land and its various riches should serve labour. The capital itself is, to a considerable extent, an element of the reality obtained by the person being in its possession. This can refer to the resources of the earth, but the technology for processing them or the tools needed for this purpose are also a result of someone's work. This, as the Pope insisted, is yet another evidence for the priority of labour over capital[34].

3. Worker has the right to just remuneration. This applies not only to money received for work, but also to the opportunity to make decisions about one's own workplace.

4. Man has the right *to form associations for the purpose of defending the vital interests of those employed in the various professions. These associations are called labour or trade unions. The vital interests of the workers are to a certain extent common for all of them; at the same time however each type of work, each profession, has its own specific character which should find a particular reflection in these organisations."*[35]

The human being is in the centre of John Paul II's discussion of work. There is no work without the human being. The personalised attitude to work is in line with the ethics of work because labour or the capital employed must contribute to the benefit of humanity. The ethics of work highlights the value attached to a worker. Theology of work cannot exist without recognising the subjective dimension of work. The ethics of work is centred around man because of his and his fellowmen's good, thus saving the worker from being disconnected from work. Work that is devoid of moral sense becomes pointless as it loses its social meaning and develops into a source of socio-economic problems.

[33] LE nr 11. Cf. Ca nr. 6-10.
[34] Cf. CA 30-43.
[35] LE nr 20.

JOHN PAUL II'S THEOLOGY OF WORK

Summary

The human being is in the center of John Paul II's vision of work. There is no work without the human being. The personalistic attitude to work is in line with the ethics of work, because labor or capital must contribute to the good of humanity. The ethics of work highlights the value attached to the worker. The theology of work cannot exist without recognizing the subjective dimension of work. The ethics of work is centered on man because of his and his fellow men's good, and thus saves the worker from being disconnected from work. Work that is devoid of moral sense becomes pointless, as it loses its social meaning and becomes a source of socioeconomic problems.

Keywords: theology of work, John Paul II, ethics of work, rights of workers

TEOLOGIA PRACY W NAUCZANIU JANA PAWŁA II

Abstrakt

Praca w Teologii Jana Pawła II jest istotnym elementem podobieństwa człowieka do Boga Stwórcy. Realizując ją człowiek spełnia jej cele w dwóch wymiarach – w wymiarze podmiotowym i przedmiotowym. W sensie podmiotowym praca sprawia, iż człowiek, twórca, pracownik, staje się coraz bardziej człowiekiem, a przez to coraz bardziej podobny do Boga. W aspekcie przedmiotowym człowiek jest powołany do tego, by panować nad stworzeniem i, humanizując ziemię, czynić ją sobie poddaną, coraz bardziej przyjazną każdemu człowiekowi i wszystkim ludziom. W doktrynalnym wymiarze teologii pracy najbardziej wyeksponowany jest aspekt stwórczy pracy, nie mniej jednak omawiany jest wymiar odkupieńczy i zbawczy. Jest to szczególnie widoczne tam, gdzie mowa jest o dowartościowaniu pracy w osobie wcielonego Syna Bożego.

W moralnym wymiarze Ojciec Święty przede wszystkim eksponuje godność człowieka pracy, z której wynika godność pracy. Elementy natury pracy takie, jak kapitał, czy aktywność człowieka, łączy osoba pracującego, który jest głównym punktem odniesienia. To personalistyczne podejście porządkuje sens pracy, broniąc przed błędami materializmu, ekonomizmu, leseferyzmu, czy marksizmu i komunizmu. Praca, w swym etycznym wymiarze, jest przede wszystkim „pracą dla", a nie „pracą przeciw" komuś, lub w rywalizacji z kimś. Dobrze zrozumiana natura pracy jest kluczem do rozwiązania problemów natury społecznej i jest fundamentem solidarności społecznej. Z tych ogólnych założeń wynikają określone szczegółowe prawa i obowiązki pracownika.

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Słowa kluczowe: teologia pracy, Jan Paweł II, etyka pracy, prawa pracowników