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Chapter Three

Pope John Paul II's "Laborem Exercens" and its Relevance for the Nigeria Ethics of Work in the Public and Civil Service

"Though the Church's first care must be for souls, how she can sanctify them and make them share in the gifts of heaven, with his live hood and education and his general welfare and prosperity." [1]

Introduction of the Problem as a Challenge on the Discipline of Theology

This paper derives from a fundamental concern with the present state of affairs on the continent of Africa, politically, socially, economically and religiously. It takes Nigeria as an example, Igbo land in its strictest sense, only as a paradigm of that which happens or can happen elsewhere. As is largely known, the great anomalies facing most developing countries are poverty, exploitation, ignorance, hunger, coups, injustice, alienation and cultural degradation.

There is increasing loss of moral and spiritual values and the mounting loss of faith in God, a loss of faith in life itself, its meaning and the impossibility for any change for the better. Many have given up. Others who had hoped for a better day in their lifetime have crashed on these hopes. Their visions for better world order have been marred. Here in Nigeria, corruption and the lack of any sense of direction have increased recently. In an attempt to find out how the present came to be and to fashion out better trends for the future, many worried, honest and truth seeking persons have called on the discipline of Theology for a direction.

The Social Teachings of the Church at this point in time has been challenged to respond to the "social question" in Nigeria as elsewhere by seeking elements from Christian social principles acceptable and adaptable to Nigeria and Africa for the solution to many of the problems facing the nation. The perspectives of the encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II: "*Laborem Exercens*". expose them, seek their causes and offer from the perspectives of Christian

[1] John XXIII, Mater et Magistra, no. 3.

social principle relevant elements towards a solution. We are thus faced with problems of unity and diversity. How can we in the unity of Catholicity seek for elements relevant for the African situation from the Encyclical whose Social milieu were not influenced by the African situation without disrupting the unity in Catholicity?

Can we redefine and reframe the terms of reference, yet remaining original? In our attempt to consider the relevance of *Laborem Exercens* for Nigeria, our attitude is and must be, to re-translate and readapt the proposal and scientific argumentations and present in the document and to place them vis-à-vis the Nigerian world of work. In so doing, we are able to identify the differences and the meeting points. We are able to establish relevant values and put them in the context of a developing nation with a developing social ethics without denying the basic truths that guide man. In other words, we are able as Africans and African Theologians to make changes in the entire process of assimilating teachings from outside by giving definitions from an African contextual framework.

Theology talking to Africa has to be understood and translated into the realities of Africa so that the voice of Christ may be truly heard by the indigene without the risk of alienation. As has been sufficiently proven, both here and elsewhere, there are many inter-related aspect uniting traditional values and the social principles of the Church. Ours is a search for the identities and the differences, thus, the relevance of John Paul II's "*Laborem Exercens*" for the Nigerian work ethics and properly so for the Nigerian civil and public service.

What is "Laborem Exercens"?

A fundamental dimension of man's life is human work. Human work is "the key to the whole social question", that is, to all the problems, which have arisen for each one of us, for our society and for the world at large with the development of industries. It is through work that man can renew the face of the earth, because through work man creates, builds and organizes the society and the world. It can be conveniently asserted that everything that is, is a product of work, the food we eat, the houses we live in, the roads, cars, books, education, the family and society, religion and culture. Human work is the guiding thread through which all political, social, economic, religious and cultural aspects of man's life in society are co-coordinated.

Laborem Exercens is the name of the Pope's third Encyclical letter, devoted solely to the problem of human work. It is thus a social Encyclical, after the

manner of the first of the great Social Encyclicals by Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* or "Of Revolutionary Times" written in 1891 at a time of great industrial unrest and revolution in Europe with the attendant problems of capitalism and exploitation. *Rerum Novarum* was geared towards correcting injustices and calling people to order by establishing basic Christian principles as guidelines for thought and action.

Since 1891, successive Popes after Leo XIII have written on related problems on Social Questions. Worthy of mention here are Pius XII's White Sunday Broadcast (1941); John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963); Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* (1967). With *Laborem Exercens* (May 1981), John Paul II joins the list of the 'Social Popes'. A profound and wide ranging document, with over 15,000 words in length, *Laborem Exercens* was written to commemorate the 90th Anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1981). *Laborem Exercens* was intended to be publicly announced on 15th May 1981 – the exact day of the anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. But it bears the date of 1st September 1981, the feast of the triumph of the Holy Cross, and this delay was due to the Pope's hospitalization after the attempted murder by Rurk Ali Agca. This 'extrinsic' affair with the date gives the document a personal and spiritual originality, which cannot be ignored.

Exposing work as a human participation in God's creative activity, Pope John Paul II shows that work can be and must be the means of man's fulfilment as an image of God. The product of labour must be worthy, the labour itself dignified, because the worker himself, is carrying out the creator's purpose: "subdue the earth", and in doing so imaging God to all his creation. The document contains many technical and difficult arguments to make its points clear, but it ends up as a directive for man the worker. The great social encyclicals of the Church, of which *Laborem Exercens* is the latest, are of their nature different from doctrinal encyclicals.

While the principles, which are essential to the teaching of the Church, such as the dignity of man as a child of God, do not change; the circumstances to which they apply do change, sometimes very radically. And so does the situation of man in the later part of the 20th century. Like the Pope himself observes in outlining the main reasons for the encyclical, there are widespread introduction of automation into many spheres of production; the increase in the cost of energy and raw materials; the fact that the world is being intolerably polluted; the emergence on the political scene of people, who after centuries of subjection are demanding their rightful place among

the nations and in international decision-making; The development of informatics and telematics; and vicious circle of inflation and unemployment; the distressing economic situation in the north-south axis, but also the unnecessary waste and endangerment of world peace in the east-west squabbling and ideological power struggle; the loss of a sense of culture and corporate work style; the marginalisation of the agricultural sector and the massive exodus from the rural zones to the cities; the social and economic under-valuing of the vocation of motherhood; the separation of work from its relation to the family and the issue relating to work and labour are seen only as determined by the dogmas of contemporary ideologies, the encyclical *Laborem Exercens* addresses itself to these problems in a new way.

And here lies the originality of John Paul's encyclical on Human work. No one will overlook the fact that it was the first time that a Pope devotes an entire encyclical completely to this one theme. Although the Pope himself states he does not intend to deal with human work in an original manner but in organic connection with the whole tradition of the Church's social teaching, his encyclical is original. In the first place, the choice of the theme exposes these facts. Unlike his predecessors who in their commemorations of Leo XIII's milestone achievement undertake an organic review of the themes connected with the 'social question, John Paul hesitates and writes rather on "Homo Laborem Exercens".

His reflections are divided into five parts and contain twenty-seven paragraphs in the original Latin version of the document *'Laborem Exercens'*. Part One, consisting of paragraphs one to three, is the introduction to the theme of human work with a definition of the concept. Part Two, consisting of paragraphs four to ten, discusses the details of work and man, the family and the nation. Here work in the subjective and objective sense is considered.

Part Three consisting of paragraphs eleven to fifteen, discusses the central conflict existing since the industrial revolution between labour and capital, a discussion which leads us to seek for the option of *Laborimus* which insists that human work comes before capital. Part Four consisting of paragraphs sixteen to twenty-three, considers the rights of workers within the context of fundamental human rights as agreed upon by the world community of nations. various groups of workers are considered, their situations and the possibilities for betterment. Part Five of *Laborem Exercens* consisting of paragraphs twenty-four to twenty-seven, contains elements for spirituality of work with Christ, the man of work as the paramount example, and the cross

as the way to salvation and resurrection. In this document, Pope John Paul's reflections are deeply rooted in the Bible, where work is presented as participation in the mystery of creation and redemption, its characteristics being that work is necessary, painful, corporate, redemptive and creative.

The Pope's Definition of Work

In the encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II, "*Laborem Exercens*", the Holy Father defines work as "any activity by man, whether manual or intellectual, whatever its nature or circumstance, means any human activity that can and must be recognised as work, in the midst of the many activities of which man is capable and to which he is predisposed by his very nature, by virtue of humanity itself.[2]

This definition of work and its meaning as given by the Pope has a very wide and broad scope. Work is referred to by the Pope as an activity. In the book of Genesis, man is presented as the only creature in all creation created in the image of God. "So God created man in his own image" (Gen. 1:26) and gave him the command to "subdue and fill the earth". (Gen. 1:28). This command contains within it an invitation to participate in the creative activity of the creator through work. Says the Pope: "From the beginning therefore, he is called to work" (LE, No. 1), man is called to work and to activity in the biblical words of the creator. "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth".

Commenting on this biblical words, the Pope says: "even though words do not refer directly and explicitly to work, beyond any doubt they indirectly indicate it as an activity for man to carry out in the world. Indeed, they show its very deepest essence … in carrying out this mandate, man, every human being." (LE, No. 4, 2). Through work, man benefits from past generations and works for the benefit of generations yet to come.

Work is thus directed towards an external object. However, it does not follow from this that work's external purposes are the first importance, necessary though it is that all should be pursued. The second Vatican Council teaches, "as human activity proceeds from man, so it is ordered towards man". This essential purpose of man's work is to perfect himself than to change the world in which he lives, though he must change the world. In

[2] Laborem Exercens, No.1

changing the world, man supplies the material for human progress but that material cannot of itself bring human progress about.

Work, a Specifically Human Activity Uniting all Mankind

The Pope makes it clear that work is a specifically human activity. Just as man is a "homo sapiens". "*homo loquens*", so also is he a "*homo laborem exercens*". This alone raises the dignity of work. Animals do not work; their natural movements and activities is not and cannot be regarded as work, but is rather best explained their instinct for self-preservation. Man however, beyond the instinct of self-preservation seeks self-realisation which work offers. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "Work is one of the characteristics that distinguishes man from the rest of creatures, whose activity for sustaining their lives cannot be called work. Only man is capable of work, and only man works, at the same time by work occupying his existence on earth". Since work is specifically human property, it is therefore a uniting factor for all men. This universality of work suggests the unity of mankind whether among men or among women, of every race and nation, who speak different languages, represent diverse culture, and profess different religions.

Work, a Means of Livelihood and Existence

The second meaning of human work, dictated by the Genesis story: "in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread…" and often quoted and elaborated upon by Pope John II is the concrete fact that work, is a means of existence, assures a livelihood, sustains family life and helps the working man earn some wages to satisfy his material and spiritual needs. "Thus man must earn his daily bread and contribute to the continual advance of science and technology". Work assures man's life and health, either directly, whereby man grows his own food as farmer, or indirectly, whereby man does some job which earns him money to buy his needs. Man's life, personality and development are shaped and dignified by work.

Work Gives meaning to Human Life and Existence on Earth

In the Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, the Pope brought to light one fundamental meaning of human work, stating clearly the fact that work reveals to man the true meaning of his existence. The problem of work has a very profound link with that of the meaning of human life. Because of this link, work becomes and indeed is a problem of man's spiritual nature. As one of those aspects connected with the inscrutable mystery of man's redemption aspect, one that is always relevant, demanding renewed attention and decisive witness.

In his first Encyclical letter "*Redemptor Hominis*", the Holy Father stressed the fact that "man is the first road which the church must travel in fulfilling its

missions; man is the first road and the fundamental road of the church mapped out by Christ Himself… Man's dignity is an elevated one; because of the saving work of Christ and so also is man's work. For not only does work bear the imprint of man, but also it reveals to man the true meaning of his existence. Work is considered as a human activity regardless of its concrete content and circumstance. Work is endowed with this "basic dimension of human existence, through which man's life is built up every day.

The Evils of Unemployment

From the above distinctive characteristics of work, we have seen that work is necessary for man. But it is a fact that many people are unemployed. Critically looking at their situation, based on our objective but positive idea of work, we would be mistaken not to affirm that unemployment is an evil.

- It is an evil because it makes the unemployed less a human person, that is that which makes him distinctly different from other sub-human animals. He has no opportunity to seek self-realisation which work offers.

- It is an evil because through it people lose their rights to existence. "He who does not work should not eat" the sacred scriptures say.

- It is an evil because the people involved have lost their rights to growth in life. They have lost their human dignity since man's dignity is an elevated one, because of the saving work of Christ, so also is man's work.

It stands clear that the right to work stands as the most fundamental of all rights in the labour world, for it is only to the working individual, that all other rights descend upon. To be out of job means to be out of means of livelihood. One might even say that unemployment is not only an evil in the general sense in which we have described it, it can in certain senses also mean the negation of existence, especially in the context of Nigeria and many of the developing nations, where to be unemployed does not automatically guarantee social security, like in many European countries of today.

Unfortunately, there is no statistics available to buttress the exact number of Nigerians without work. But it is reasonably acceptable to state that about fifteen to twenty percent of the capable working population of Nigeria is

without work. Majority of Nigerian citizens, both skilled and unskilled workers are thrown out of job, by private, public and government sectors.

Human Work and Nigerian Situation in Pre-colonial Society

We refer to Igboland and the pre literary, pre-colonial and pre-industrial Igbo culture and survey Igbo tribal society in its work structure before the birth of the Nigerian nation. Such a historical and cultural excursion is necessary, as we can better understand the background and attitude to work in Igbo traditional society before the political, cultural and social interruption of Igbo history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is important to note that what is said of Igboland, might apply to any of the various ethnic groups of Nigeria.

Attitude to Human Work in Igbo Traditional Society

In discussing the attitude of the Igbo to work in traditional society, it must be made clear that some of those traits have disappeared in modern times among the same people and this is understandable. The time has changed, influences from Europe, America and other Africa and world communities have infested Igboland, and the caption of S. Othenberg's book "Igbo Receptivity to Change" is being daily experienced among the Igbos of today. The society is no longer strictly an agricultural one, as industrialization, commercialization and new government jobs, among others have invaded the economic scene.

First of all, human work was understood in traditional society as a fundamental dimension of man's existence because, through work, man was able to change, re-organise, and restructure his society. Work was therefore, regarded as a creative activity. Man built his house, built up his family, the village assembly, the village square and the places of worship through work. Secondly, the Igbo understood human work as a means to feed himself and his family and kindred. Here, work was regarded as a necessity of nature to keep body and soul together without which, the society, as Basden has tried to show, toiled "when there was a great necessity, either hunger, or superior force". Leisure is appreciated and people should not overwork when it was not called for.

Summarily, there were two sole inducements to work, namely: to provide basic foodstuff for the family and the kindred and to provide shelter for the family. Thirdly, work was understood in Igboland as a corporate activity, performed by all members of the community and family. Through work a man, his wife or wives, and children were able to engage themselves in a

united and concerted action to complement each other and fulfil their basic needs. Work was a part of life, in the words of Francis Cardinal Arinze:

> *"Nobody was called a worker because everybody was a worker. It was taken for granted that everyone did some useful work, and most of it was rural*".

Seen in this way, the ramblings in Europe in the nineteenth century concerning the situation of the "working classes" and the "employers" could not make any sense for the Igbo of the same period. Besides, the attitude of the Igbo view of work considered one kind of labour, namely, that of the farmer, as a noble activity as opposed to the Romans and Greeks of olden times, where manual labour was usually left to hired hands and slaves, since it was a "mean" job for the citizens. Worthy of free man, for the ancient Greek and Roman was work on poetry, science, philosophy and the art of participation in government. But for the Igbos, praises were lavished on the successful yam farmer and he had a noble status in the society.

Why this Attitude to Work?

This attitude to work is understandable for various reasons.

- The climate was tropical, plenty of sunshine, sometimes very hard on the worker. There are only two clear seasons for the Igbos: the wet season and the dry season. This clear weather division into rainy and dry seasons, makes it imperative for the Igbo to work and plant in the wet season, and to harvest and rest for the greater part of the dry season, Nature thus played a vital role in determining work tempo.

- The material needs in traditional society were not generally flamboyant. People had just the minimum for existence, as a strong sense of materialism, unnecessary amassing or accumulation of wealth was generally absent.

- Thirdly, the needs of the family and of life were on the whole easily satisfied. The farms supplied practically all the food needed for daily consumption; yams, cassava, vegetables and fruits. Meat was available through hunting activities and its consumption was often modest.

Traditional Igbo Society – Absence of the Rich versus the Poor

In Igbo traditional society, there was a marked absence of rich and poor classes. People were generally farmers and they grew their own food. Since most of them cultivate the same type of food, it is to be expected that their diet would be almost identical. There was a technological identity to what wealth would bring about to cause a class system among the people, as Max Glukman has mentioned: "with available tools; axe, hoe and adze, spear and trap, bows and arrows, dugouts or canoes and fishing nets, each man can produce little beyond what he himself can consume. Hence though the poor might work for those who have more, they cannot be employed to give the rich an elaborate level of life above their own."

Under this condition therefore, the rich could not get rich in their production and acquisition as the possibilities for storage were limited, nor could the poor get poorer in their consumption of excess. It is thus a clear class of haves and have-nots, for everyone was forced to eat the same food, and live under the same circumstances.

Change of Attitude in Colonial Days

Historians have described the period that opened up towards the end of the 15th century as the "Age of Exploration", and this description covers many events that followed, namely; slavery, colonialism and Christianisation. A new impulse to exploit the natural resources of certain commodities which Europe did not have, the desire to counteract Muslim expansionism, and the wish to explore the so called "unknown world" forces the well-to-do classes of western Europe to tour round the world to seek for the suppliers of these luxury commodities; such as silk, ivory, gold, precious stones, and spices, previously obtained directly from Asia. What started as trade in legal materials ended up with slavery which lasted for over two centuries, costing entire Africa precious manpower and depopulation.

Colonialism took over from slavery. But Britain's colonial policy remained exploitative and orthodox; "maintain law and order, stimulate the production of raw materials, create demand for British exports, and raise taxes to pay for colonial rule." This policy lasted until 1960 when Nigeria became independent. In the context of Nigeria, the colonially imposed government with its federal structure coincided with Britain's dreams, without proper consideration of the historical realities; the wishes of the various ethnic groups occupying the area, and was therefore from its inception unworkable and politically unrealistic as history has tried to prove in the stormy years of the nation's existence.

Colonial Heritage and the Crisis of Values

In making reference to the problems of Nigeria, we are thereby attempting to locate the context and milieu in which the encyclical letter of Pope Paul II is being applied in its relevant message. As has already been shown from the preceding descriptions, the traditional society described above has already or is readily disappearing, following the intrusion of foreign powers into the political, cultural and social life style of the natives.

In fact, Nigeria today is undergoing a massive change in all spheres of life, be it economic, social, political, religious or otherwise. This situation has to a very large extent also changed the original attitude to work in traditional society it has changed the organisation of work and the type of work done. For many Nigerians, work is ceasing to be rural or subsistent and is becoming urban and white-collar Instead of hoes and machetes, people today work with paper and pen dressed in French or British suits to match. The Western European influence during the colonial after has left its indelible mark on the situation of Nigeria, and has inherently become the origin of all problems associated with the nation. This does not mean that the external causes alone are responsible for the situation. In fact, there are also internal problems which have no doubt joined to maximize the contradictions.

The problems of corruption, embezzlement of public funds, laziness, the tendency to materialism and self-centred politicians coupled with selfishness, the absence or total lack of intellectual rigour in dealing with issues, the cult of mediocrity, lack of exemplary leadership, the lack of fair play and the neglect of public utilities, added to the situation of "get rich quick", armed robbery whether by single individuals, groups, or by public servants and elites, the cult of waste, consumerism, lack of efficiency, the exploitation of the weak and lowly, and above all, the indiscipline in public and private life – all these join hands together to make what we today call the 'bane of the Nigerian society'.

The question of finding a formula to redeem the country from complete political, economic, social and moral collapse has been uppermost in the minds of Nigerians, both high and low, rich and poor, public officers and privately employed, students, teachers, churchmen, civilians and military men. Some have been content with mainly exposing the ills of our society,

solutions have been sought, ideologies propounded and moral orientation schemes initiated, such as the 'Low Profile', 'Otu Olu Obodo', 'The National Ethical Re-Orientation Programme' and 'War Against Indiscipline' Why all these measures? What is wrong with Nigeria?

Attitude to Work Today

It has been sufficiently demonstrated in the preceding pages that Nigeria's history is one of colonialism and extended economic exploitation, both from outside and from inside. Because of the colonial economic system with foreign firms such as the United Africa Company (UAC), United Trading Company (UTC), British Petroleum (BP), Shell, John Holt, Royal Niger Company, National African Company, all operating within the territory and carting away its raw materials to Europe; independent Nigeria inherited an economy that was in 1960 structurally engineered to be dependent on, and manipulated by the international money markets of Western Europe and America.

This dependence sees in government work, even after the colonial era a bourgeois institution that does not merit it. Government work is looked upon only as a source of "getting one's share of the national cake", and therefore many people are prone to look at what is government's as "no man's land and no man's property", and people render unsatisfactory service to it. There is strong negative 'utilitarianism' in people's attitude towards national service and government work. The reasons are clear, and in the historical situation understandable. Commenting on this state of affairs Francis Cardinal Arinze wrote: "The colonial power was not loved and was served with less than total dedication.

Government business was regarded as nobody's business. This mentality had a damaging effect on work attitude. Behind this assertion lays the principle that work which serves the good of foreign powers primarily and not that of the workers runs the risk of being haphazardly done.

The consequences for the natives was that new classes of people gradually came into existence with nothing to sell other than their labour. Surely they did not like this labour and would easily neglect it, but for the fact that they daily depend on it.

These hired labourers were fired anytime, poorly paid, sometimes beaten by the master, and they on their own, have bad reminiscence of this times. National work was looked upon with suspicion, as work for a foreign body. This attitude however, is gradually changing with the many appeals to

patriotism by the post-colonial governments but much has still to be done. The famous slang "*Oga Emem Pay*" (will it pay me, or rather, is it to my gain) often heard in the post-colonial Igboland is a product of this situation.

When attitude to work remains only utilitarian, only to get daily bread, but not to become more, not to help in nation building, not to build up a corporate body, that is, a community of workers, not to get spiritual fulfilment; when work is considered simple as a task to be done and get quick money, then we are away from the mark. Pope John Paul has a lot to offer the Nigerian worker in his attitude to work.

Work is considered alienating, especially paid jobs. Therefore, there is personal engagement or interest in the work done for others. And so, many Nigerians employed to work for an entrepreneur or for the government, engage likewise in private work, which can give them personal fulfilment or bring them nearer to their private wishes.

During employed working hours, many people play, eat, chat, prepare for exams, trade on other goods, but they do not work adequately for that which they are paid unless this is adequately controlled. The booklet on national consciousness and mobilization crusade' titled *War Against Indiscipline* and systematically carried out by Buhari government has a lot to say on the point mentioned here. Slogans often heard during work hours include 'Na me be Nigeria?' 'Me I no go die for dis kind work', meaning simply that many workers do not identify themselves with the work they do.

Applying the Social Principles of 'Laborem Exercens' to Nigerian Situation Today

In spite of all criticisms on external powers and on the past, Nigeria today needs authentic value to appreciate the actions of its citizen's and judge their conduct, but these values cannot be solely created by western society and then applied to Africa. Africa's values must and has to emanate from the realities of Africa, and it is only when committed individuals decide for this option that the new society ideally aiming at restoring the dignity of the human person can be created; the time has come for such a revival.

To have a true understanding of the meaning and value of human work, we need only reflect on the following words of the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II in Nigeria.

> "*Nigeria has been blessed by the creator with rich human, potential and with natural wealth, such gifts received in humble*

> *gratefulness, are also a constant challenge, for the goods of this world are given by the creator for the benefits of all. Public authorities are entrusted with the sacred assignment to channel these riches to the best interests of the people, that is, for the betterment of all and future of all."*

Works as a Necessity

It is man's duty to work. It is by his work he must procure his daily bread; by his work that he must contribute to the continuing development of the technical arts and sciences; by his work that he must help to raise even higher moral and cultural standards of the society in which he shares his life with the human family. In so far as we fail in realizing this, we frustrate our lives and fail in what we owe the common good, offending against the virtue of social justice, which bids us to do habitually, whatever is necessary for the common good.

Since it is man's duty to work, Nigerians may need to change their attitude to work, which since the colonial experience has become exteriorized. Work should not simply mean 'Meal ticket', but must be more for a country with the potentialities to elevate Africa. Work must be understood as necessary, creative, corporate, painful and redemptive.

Man as the Subject of Work

Man alone is adapted to work. Indeed, work is one of the signs by which man is distinguished from other living creatures. Although active in sustaining themselves, animals cannot be said to work. Work is a fundamental dimension of man's existence on earth, and through work man fulfils his life on earth. Therefore, work bears man's signature, the distinctive mark of his humanity and nature; the mark of a person who is created in God's image to act within a community of persons. We must keep always before our eyes the subjective nature of work. First man, then the rest. If we do this, we shall never neglect or deny the threefold external purpose of work, namely; family, nation and mankind; nor shall we neglect the dignity of the working person and the uniqueness of the individual.

Work in the Objective Sense

The Encyclical *Laborem Exercens* extols the unique worth, value and dignity of man and asserts that economics must serve man, not otherwise. Man's special relationship to God his creator and his endowment with reason, faith and external soul make him superior over work itself, the object of work, the tools and equipment used as working materials. Such an attitude will help

rescue Nigeria and entire Africa from the impending economic secularism and materialism facing modern nations.

The Primacy of Labour over Capital

The conflict between labour and capital is superfluous and based on false views of man. The undoubted source of the conflict lay in the fact that when the workers offer their labour for sale, they put their powers at the disposal of a class entrepreneurs who were led by the principle that profit should be maximised and tried strenuously to establish the lowest possible wage for the work done. Apart from this, Man's work was abused in other ways for the sake of profit; among the evils is the neglect of safety precautions and of provision for the health, living conditions of the workers and their fundamental human rights as well as their families.

The Pope offers the basic thesis that there is a priority of labour over capital, and at the same time, no inherent opposite between both. While recommending the sharing of profit between capital and labour, the Pope warns that both capitalism and socialistic communism, that is, economism and materialism have erred in setting mankind in an antimony of ideologies to the left and right. Nigeria must reject all ideologies whether to the left or to the right. Africa policy makers are thereby helped to strike a balance between rigid capitalism and extreme collectivism. We must maintain the primacy of man over things including ideologies.

Worker's Participation in Decision Making

The 'personalist argument' is offered as a valid alternative to all forms of work, which deprive the worker's participation in the means of production, or bureaucratize his personality. As the document points out, the man who works rightly expects something besides a fair wage for his labour. He wants also to have the process of production so arranged that he works, even on something which is owned in common, he can be aware that he is working: on his own account." This awareness is extinguished by excessive bureaucratic supervision which centralizes everything and makes the worker feel that he is just a cog in a huge machine directed from above; nay rather, that he is for more reasons nothing but a mere instrument of production rather than the true subject of work endowed with an initiative of his own. Failure in this respect inevitably does incalculable damage to the running of the economy; and has as its first victim, man himself.

Private Property

On the ownership of private property, *Laborem Exercens* maintains that this right is a natural one and is in order with the will of God. Ownership of property, whether individually owned or in the hands of the community as titleholder must be strictly differentiated from rigid capitalism or extreme collectivism. Christian tradition has never held that the right to ownership is absolute and untouchable; rather, the right has always been understood within the broader context of the right, which is common to all men to use the goods of the whole of creation. The right to private disposal is plainly subordinate to the right of common use of goods that are intended for all mankind. In the context of Nigeria, we are guided from the above assertions to learn that man cannot live in poverty and squalor. An adequate method of distribution of the goods of the nation must be undertaken to ensure that the majority of the citizens have their rightful share of the nation's resources.

External Influences

Laborem Exercens rightly points out to African leaders as well as workers and employers everywhere, that some of the problems in labour and productivity are controlled by factors beyond the workers and his direct employer. Such factors, which cause dependence in economic relations, may be social such as international trade policies and relations, multi-nationals, and other economic determinants, which need adequate examination. Policy makers and economic experts are thus helped from the Pope's research to know where the problems lie and to take necessary steps to curb them for the good of the worker.

The Rights of Workers and Human Dignity

The rights of the workers are inalienable. By guaranteeing them these rights, the charter of the United Nations, which calls for the respect of human dignity and guaranteeing of human rights, are recognized. In the words of the Pope: "As the *Magisterium* of the Church has pointed out several times, that human rights constitute a primary condition for peace in today's world, peace within states and social groups as well as between states. The human rights that flow from work fall into the broad context of these principal rights of the person" (LE, N.26).

Among the many rights of the workers which any serious nation must guide and guarantee are, the right of citizens to work; the right to just wages for work done; the right to resist all forms of exploitation; the right to strike when this becomes inevitable; the right to own property and to participate in the ownership of the means of production; the rights to various social benefits and insurance such as health, education, leisure and rest, pension and

old age, protection against threats to personality and property; rights to practice of religion, freedom of movement, speech, thought and existence.

Other rights include the protection of women from chauvinistic elements of exploitation; guaranteeing the rights of migrant workers, technical workers, the disabled and unemployed and last but not the least, protecting the dignity of agricultural work by granting farmers essential support, services, loans and encouragement. In a developing nation such as Nigeria, official state policy must be aimed at achieving the full realization of these rights for the common good of all its citizens.

Spirituality of Works

Finally, the spiritual orientation offered by *Laborem Exercens* confirms and elevates the traditional African conception of work, which if properly understood, contributes to the development of Africa, as well as in other continents, the conception of work as a God-given vocation to help in creation. Work will thus be understood as a human obligation in the complex meaning of the word, for the Creator has commanded it and man cannot live and grow in his humanity without it. Properly understood, work has before all else, the property of bringing people together, uniting them in the oneness of God's supremacy. For through work, man cares for his family and those closest to him; he cares for the wide range of his human society, that is, the nation which is his mother, and the whole human family of which he is a member.

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