

Work and Growth: A Catholic Church-Inspired Perspective

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at

International Conference on Religions and Sustainable Development Goals

Vatican City, 7-9 March 2019

I wish to thank His Eminence Cardinal Turkson and the Dicastery for Integral Human Development for the kind invitation to participate in this Conference and to share some reflections with you today. I must admit, however, that upon receiving this invitation, my heart skipped a few beats upon reading the assigned topic: “Work and Growth”. I feared that I would be expected to offer a purely economic analysis of this issue – a task for which I would be sorely lacking both in professional formation and in psycho-social and spiritual conviction. Then I read the sub-title for the entire conference: “Listening to the cry of the earth and of the poor”, and my breathing returned to its normal rhythm. Thus, I will focus on the growth of decent work under conditions of dignified working conditions and just wages and with access to collective bargaining, as it is sorely needed in today’s world.

In its recently released Report entitled *Work for a Brighter Future*, prepared by the Global Commission on the Future of Work constituted by the International Labour Organization in anticipation of its centenary observance, attention is called to the following trends that represent significant obstacles to achieving the goals that are inextricably related to the world of work and, in particular, to Goal 8, which calls for the attainment of Decent Work and Economic Growth. They include the following:

- 190 million people are unemployed, of whom 64.8 million are youth;
- 344 million jobs need to be created by 2030 in addition to the 190 million jobs needed to address the needs of those already unemployed;
- 300 million workers live in extreme poverty (<\$1.90/day);
- 2.78 million people die every year as a result of occupational accidents or work-related illnesses;
- Wage growth declined from 2.4% to 1.8% between 2016 and 2017;
- Women are paid approximately 20% less than men;
- Between 1980 and 2016, the richest 1% of the world’s population benefited from 27% of global income growth whereas the poorest 50% benefited from only 12% of such growth.¹

¹ *Work for a Brighter Future*, Global Commission on the Future of Work, International Labour Organization, Geneva, Switzerland, 2019, p. 20.

The author, J. Pfeffer, succinctly summarizes these present-day obstacles to equitable and solidarity-based growth, as follows: “As companies obsess over their carbon footprint, they would do well to consider their effects – their footprints – on the human beings, a carbon-based life-form, who work for them.”²

Since I am tasked with offering Catholic Church perspectives on this topic, I do not feel it necessary to apologize when pointing out that papal commentaries on these situations are even more pointed and heartfelt. During a Mass to observe the year 2000 Jubilee Celebration for Workers, St. John Paul II urged the human family, at the beginning of the Third Millennium “to address the economic and social imbalances in the world of work by re-establishing the right hierarchy of values, giving priority to the dignity of working men and women and to their freedom, responsibility and participation. It also spurs us to redress situations of injustice by safeguarding each people's culture and different models of development.”³

In an Address to the 48th Social Week for Italian Catholics, Pope Francis expressed anguish over the exploitation and uncertainties faced by many labourers: “There are jobs that humiliate the dignity of people, those that fuel war with the production of weapons, which undersell the value of the body with the traffic of prostitution and which exploit minors... Precarious work is also an open wound for many workers, who live in fear of losing their job. I have heard this anguish many times: the anguish of losing one’s job; the anguish of a person who has work from September to June and doesn’t know if he will have it the following September... This is immoral. This kills, it kills dignity, it kills health, it kills the family, it kills society.”⁴

Concern about the ethical relation between work and economic growth and business development is not confined to a recent chapter in the Church’s history. Writing at the time of the Industrial Revolution, both about the penchant for profit and its consequent abuse of workers, Pope Leo XIII issued his landmark encyclical letter, entitled *Rerum Novarum*. He declared with forceful conviction, “... the labour of the working class – the exercise of their skill and the employment of their strength, in the cultivation of the land and in the workshops of trade – is especially responsible and quite indispensable.”⁵ He saw the role of the worker as so important in contributing to economic growth “... it may be truly said that it is only by the labour of working men that States grow rich.” Therefore, he called for fulfilment of the

2 J. Pfeffer “Dying for a Paycheck”, Stanford Graduate School of Business, Harper Collins, 2018.

3 St. John Paul II, Homily on the Occasion of the Jubilee Celebration for Labourers, Vatican City, 1 May 2000, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000501_jub-workers.html

4 Pope Francis, Video Message to 48th Social Week for Italian Catholics, 26 October 2017, <https://zenit.org/articles/pope-no-dignity-without-work/>

5 Pope Leo XIII, *Encyclical Rerum Novarum*, 1891, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html, 35.

demand of justice “... that the interests of the working classes should be carefully watched over,..., so that they who contribute so largely to the advantage of the community may themselves share in the benefits which they create – that being housed, clothed and bodily fit, they may find their life less hard and more endurable.”

Forty years later, Pope Pius XI insisted, “It is a scandal when dead matter comes forth from the factory ennobled, while men there are corrupted and degraded.”⁶ St. John XXII warned, “If the whole structure and organisation of an economic system is such as to compromise human dignity, to lessen a man’s sense of responsibility or rob him of opportunity for exercising personal initiative, then such a system, We maintain, is altogether unjust – no matter how much wealth it produces or how justly and equitably such wealth is distributed.”⁷

Pope Benedict XVI reflected on the present-day situation of “mobility of labour”, which he associated with a climate of deregulation, and acknowledged certain “positive aspects” in this phenomenon, “... because it can stimulate wealth production and cultural exchange.” Nevertheless, he also recognized that “... uncertainty over working conditions caused by mobility and deregulation, when it becomes endemic, tends to create new forms of psychological instability, giving rise to difficulty in forging coherent life-plans, including that of marriage. This leads to situations of human decline, to say nothing of the waste of social resources.” Comparing present-day situations with the casualties of industrial society in the past, Pope Benedict expressed concern that “... unemployment today provokes new forms of economic marginalization, and the current crisis can only make this situation worse. Being out of work or dependent on public or private assistance for a prolonged period undermines the freedom and creativity of the person and his family and social relationships, causing great psychological and spiritual suffering.” Thus, he reminded “... everyone, especially governments engaged in boosting the world’s economic and social assets, that the *primary capital to be safeguarded and valued is man, the human person in his or her integrity*: “Man is the source, the focus and the aim of all economic and social life.”⁸

I cannot conclude this reflection without citing labour migration, which, when it is undertaken by both employers and workers in a voluntary, regular and orderly fashion and under decent work and just wage conditions, represents a “good case example” for the positive association between work and growth. In a 2018 article for a Working Paper on *Rethinking Labour: Ethical Reflections on the Future of Work*⁹, Mr. Donald Kerwin, Director of the Centre for Migration Studies in New York, makes the claim that “Migration from developing to developed States

6 Pope Pius XI, *Encyclical Quadragesimo Anno*, #31, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html

7 St. John XXIII, *Encyclical Mater et Magistra*, #83, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater.html

8 Pope Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Caritas in Veritate*, #25, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html

9 Donald Kerwin, “An Ethical Vision of the Future of Labour and International Migration,” in *Rethinking Labour: Ethical Reflections on the Future of Work*: A Working Paper of the Caritas in Veritate Foundation, Geneva, Switzerland, October 2019, p. 130.

has long been one of world's most successful anti-poverty strategies." He then proceeds to list the following 2015 findings by the McKenzie Global Institute¹⁰:

- International migrants constituted 3.4 percent of the world's population, but contributed 9.4 percent (\$6.7 trillion) to the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), most of it attributable to the movement of migrants to "higher productivity" settings and jobs;
- Low- and middle-skilled workers together contribute about the same amount as high-skilled migrants to global GDP, although the latter contribute more per capita;
- Migrants contribute to their new communities through innovation, starting businesses, filling labour gaps and allowing natives to pursue higher-value work;
- Over time, resettled refugees compare favourably to the total United States population, as measured by personal income, self-employment, college education, home-ownership and computer literacy.
- Developed States place the most restrictions on migration, but garner most of its benefits. They host 65 percent of the world's migrants, but realise more than 90 percent of migrants' absolute global GDP contributions, which amount to 13 percent of their GDP.

I sincerely believe that this evidence demonstrates the positive impact of labour, even when undertaken by newly arriving migrants and refugees, on economic development across the gamut of high-, middle-, or low-income countries and at global through local levels. The lens through which Catholic Church-related Teaching reads and interprets such trends, however, moves far beyond the economic sphere to that of integral human development. Thus, Pope Francis makes the striking point that migrants and refugees are "not pawns on the chessboard of humanity," but "children, women and men who leave or who are forced to leave their homes for various reasons, who share a legitimate desire for knowing and having, but above all for being more."¹¹

10 McKinsey Global Institute (2016). "People on the Move: Global Migration's Impact and Opportunity." pp. 9, 71. Available at http://www.migration4development.org/sites/default/files/mgi-people-on-the-move-full-report_1.pdf

11 Pope Francis, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 2014, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20130805_world-migrants-day.html