

# Human work and self-realization, a thomistic approach.

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Max Weber, in his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, highlights the correlation between the protestant ethic and capitalism. The link is not one of direct cause and effect but this ethic can be seen as a contributing factor of capitalism, thanks to the importance of the wordly “calling” or the religious significance given to every-day activities. This is even more important for the Calvinists because of their understanding of predestination and their search for signs thereof in worldly success.

Our perspective will not focus on capitalism but will try to apprehend work as part of human perfection, or, in a more modern saying, as an element of his self-realization. For this wider view on work, the reflection will root itself in the Biblical vision of work as an essential activity in man’s life. The commandment of God sending man to work found in Genesis 1:28 and 2:15 is not a malediction but a calling. The circumstances have changed after the fall, but not God’s wisdom. Human work remains a task entrusted by God to man and through which man, with God’s assistance, can build a world and realize himself as man. It is our faith, as proclaimed in Ps 104, where the author sings the marvels of God’s blessings in creation and in human history. In this contemplation, cooperating with God, “man goes out to his work, and to his business, till the evening” (Ps 104:23).

As such, work has something to do with human self-realization intended in the personalist three-dimensions of vocation, incarnation and community. Vocation refers to God’s design continuously revealed to man from Genesis and in each personal life, while incarnation or embodied life denotes a commitment to the transformation of the earth and the environment through culture and all sorts of crafts and industries, the fruit of human creativity. And all this happens within human communities and in a spirit of complementarity and reciprocal services that build society and help one’s own self-realization.

In the dynamic ethics of Aquinas, the acquisition of virtues as perfecting qualities of human acts is crucial for man in order to reach his beatitude, the highest expression of self-realization, when man is introduced to the fullness of life in God. This paper will focus on the virtues exercised in the activity of work to find out how work can contribute to man self-realization.

After a synthetic overview of some elements of a theology of work in Aquinas, we will explore the role of some chosen virtues in perfecting man in his working activity and his work itself.

## **I. A theology of work in Saint Thomas’s writings?**

Aquinas deals with the question of work in the context of the debate concerning friars working in a university setting: can they teach and live on their teaching as the seculars do or are they stuck to manual labor to fulfill their personal needs as the monks do?<sup>1</sup>

He will answer to the question with a teleological approach as “one judges a thing according to the end to which it is ordained”<sup>2</sup> Actually, work has four ends: obtaining food, fighting against

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<sup>1</sup> Aquinas wrote two texts right in the middle of the quarrel in 1256: *Quodlibet*, VII, 7 and chapter 5 in *Contra impugnantes*. About the theology of work according to Thomas Aquinas, cf. Christine GAUTIER, *Collaborateurs de Dieu. Providence et travail humain selon Thomas d’Aquin*, Cerf, Paris 2015, chapter 4.

idleness, curbing concupiscence, almsgiving<sup>3</sup>. So the precept concerning work will be evaluated in connection with its ends, comparing work with all other means to reach those ends. The precept must, however, be taken seriously because it comes directly from Scripture, starting with Genesis (3:19). St Paul's exhortation in Thessalonians is extremely clear: "we urge you (...) to work with your hands, as we directed you" (1 Th 4:11).

The other available means for the friars which mitigate the precept concerning manual labor are numerous: idleness can be vanquished by prayer, study, meditation, preaching; concupiscence can be curbed by fasting and vigils. Concerning the quest of food, the question is slightly more delicate because the precept belongs to the natural law and Thomas refers to the human constitution. The Angelic Doctor will develop two different arguments, an anthropological one and a social one, so that his theology of work is much more universal and goes beyond the university quarrel.

### The anthropological argument

Man was not provided with bodily dispositions which would give him immediate access to food, clothe and any other natural protection as animals enjoy (such as fur, horns to defend themselves, and the capacity to hunt prey), but "[nature] gave him hands adapted to varied works and with which, through different jobs (*artificiis*) he realizes the things thought out by his reason".<sup>4</sup> Reason and the hand (the organ of organs) permit man to secure his subsistence. From what the reason has conceived, we then come to the works and to the professions<sup>5</sup>. The creative capacity of reason is central, as we can see in this question when Thomas asks whether the body of man was given an apt disposition:

Horns and claws, which are the weapons of some animals, and toughness of hide and quantity of hair or feathers, which are the clothing of animals, are signs of an abundance of the earthly element; which does not agree with the equability and softness of the human temperament. Therefore such things do not suit the nature of man. Instead of these, he has reason and hands whereby he can make himself arms and clothes, and other necessities of life, of infinite variety. Wherefore the hand is called by Aristotle (*De Anima* iii, 8), "the organ of organs." Moreover this was more becoming to the rational nature, which is capable of conceiving an infinite number of things (*infinitarum conceptionum*), so as to make for itself an infinite number of instruments (*infinite instrumenta*).<sup>6</sup>

Man is gifted with a body adapted to his intellectual nature. His physical weakness is thus transformed on account his rationality. This bodily disposition first seen as an imperfection is thus opened to a creativity which allow him to elaborate strategies and tools for his protection and for all his natural needs, beginning with food. In the treatise of man (*ST*, I, q. 76, a. 5), the stated aim of this bodily disposition informed by reason is the infinite variety of the tools with a view to attaining all kinds of ends. And there, man's free decision plays its part: what to do and how direct this multiform gift open to infinite possibilities? As the quality of the body depends on its order to the

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<sup>2</sup> AQUINAS, *Quodlibet*, VII, 7. On the teleological approach see Carlo MOLARI, *I luoghi paralleli nelle opere di S. Tommaso e la loro cronologia. Un esempio di analisi: il lavoro manuale dei religiosi*, "Euntes Docete" XI (1958) III, "Con maggiore completezza e logicità, nel Quodlibetale S. Tommaso ordina tutta la materia sul lavoro manuale prendendo spunto da un principio finalistico.", p. 386.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 187, a. 3.

<sup>4</sup> AQUINAS, *Quodlibet* VII, 7. My translation.

<sup>5</sup> About the wide semantic field of work, see Christine GAUTIER, *Collaborateurs de Dieu. Providence et travail humain selon Thomas d'Aquin*, Cerf, Paris 2015, p. 196.

<sup>6</sup> *ST*, I, q. 91, a. 3, ad 2. See also q. 76, a. 5, ad 4: "man has by nature his reason and his hands, which are "the organs of organs" (*De Anima* iii), since by their means man can make for himself instruments of an infinite variety, and for any number of purposes." (*instrumenta infinitorum modorum, et ad infinitos effectus*)

spirit which animates it, so the quality of the human work will depend on its order to the rational creativity of the person who perfects herself while working.

### **Social dimension of work**

In keeping with the precept given in Gen 3:19, which orders to earn one's food by the sweat of one's brow, Thomas will make an important distinction between the precepts which concern each single person and those which concern the human species as a whole. For example, the command to multiply is addressed to humanity as a whole but it does not prevent some people from choosing not to have children without compromising the species' survival. In the same way, nobody can totally answer his/her own needs, but in an organized society where exchanges are codified and thanks to complementarity of talents, some can teach while others cultivate the earth and produce food, and others make clothes. So, everyone can put bread on the table. The precept concerning work is applied to all, but in different ways and the religious can earn their living from teaching because they help others by offering them spiritual goods. This does not mean depreciating manual labor, especially the one which provides food for all, but complementarity allows each one to provide a good useful for all on material or spiritual level and to build the common good.

Such a vision of society encourages a certain specialization, and a richer enfolding of creativity, each one specializing more in whatever he does best. Language plays a role here. It permits men to collaborate in the search of truth and communicate the fruits of their research<sup>7</sup>. The distribution of the tasks relies first on the organization of the city, the perfect community, because here the needs of all are guaranteed better than in the family.<sup>8</sup> The distribution of the gifts and personal dispositions in the community is also a gift of divine providence which never lets the whole community lack the talents necessary to the common good<sup>9</sup>.

Thomas does not deny that some must be exempted from work, for instance if they are disabled. Solidarity compensates so that nobody is left in need if not able to earn his living on his own. This is precisely in keeping with the fourth end of work: almsgiving and helping the needy<sup>10</sup>.

As a human good, work bears an intrinsic value that goes far beyond its result or immediate fruit. Indeed, mutual help is not limited to physical needs but includes also moral growth. While the group receives from one person (for example St Paul choosing to work in order to avoid scandal), the contrary is also true:

man receives help from the group of which he is a part, to have a perfect sufficiency for life; namely, that man may not only live but live well, having everything sufficient for living; and in this way man is helped by the civic group, of which he is a member, not only in regard to bodily needs—as certainly in the state there are many crafts which a single household cannot provide—but also in regard to right conduct.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. *De Regno*, I, c. 1: The language “allows someone to express his whole thought to others”. See also *SCG* III, 147.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*, translated by Richard J. Regan, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., Indianapolis, Cambridge 2007, Book I, chapter 1, p. 15: “the political community is the perfect association. [...] For it belongs to the political community that it contains all the things sufficient for human life as much as possible. And so it is composed of many villages, in one of which smiths practice their craft, in another of which weavers practice theirs, and so forth. And so the political community is evidently the perfect association.”

<sup>9</sup> *SCG* III, 134 : “[S]ince many things are needed for man's life, for which one man could not suffice of himself, it is necessary for different jobs to be done by different people. For some should be farmers, some caretakers of animals, some builders, and so on for the other tasks. [...] Now, this division of various tasks among different persons is done by divine providence, inasmuch as some people are more inclined to one kind of work than to another.”

<sup>10</sup> *ST*, II-II, q. 187, a. 3.

<sup>11</sup> AQUINAS, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, Translated by C.I. Litzinger, O.P., Dumb Ox Books, Notre Dame, Indiana 1964, Book I, lecture 1, § 4, p. 2.

This quotation leads us toward the role of the virtues in work, to which I now turn my attention. I will subsequently illustrate how the virtues we practice in our work contribute to our self-realization.

## II. Work and virtue

In the first part, I looked at work as a human activity, and as such, contributing to human flourishing and as a gift of God. Since the fall, work can be painful, but related to its ends it remains always positive. It is an analogical concept: starting with the hand, organ of organs, it opens up to all the means invented and developed by man to provide material, moral and spiritual goods for himself and for the others. Work therefore is not limited to the material contingencies involved in organizing the worldly city but has also something to do with eternal beatitude. As such it contributes to the perfection of the worker. For Thomas, the quality giving its perfection to an act and to the agent is virtue. And virtue is present in our work at different levels, namely work, art, and industriousness.

### Art, work, and industriousness

The first level is art: the operative habitus that qualifies the work but not the worker<sup>12</sup>. Strictly speaking, it is not a virtue. However, when a person discovers a giftedness in a particular kind of art, to perfect it contributes to her personal growth and through this new aptitude she will be able to do a lot of good with her beautiful works. In this case, art is accompanied by moral virtues allowing a right use of the works. Indirectly, art or technique have moral effects. The following text of the *Commentary on Aristotle's Posterior Analytics* underlines this:

To enable us to carry out these actions easily and in an orderly way, we have invented many arts. For an art is nothing other than a certain ordering of reason by which human acts achieve a suitable end through determinate means.<sup>13</sup>

Technique is here instrumental to the realization of human acts which are means toward the end represented by human life, which entails more than merely biological subsistence. Aquinas has noted that a deficit in ability (*facultas*) or skill (*ars*) in manual labor can compromise the quest for livelihood<sup>14</sup>. The virtue of industriousness will supply for this lack and where it is not possible to acquire it – Thomas is here thinking of disabled persons or religious not used to manual work before entering religious life, who couldn't bear hard working conditions – mutual help will take over. Thomas calls it natural friendship or charity<sup>15</sup>.

Let us clarify what kind of virtue industriousness is. Just as work comes from an alliance of reason and the hand, and as the hand must invent all sorts of tools that reason conceives in order to improve the life of men and women, so industriousness perfects this research:

Thus we observe that man is helped by industry in his necessities, for instance, in food and clothing. Certain beginnings of these he has from nature, viz. his reason and his hands; but he has not the full complement, as other animals have, to whom nature has given sufficiency of clothing and food.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 57, a. 3.

<sup>13</sup> AQUINAS, *Commentary on Aristotle's Posterior Analytics*, Translated by R. Berquist, O.P., Dumb Ox Books, Notre Dame, Indiana 2007, Book I, *Proemium*, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> *SCG* III, 132 : “there are many who desire perfection of life, for whom neither the ability nor the skill is available to enable them to spend their lives in manual labor, because they are neither brought up, nor informed, in such pursuits.”

<sup>15</sup> *SCG*, III, 135: “Yet there is a remedy in connection with the way of life that we are talking about; namely, that help be given him whose labor is not enough to provide his living, either by other men in the same society who can do more work than is necessary for them or else by those who have riches. This is in accord with the law of charity and natural friendship whereby one man comes to the assistance of another who is in need.”

<sup>16</sup> *ST*, I-II, q. 95, a. 1.

Because at the beginning man does not possess the necessary means but only some tools (hands and reason), he is obliged to proceed by way of trial and error. Indeed, the prudential search for suitable means leading to the human fulfilment (that is to say, the fullness of virtue) is a contingent one and in contingency the means are numerous. As a result, industriousness plays an important role in the search for the best way to tackle a problem as a means to earning one's livelihood.

The question of subsistence today remains a priority in dealing with the environmental challenge and in finding out how to feed the planet. Mankind has newly to face this technical issue which bears a moral dimension<sup>17</sup>. Depending on how he solves it, he can improve his future happiness or compromise it. And self-realization also depends on these conditions, even if it is not identified to them.

Another name for industriousness is creativity which is expressed in various fields of human endeavour, not only in the arts. To come back to the global food issue, the upheaval of our societies calls man to be more creative to the point that he should invent new professions to accompany the changes in the fields of agriculture, health care, and technology. Some of these professions have already appeared<sup>18</sup>: climate controllers, garbology specialists, vertical farmers, memory surgeons, unused data administrators, alternative currency bankers, crowdfunding specialists, privacy consultants, to name a few. Because our systems need to be renovated, creativity is highly necessary. This virtue has a positive impact both on the agent (self-satisfaction and perfecting activity) and on society. And if society functions better, the members will more easily attain their end which is their personal good, not only a material one but especially a moral and spiritual one.

Industriousness develops itself in the realm of technique. It is close to prudence which is concerned with the search for of the means adapted to the person and to the end she pursues. In this regard, Thomas writes:

Diligence (*industria*) is twofold: one is merely sufficient with regard to things necessary for salvation; and such diligence is given to all who have grace, whom *His unctio teacheth of all things* (1 John 2:27). There is also another diligence which is more than sufficient (*industria plenior*), whereby a man is able to make provision both for himself and for others, not only in matters necessary for salvation, but also in all things relating to human life; and such diligence as this is not in all who have grace.<sup>19</sup>

Infused prudence aims at the good of salvation and all the faithful in a state of grace possess it. On the contrary, acquired prudence can provide "all things relating to human life", so it perfects man's work in general and makes life easier for all. As every acquired virtue, it is not innate and requires repeated efforts before becoming a stable quality in the agent.

Prudence is moreover a virtue supported by the moral virtues. It is the right rule of action. This demands that the appetites should be oriented towards the due ends thanks to moral virtues<sup>20</sup>. Once these principles are acquired (the due ends), prudence allows the person to act well, that is to do something and do it in the right way, after having deliberated and chosen the good means in view of the fixed end<sup>21</sup>. Because the prudent man sees ahead in the distance, as Thomas puts it, his sight is keen and he foresees uncertain events<sup>22</sup>, he is all the more necessary to our contemporary societies which are in a constant state of flux. Prudence must assist human creativity in the discovery of new ways and new professions to shape the future in the face of challenges. Without this rational

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<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis asserts that the solution lies in man's power, for example in *Laudato Si'*, n. 14. But this requires collaboration and conversion (see also n. 220 ff.)

<sup>18</sup> See for example the website of the University of Kent: <https://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/Choosing/future-jobs.htm> (01/09/2017).

<sup>19</sup> *ST* II-II, q. 47, a. 14, ad 1.

<sup>20</sup> *ST*, I-II, q. 57, a. 4.

<sup>21</sup> *ST*, I-II, q. 57, a. 5.

<sup>22</sup> *ST*, II-II, q. 47, a. 1

leadership, creativity could be led astray from its end – the real good of the person expressed in the four ends of work (obtaining food, fighting against idleness, curbing concupiscence, almsgiving) – attracted and misled by the means available by techno-science. At the crossroads between moral virtues and the intellectual ones, prudence directs industriousness and technical work and orientates them toward the service of the person and of society.

So qualified by the virtue of prudence, industrial production (the industrial one or the production proper to all the new fields of the human work) can increase in value while improving nature and helping to bring about the fulfilment of a world of persons, as Emmanuel Mounier wished:

Shackled at first to the immediate satisfaction of elementary needs, then loosened from them by parasitic interests or betrayed by its own infatuations, production should at last become an activity both liberated and liberating, shaped by all the requirements of personality.<sup>23</sup>

So art and industriousness, well-guided by prudence, helps the fulfilment of the person as an embodied being, starting from her nature as a given (in both its external and its internal dispositions) and moving this nature towards its end which is a more human and a more personal life, for the individual and for society as a whole, providing for the deep needs of humanity, those which conduce to greater freedom and which lead to the fullness of life.

### **Work and asceticism**

Besides the dimension of creativity, we need also consider the laborious character of work. Inventions do not always come about spontaneously and when skills or dexterity are required work is even less innate. As in the case of virtue, work demands effort. This asceticism common to both is a condition for the perfection of the person.

One of the four ends of work according to Aquinas is to fight idleness. Positively, it means that work allows, through practice and through docility to a master and to the preexisting material, to develop crafts and artistic, intellectual or moral skills such as patience, perseverance, self-control and listening. Paradoxically, resistances (material or other ones) that we meet in our work contribute to a greater ease and the flourishing of these qualities enable the work to be more successful and the person to perfect herself. Without asceticism, the craftsman could not increase the dexterity of his hand, nor could the musician acquire masterly skills. Indeed, every professional has something to practice and to exercise, often with tedious hours of repetition, in order to be prepared. This realism demands patience so that the artistic or professional perfection does not go without moral development.

Moreover the agent has also to work on his character, to direct his passions toward his true good and sometimes to correct certain defects. Prudence and the moral virtues play a role in so far as they guide human acts according to a right choice, right in respect to reason<sup>24</sup>. Work thus participates in human self-realization even with regard what at first constitutes an obstacle (resistances, flaw in the material to be worked on).

### **Patience**

Patience is the virtue helping one not to be discouraged in the face of evils, and especially not to abandon those difficult goods which can lead to better ones<sup>25</sup>. Perseverance was also quoted among the virtues necessary for our work. It allows one to stay attached to a specific good till it is achieved and requires one to resist when something leads one astray. It is obviously beneficial to the agent

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<sup>23</sup> Emmanuel MOUNIER, *Personalism*, Translated by Philip Mairet, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, London 1962, p. 13-14.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ST*, I-II, q. 57, a. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 136, a. 1.

during his work, not only for the sake of the work done but also for the perfection of the person herself.

Commenting on Psalm 36:2-3 (“Trust in the Lord, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.”)<sup>26</sup>, Thomas indicates the means to reach abundance, seen as the fullness accompanying the fulfilment of all wishes. He first comments on the two means based on the first part of the verse: hope (concerning both the good promised by God and His help to obtain it) and good action. Hope places our worldly activity in the wider horizon of God’s design and of our eternal salvation. Then good action pertains to the realm of human acts elevated by the virtues. Then he proposes various interpretations of the land to live in: the land of glory, that of the soul, or that of the militant Church, or that of the flesh. His interpretation of the land of the soul is interesting because he illustrates it with the sower and the seed fallen in the good soil, concerning which the Lord says: “these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance” (Lc 8:15). And Thomas goes on to explain that one inhabits the earth by coming back to one’s conscience – conscience in the sense of wisdom<sup>27</sup>. It reminds us that patience bears fruit if it is rooted in the wisdom of God who governs the world and our acts if we are faithful to Him, hearing His word and spending time in the sanctuary of our conscience. There we can also open ourselves to a higher prudence, which enables us to reexamine our choices and shed a divine light on them. This higher prudence is the gift of counsel, the gift of the Spirit that corresponds to the virtue of prudence, that helps it and perfects it<sup>28</sup>. Patience also procures a personal good since it removes sadness<sup>29</sup>. The more painful work is, the more it gives the occasion to practice patience and virtue. However the painful vision on work should not overcome the positive dimension that is the development of qualities and creativity. When conditions are too difficult, man always retains his freedom to denounce absurdity or scandal or whatever denies human dignity and to strive to improve these conditions. When it comes to avoiding an evil (such as slavery) or to establishing a greater good, the virtues of fortitude and justice take over<sup>30</sup>.

### **Work and social virtues**

Human work is integrated in our social life. Even the one who works alone must then exchange the fruit of his work in order to gain his subsistence.

The virtue particularly deputed to maintain a satisfying social order and thus contributing to taking care of relationships and to collaboration in the context of work is friendship or affability<sup>31</sup>. It concerns both actions and words and adjusts them to create harmonious relationships. This virtue gives precedence to human persons over the work to be done, it corrects a wild search for profit. It can also be cultivated in our over bureaucratized societies which tend to reduce persons to files, numbers and processes. A simple smile or a cordial word can smooth some boring administrative procedures and remind us that the agent is always a human person. Thomas describes the benefit of this virtue in the these terms: “[T]his virtue regards the pleasures of fellowship, which have their origin in reason, in so far as one man behaves becomingly towards another”<sup>32</sup>.

This virtue is also called friendship because it is rooted in a natural friendship resting on the fact that we all share the same nature<sup>33</sup>. It is linked to the virtue of justice because it deals with giving his due to the other by virtue of his human dignity. Sometimes in the work context it can be

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<sup>26</sup> The English translation is not yet available. For the latin, see *Expositio in Psalmos*, 36, n. 2, in AQUINAS, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 14, Fiaccadori, Parme 1863.

<sup>27</sup> cf. Wisdom 8:16 : “When I enter my house, I shall find rest with her”.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 52, a. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 136, a. 1, ad 3.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 136, a. 2. It is interesting to note that patience is also a potential part of fortitude (a. 4).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 114, a. 1.

<sup>32</sup> *ST*, II-II, q. 114, a. 2, ad 2.

<sup>33</sup> *ST*, II-II, q. 114, a. 1, ad 2.

practiced by mere interest, for instance in business relations. For Michael Novak it is one of the virtues relative to market as “courtesy, good service, quality, helpfulness, “satisfaction guaranteed””<sup>34</sup> and in this case the aim is to seduce the buyer and to sell more goods. If led by utilitarianism and not by the good itself, these virtues lack their qualities and don’t perfect the moral agent. In the opposite case, the agent is perfected and a fruit is the pleasure gained in acting with affability. The reason is that the good of the other which I love can be considered as my own good (all the more if the persons are two friends), and also that we can hope to obtain some good from these friends or from God. It is also pleasant because we become conscious that we are filled with abundant good when we are able to share with others, and all the more if love urges us to act in such a way. So doing good to others and practicing affability makes us feel better and happier<sup>35</sup>. Sometimes we tend to neglect these apparently insignificant attitudes, but they can transform our lives, however heavy work conditions might be, and fill our hearts with joy. It seems clear, therefore, that affability has affinities with some of the fruits of charity such as peace and joy. Charity is actually the source of any love and the origin of social virtues (and not only the ones we have quoted).

Beside affability, truth is another social virtue that is highly important in work. For Thomas, communication (through language) contributes significantly to the attainment of the common good, allowing us to transmit to others the fruit of our efforts and pool our varied talents. Truth is the virtue thanks to which man says the truth and manifests it in what he is. Without it, social relations and trust are compromised<sup>36</sup>. And as consequence, work with it. On the contrary this virtue qualifies human relations and suggests to what to say and how to say it<sup>37</sup>. It allows us to grow in trust and to contribute together to the common good relying on one another in our work, weaving a net in which the trust given in turn calls forth a greater trust in return and permits everyone to do his best in his job and to perfect himself.

The social virtues are numerous. However, in the limited space of this article we must leave them aside and turn to the theological virtues in order to see if there is a link between our work and our eternal end which is God Himself.

### **Work and theological virtues**

Hope is necessary to undertake a career, to embark on a new project, to dare explore new routes. Hope supports the virtue of industriousness when it doesn’t know precisely if it will succeed. It especially belongs to the young as Thomas says: youths “easily count a thing possible; and consequently are of good hope.”<sup>38</sup> To demonstrate this he quotes St Paul: “whoever ploughs should plough in hope and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop.” (1 Co 9:10). The same can be applied to all the enterprises<sup>39</sup>. We speak here of the passion of hope and not the theological virtue of hope. However, the link between hope and industriousness is highly significant. Man must keep in mind the arduous good, the fruit of the work being done, and find in the hope of achieving it the courage to undertake whatever task his job requires or his creativity inspires in him. The good to be done is all the better according as it is closer to God, participating in a more perfect similitude of the divine good. At this level we often separate work as a contingent necessity from our eternal good. Is it possible to reconcile these two spheres?

The highest perfection of man consists in his union to God given through grace and the theological virtues. In our work we aim at an arduous good and we have seen that hope is a stimulus to accept

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<sup>34</sup> Michael NOVAK, *Free Persons and the Common Good*, Madison Books, Lanham, New York, London 1989, p. 105.

<sup>35</sup> *ST*, I-II, q. 32, a. 6.

<sup>36</sup> *ST*, II-II, q. 109, a. 3, ad 1.

<sup>37</sup> *ST*, II-II, q. 109, a. 1, ad 2.

<sup>38</sup> *ST*, I-II, q. 40, a. 6.

<sup>39</sup> *ST*, I-II, q. 40, a. 8, s.c.



the challenge of this arduous good. Theological hope elevating our human dispositions allows us to see something as possible for thanks to the divine assistance<sup>40</sup>. So God becomes the rule of our action and transfigures our expectations, opening them to a wider horizon, namely the divine beatitude. Our everyday activity, however humble it may be, elevated by God, becomes the material that serves to build the City of Heaven. And God inhabits our activity by grace which animates all the virtues. Thomas specifies that we can extend hope to the persons we love, desiring for them a good as if it were our personal good (in the same manner as the good of the other makes us rejoice)<sup>41</sup>.

This attitude rests on faith<sup>42</sup>. The author of the letter to the Hebrews presents the act of faith as follows: “[W]hoever would approach God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (He 11:6). Does work belong to this search for God? The object of faith is what we cannot see and concerns divine realities<sup>43</sup> and is expressed in the articles of the creed. When we profess our faith in God the Creator, we include what is revealed, for example the governance of creation that God left to man (who must nevertheless respect the laws inscribed by the Creator in creation) and the fact that God entrusted man to his brother. We believe also that man needs salvation in Jesus Christ, an integral salvation not excluding any of the human dimensions of life, his soul and his body with all his activities, relationships, so that they can be effectively orientated toward God. This salvation fills our activities, even our sufferings, with a new meaning. That is why we can say that our work participates in our search for God and aims at attaining God if it is done with faith and charity. Indeed through faith eternal life begins because the intelligence is made able to adhere to realities it cannot see<sup>44</sup>, so that with his farseeing sight watching beyond the immediate work to be done, man knows that he is building the City of Heaven, the one coming from God and which fully realizes humanity.

But faith acts through charity (Cf. Ga 5:6) which enables us to accede to our ultimate perfection, the union to God, and gives us all the virtues mentioned before. We have already quoted the gift of counsel infused by the Holy Spirit with charity. Patience is also a fruit of charity<sup>45</sup> given with grace, friendship has also its source in divine love. Charity is in us a habitual added form which inclines us promptly and with joy towards the acts of charity<sup>46</sup>. Charity acts as well towards others, towards the actions necessary to our work and towards ourselves. De Lubac did not miss the role played by charity in man’s activity:

Furthermore, charity can distinguish between those vague dreams that are so harmful to concrete action and that universal intention which, by transforming the humblest task, makes a man give himself up to it wholeheartedly. Charity realizes that great self-denial is necessary for a man that he may have something to give, and to give is not to scatter oneself abroad—and that many natural bonds must be severed if the divine relationships of grace are to be established<sup>47</sup>.

Where charity is present, our work will be more surely achieved and won’t lose itself in vague desires or measureless projects. The perfection of work is achieved through the perfection of the person and, in the final analysis, issues from charity alone. So we can say with Karol Wojtyła: “And a thought grows in me day after day: the greatness of work is inside man.”<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> ST, II-II, q. 17, a. 1.

<sup>41</sup> ST, II-II, q. 17, a. 3.

<sup>42</sup> ST, II-II, q. 17, a. 7.

<sup>43</sup> ST, II-II, q. 1, a. 6.

<sup>44</sup> ST, II-II, q. 4, a. 1.

<sup>45</sup> ST, II-II, q. 136, a. 3.

<sup>46</sup> ST, II-II, q. 23, a. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Henri DE LUBAC, *Catholicism. Christ and the common destiny of man*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1988, p. 345.

<sup>48</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *The Quarry*, ID. *The place within. The poetry of Pope John Paul II*, Random House, New York 1994, p. 63.

## **Conclusion**

From this brief review of some virtues contributing to man's perfection and so to his self-realization, we can conclude that their action comes in the three dimensions constitutive of the human person. First, they allow man to answer his human vocation, putting his talents to the service of others (and thus becoming aware of them, accepting God's gift and developing them). They extend also to his supernatural vocation when the theological virtues are added making him touch God by transfiguring his human virtues. Second, the embodied dimension of life is well illustrated among others by prudence (and its parts such as industriousness and creativity) which adjusts the means to the ends pursued and requires one to be realistic and to be attentive to the contingent conditions of our actions. Third, they contribute to the communitarian dimension of the person, specially thanks to the more social virtues which bring to perfection collaboration and interpersonal relations in the work.

That's why we are invited to cultivate all these virtues in order to find human flourishing in our work, with the grace God gives us every day so that we can earn our daily bread with joy.

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