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Work in the Protestant and Catholic Traditions Compared: A Historical Analysis

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I want to thank the organizers and our hosts for the invitation and their hospitality, and this opportunity to reflect on the many meanings of work—religious, economic, social, political, and cultural—in this quincentenary year of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, and the centenary year of the Bolshevik Revolution, as we acknowledge the respective historical significance of the years 1517 and 1917. My particular task is to offer some remarks on Protestantism and Catholicism in relationship to work, seen in historical perspective. I will do so by taking a longer-term approach, beginning with a few reflections on Christianity and work in history more generally and about Christian commentary on work prior to the Protestant Reformation. I take my cue from the perspective implicit in the most substantial papal document devoted specifically to work and its theological and human significance in the modern era, St. Pope John Paul II's *Laborem exercens*, his encyclical written in 1981 for another commemoration, the ninetieth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum*.

Considering the centrality of human work to human life regardless of the historical period or civilization in question—from the time of the domestication of animals and settled agriculture several thousand years ago up to the present, what most strikes me is how relatively little serious theological reflection has been dedicated to the subject per se in the history of Christianity. It really is quite remarkable. At the most basic level, without some forms of sustained work human beings die; even in the most elementary expressions of foraging for food, or hunting, or fishing, labor is indispensable to human survival and therefore a prerequisite for the possibility of human flourishing en route to the ultimate human goal of *beatitudo* with God. This fundamental character of work characterizes every society and every culture since ancient times. As Pope John Paul II writes in *Laborem exercens*, "work is part of 'what is old'—as old as man and his life on earth," including as it does "any activity by man, whether manual or intellectual, whatever its nature or circumstances" (§2). In most if not all eras and in most human societies throughout history, most people have spent most of their waking hours working. So *prima facie* we might reasonably think that an activity in which—in its many expressions and in the variety of forms it has assumed—most Christians have spent most of their time would have inspired a rich tradition of theological reflection. We might reasonably have thought there were substantive, serious treatises and an insightful homiletic or catechetical tradition addressing questions such as "How do human being follow Christ in their ordinary daily work?" or "In what ways is the activity of a man working in the fields, a woman running a household, or an artisan weaving wool or cobbling shoes or hammering nails related to the Gospel?" But there seems not to be such a tradition. Despite the seeming obviousness of the importance of work in human life—daily labor, in whatever capacity—it is not a theme that was taken up per se in a sustained way for theological reflection in the early Church, among the Church Fathers, or in medieval monasticism or scholasticism.

Readers of *Laborem exercens* might be forgiven for having a different impression. In his encyclical, Pope John Paul II briefly offers a historical picture about the impact of Christianity on the character of human labor in the ancient Mediterranean world, which in the first century, of course, was under the political sway of the Roman Empire. From what he says, it sounds as though Christianity brought about a revolution in the understanding of human labor:

> *The ancient world* introduced its own typical differentiation of people into classes according to the type of work done. Work which demanded from the worker the exercise

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> of physical strength, the work of muscles and hands, was considered unworthy of free men, and was therefore given to slaves. By broadening certain aspects that already belonged to the Old Testament, Christianity brought about a fundamental change of ideas in this field, taking the whole content of the Gospel message as its point of departure, especially the fact that the one who, while *being God*, became like us in all things devoted most of the years of his life on earth to *manual work* at the carpenter's bench. . . . Such a concept practically does away with the very basis of the ancient differentiation of people into classes according to the kind of work done (§6; italics in original).

In principle, perhaps, but certainly not in practice, were traditional ancient categories broken down by the divine condescension that simultaneously ennobled simple, humble work as modeled by Jesus—whether in the decades after Christ's death and resurrection, while Christianity was still a fledgling but growing movement in the second and third centuries, or after Constantine gave his imperial stamp of approval to Christianity in the second decade of the fourth century, or once Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of the Empire in 380. Imperial support for Christianity did not alter the deeply hierarchical character of the Roman Empire in socioeconomic terms, including the persistence of slavery, nor indeed did the Christianization of medieval Europe, whether during the missionary endeavors of Benedictines in the sixth through the tenth centuries, or after the Gregorian revolution of the eleventh century. The presumptive fact that Jesus spent his young adult years in "manual work at the carpenter's bench," prior to taking up his public ministry after his baptism by John the Baptist, was not something emphasized by patristic writers, who were preoccupied instead with the importance of Christ's ethical teachings and especially with the implications of the incarnation for human redemption, salvation, and the understanding of God. In this they were only following the Gospel narratives themselves, which say nothing about Jesus between the incident when his parents find him at age twelve teaching in the Temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2: 41-51) and his exposure to the preaching of John the Baptist many years later. Christ as simple craftsman, as humble laboring carpenter, is incidental if not irrelevant to the development of Christology and moral theology in the early and medieval Church.

I am well aware that papal encyclicals are not works of historical scholarship, and that it would be wrongheaded to expect them to be. But at the same time, it is important to the faith that what encyclicals say about the past not be mistaken and it is preferable that they not be misleading. It seems to me that *Laborem exercens* is misleading, however, in the way it implies that a personalist understanding of human beings, in which for every person the purpose of work is "to realize his humanity, to fulfil[l] the calling to be a person that is his by reason of his very humanity" (§6), was something achieved by the advent of Christianity itself with respect to work, and has characterized either the Church's teaching or the Christian tradition more broadly from the ancient world to the modern era, through its emphasis on the human subject and the primary importance of the subjective character of work because "the one who carries it out is a person, a conscious and free subject, that is to say a subject that decides about himself" (§6). Section 7 of the encyclical opens with this sentence: "It is precisely these fundamental affirmations about work that always emerged from the wealth of Christian truth, especially from the very message of the 'Gospel of Work,' thus creating the basis for a new way of thinking, judging and acting" (§7). One might interpret this statement by distinguishing between *creating a basis for* a new way of thinking, judging, and acting as opposed *actually* to thinking, judging, and acting in new ways, but it seems to me that is about the most charitable reading one can give to Pope John Paul's assertion. The encyclical's next sentence jumps all the way to the modern period and the forms of materialistic and economistic thought that accompanied the industrial era—which are, to be sure, incompatible with traditional Christian views about human beings and human flourishing. But there is almost nothing in the encyclical about the first seventeen centuries of Christian history, between the advent of the Gospel's supposed revolution in the conceptualization of labor and the industrial revolution. The industrial revolution indeed did bring about a massive transformation of human society, beginning in Britain at the end of the

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eighteenth century and spreading to other European countries and North America in the nineteenth. The associated disruptions led eventually to the Church's attempts to address radically new social and economic conditions, including new forms of industrial labor, in modern Catholic social teaching, beginning with *Rerum novarum* and influenced in preceding decades by theologians such as Archbishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler of Mainz (1811-77). There are no references to patristic sources in *Laborem exercens*, nor do any of the four references to Thomas Aquinas's works in the encyclical concern labor in a substantive or direct way.

I am more than willing to defer to those who know more about the subject of premodern Catholic theological and spiritual reflection about human labor, and I would actually be delighted to learn of the existence of such a tradition and to be directed to the relevant sources. We can find scattered remarks in the Church Fathers about labor that might be seen as compatible with what *Laborem exercens* says about the ennobling, transformative character of labor rooted in Jesus' work as a carpenter. St. John Chrysostom writes in a homily on 1 Corinthians, for example, that when you "see one driving nails, smiting with a hammer, covered with soot, do not therefore hold him cheap, but rather for that reason admire him, since even Peter girded himself and handled the dragnet and went fishing after the resurrection of the Lord"; St. Augustine states that "the Apostle [Paul] would not refuse to perform any rustic labor or to engage in any workman's craft," and more generally, "Whatever work men perform without guilt or trickery is good." There are other remarks, too, that fit better with what John Paul II emphasizes at the end of his encyclical, which seem to me more representative of the preponderant emphasis about the theological significance and spiritual meaning of work throughout most of the history of Christianity. This tradition sees in human labor less the deliberate development of God-given human capacities and realization of human personhood than an opportunity for co-suffering with Christ through the patient endurance of taxing toil. Hence, for example, St. Basil says it is "obvious that we must toil with diligence and not think that our goal of piety offers an escape from work or a pretext for idleness, but occasion for struggle, for even greater endeavor, and for patience in tribulation, so that we may be able to say, 'In labor and painfulness, in much watching, in hunger and thirst'" (cf. 2 Cor 11:27).

The *Rule of St. Benedict*, "a school of service to the Lord," as the prologue puts it, shaped a monastic tradition known for prayer and work—*ora et labora*. There is certainly a strong emphasis on the importance of "good works" inspired by scripture and geared toward the imitation of Christ throughout the Rule, most explicitly in the seventy-two "instruments of the spiritual art" in Chapter 4. Yet despite the importance of manual labor in monastic life, the terse, flexible Rule includes very little commentary on or theological reflection about it. Chapter 47, devoted to manual labor, begins on the same note as the quotation from St. Basil mentioned before: "Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore, the brothers should be occupied at certain times in manual labor, and at other fixed hours in holy reading." The remainder of the chapter is given mostly to recommended allotments of time to be devoted to each type of activity at different times of the day through the major divisions of the liturgical year—there is nothing at all about the meaning or purpose of work beyond the avoidance of idleness. Elsewhere, the Rule stipulates that except for reasons of illness or another pressing matter, "no one be excused from duty in the kitchen, for thereby a very great award is obtained," yet there is no further comment about what that reward might be (Chapter 35). Chapter 57, on the craftsmen in the monastic community, mentions the danger of pride and little else: "let them exercise their crafts with all humility and reverence. . . . But if one of them grows proud because of the knowledge of his craft, in that he seem to confer some benefit on the monastery, let such a one be taken away from this craft and not practice it again, unless perchance, after he has humbled himself, the Abbot may bid him resume it." Taken together, it seems fair to say that these prescriptions and warnings are not oriented toward labor as a central means of realizing one's humanity, except insofar as it helps one avoid idleness and practice the self-discipline essential to those seeking to follow Christ "by the labor of obedience to Him from Whom you have departed by the sloth of disobedience" (Prologue).

What about St. Thomas Aquinas? Surely in the breadth of the *Summa Theologiae*, we might think, there must be some substantive analysis of labor, considering its centrality in the

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lives of his thirteenth-century Christian contemporaries, including in bustling cities such as Cologne and Paris where the Angelic Doctor studied and taught? In one sense, of course, much of what Aquinas says in his exhaustive analysis of human acts, in his treatment of virtues and vices, applies in a generic way to the human acts involved in work, regardless of one's occupation or the type of labor involved. But it is striking that the *Summa* includes no substantive consideration of labor per se. In the *Secunda secundae*, after 170 questions on the three theological and four cardinal virtues, Aquinas devotes 11 questions to different types and states of life. Not one concerns lay life per se, nor are any dedicated to a state of life that involves manual labor. The traditional distinction between the contemplative and active lives, rooted in the Gospel story of Mary and Martha, serves as a basis for analyzing the relative merits of religious and ecclesiastical life that focus respectively on contemplation or action. St. Thomas was certainly aware of the reality of physical work outside religious life; he notes that "under manual labor are comprised all those human occupations whereby man can lawfully gain a livelihood, whether by using his hands, his feet, or his tongue" (II-II q. 187 r.) But "active life" is not extended to include explicit consideration of anyone who grew the crops, tended the sheep, sheared the wool, wove the cloth, cut the trees, fashioned the furniture, constructed the wagons, harvested the grapes, made the wine, dug and maintained the wells, cut and hauled the stone, laid and mortared the bricks, and constructed the buildings—or any of the many other forms of labor that surrounded Aquinas and other thirteenth-century university professors, and on which their own lives depended in crucial ways. Again, despite eleven questions about the ecclesiastical and religious states, there is no discussion of the lay state of Christian life. Status is analyzed fundamentally according to the distinction between freedom and servitude and with respect to internal and external acts, considered as such (II-II q. 183).

Aquinas's most explicit remarks in the *Summa* on manual labor per se are found in II-II q. 187 a. 3, when he is addressing whether the members of religious orders are bound to practice it (in other words, even here the mention of labor is indirect and oblique). Here, St. Thomas says that manual labor is directed toward four things: above all and chiefly to the obtaining of food (he refers, as do many other premodern Christian writers, to Genesis 3:19, "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread"), as well as to combating idleness (as we saw also with Saints Basil and Benedict), to curbing concupiscence through disciplining and occupying the body, and finally to obtaining provisions for almsgiving. The first is a matter of necessity, insofar as human beings cannot live without food; the others are not necessary, insofar as their ends can be obtained by means other than work. Without belaboring the point, it seems fair to say that what Aquinas says about work—human labor per se—is minimal, indirect, mostly abstract, not theologically expansive, and quite distant from the exalted terms in which John Paul II describes work, and in which we might think labor had been regarded during the history of the Church, based on what *Laborem exercens* implies about the "Gospel of Work" following the advent of Christianity.

A brief presentation such as this one cannot claim anything like comprehensivity, of course, but I suspect that expanding the range of sources would reinforce the impression conveyed by those I have cited about the impoverished character of theological reflection on and writing about the spiritual significance of human work as such for most of the history of the Catholic tradition. Again, unless others know of important, numerous sources I have overlooked, there is nothing in the ancient, medieval, or (as we shall see) even the early modern Church comparable to the deliberate, self-conscious awareness of and reflection on labor that is characteristic of modern Catholic social teaching from *Rerum novarum* through the documents of Vatican II, *Laborem exercens*, and other papal encyclicals through Pope Francis's *Laudato si'*. The substantive beginnings of this more positive theological reflection, it seems to me, might be attributed to some Renaissance humanist writers such as Giannozzo Manetti (1396-1459) in Florence or Benedetto Morandi in Bologna, neither of whom were trained theologians but both of whom expressed more positive, constructive ideas about human work than much of the preceding tradition as part of a more exalted view of human beings.

Perhaps the fact that Jesus was a carpenter, and that work is addressed in various ways in scripture, provided the basis for a Christian revolution in the understanding of work. If so, it seems not to have expressed itself very robustly in the early or medieval Church. Why not?

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Why was work regarded as a hedge against idleness, a bridle against concupiscence, and chiefly as a means of acquiring food but not as a path to human fulfillment or of self-realization along the lines implied by Pope John Paul II's personalism?

I suspect the principal reason is the obvious one, viz. that most work for most people in premodern history was grueling, repetitive, and unfulfilling agricultural labor. It was heavily dependent on the vagaries of weather, susceptible to crop failures, and heavily influenced by diseases that adversely affected flocks of sheep, goats, and other animals, as part of human life lived close to the rhythms of the natural world and always subject to the possibility of subsistence crises. Ancient, medieval, and early modern Europe was not a world in which most men—let alone women—had much choice about what they wanted to do with their lives. It was not a world in which most people (and again, women far less than men) had the opportunity for formal education, something rightly emphasized in modern Catholic social teaching as critical for the development of human beings' God-given gifts, or as *Laborem exercens* puts it, as something that is "always valuable and an important enrichment of the human person" for "becoming a human being is precisely the main purpose of the whole process of education" (§§8, 10). It stands to reason, then, that there was not much Christian reflection about what understandably was not regarded as a crucial path to human fulfillment, and that instead work was understood in ways in which its commonly negative, punitive, unpleasant terms found their positive meaning in a sense different from the one emphasized in the encyclical. That does not imply, of course, that labor was without value or went unredeemed, but rather that its principal connotations for most Christians, to the extent they reflected on the matter, would have been along the lines of what Pope John Paul mentions only at the very end of *Laborem exercens*: a matter of suffering, and of co-suffering with the savior, "by enduring the toil of work in union with Christ crucified for us": as the encyclical states, a Christian "shows himself a true disciple of Christ by carrying the cross in his turn every day in the activity that he is called upon to perform" (§27). This understanding presumably would have applied less to that minority of medieval and early modern men in towns who had the opportunity to exercise their creativity and freedom as artisans, jurists, or teachers, notwithstanding the constraints characteristic of their institutional contexts, laws, and customs. But lives of unchosen, grueling, hard labor, whether in premodern Europe or today, tend to lend themselves to a Christian experience and understanding of work as suffering and co-suffering, more than to a notion in which, through work, a Christian realizes the person God wills him or her to become through the incremental fulfillment of a freely chosen vocation.

I have not forgotten that I am supposed to say something about the Protestant Reformation! But now I have arrived at the point where it makes sense to do so. One of the ironies of *Laborem exercens* is that in its esteem for human work of all kinds, including those that are the preserve of lay Christians, it is in a sense, knowingly or not, the theological heir to a tradition that began in an influential way with Martin Luther. In the premodern world dominated still by agricultural labor and characterized by artisanal crafts in the burgeoning towns of early sixteenth-century Europe, Luther spoke forcefully of the spiritual value of ordinary labor as part of his polemic against pious actions (or "works") understood as contributions to the Christian process of salvation. This was one corollary of his new theology of faith, grace, and salvation. As he says in his *Treatise on Good Works* from the spring of 1520, God "is served by everything, whatever it may be, that is done, spoken, or conceived in faith." The key, according to Luther, is faith, and the feeling of certainty that in his experience accompanies it; this was what sanctified work and made it pleasing to God, regardless of the sort of work it was. "All individuals are able to tell and feel whether or not what they do is good," he wrote in the same treatise. "If their hearts are confident that their work is pleasing to God, then it is good even if it were something as trivial as picking up a straw."

Still, Luther's revaluation of the place of human labor in Christian life, and of its theological significance regardless of the particular forms it takes, is more nearly related to his rejection of the distinction between the clergy and laity as traditionally understood—it is a corollary of his Luther's "priesthood of all believers" and his sanctification of lay life, placing it fully on the same plane alongside that of the clergy (a view that was not officially and forcefully

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articulated in Catholicism until *Lumen gentium* during Vatican II). This position is expressed powerfully by Luther in his even more polemical treatise of 1520, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*. There he says, in deliberately provocative fashion, not only that "A cobbler, a blacksmith, a peasant—each has the work and office of his trade," but also that "they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and everyone should benefit and serve everyone else by means of their own work or office, so that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, just as all the members of the body serve one another [cf. 1 Cor 12:14-26]." Luther's view of clerical ordination and status, as well as his rejection of the monastic life in which he had taken vows and lived for more than ten years, are of course incompatible with the Catholic position that was strongly reaffirmed by the Council of Trent and has been reaffirmed since. But his unabashed exaltation of ordinary lay labor as such started something new in Western Christianity, an emphasis that complemented Renaissance humanism from a theologically more explicit yet anthropologically much more pessimistic starting point. Something analogous could be said about John Calvin, with his strong sense of Christian *vocatio* that applied equally but differently to clergy and laity, men and women, yet with a supple adaptability lacking in Luther's view that Christians ought to stay in the occupations in which they found themselves. The survival and institutionalization of the Reformation in both its Lutheran and Reformed Protestant forms, in different regions in Europe, brought these ways of thinking about Protestant laypeople and Christian labor into the modern era.

Catholicism in the sixteenth century was characterized by a new attention to Christian vocation, too, and by what is often called *discernment*. This was significant for human labor because different sorts of work tended to accompany different vocations. Here the influence of Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* is almost impossible to overstate, considering how widely they were administered and adaptively practiced—and as a matter of sheer numbers, it seems obvious that the discernment process of the large majority of those who made the exercises resulted not in the exercitants becoming Jesuits (which was not the purpose of the exercises, of course), but rather becoming more self-conscious, spiritually self-aware members of the laity. That said, the thrust of the *Exercises* is not on labor per se, but rather on the discernment of God's will for one's state in life, whether clerical or married, as the means to the sole end, "the praise of God our Lord and for the salvation of my soul." The Ignatian emphasis on discernment certainly had a major influence on the reflective self-deliberation of Catholics about vocation, more of whom, like their Protestant contemporaries, were also becoming better educated in larger numbers in the sixteenth century. But we do not find in the *Spiritual Exercises*, it seems to me, as much reflection on or attribution of spiritual meaning to work per se, applicable to all its forms, as we do in Luther or Calvin.

What about the great French devotional writer and Doctor of the Catholic Church who was influenced by Ignatian spirituality and education himself, St. François de Sales? Famously, his *Introduction to the Devout Life*—in a manner quite unlike the more traditionally monastic fifteenth-century *Imitation of Christ*, for example—emphasizes the compatibility of serious Christian devotion, focused on the love of God and neighbor, with every station and vocation in life. In Chapter 3 of Book 1, entitled "Devotion is Suitable to Every Vocation and Profession," de Sales writes that God bids Christians "to bring forth fruits of devotion, each one according to his kind and vocation. A different exercise of devotion is required of each—the noble, the artisan, the servant, the prince, the maiden, and the wife; and furthermore such practice must be modified according to the strength, the calling, and the duties of each individual." Relatedly, later in the same chapter, he states, "It is an error, nay more, a very heresy, to seek to banish the devout life from the soldier's guardroom, the mechanic's workshop, the prince's court, or the domestic's hearth." We can see in this universal adaptability of devotion to every human occupation and calling a sort of Catholic response to Luther's priesthood of all believers and emphasis on the sacred character of lay work in the world. Yet the emphasis seems to me subtly different. The focus of François de Sales's *Introduction to the Devout Life* is not work, and the treatise does not offer a theological reflection on the meaning or spiritual significance of human labor; the focus of the treatise is *devotion*, understood properly as the love of God realized as fully

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as possible, and his emphasis is the compatibility of devotion with all types of Christian lay callings. You can and should be holy, and find your appropriate way of loving God and others, regardless of whether you are doing housework or teaching students or selling textiles. De Sales emphasizes devotion, Ignatius concentrates on discernment, but neither says much about human labor as such—certainly not with anything like the deliberateness, or to the extent, or in the terms that Pope St. John Paul II reflects on it in *Laborem exercens*.

As I move toward a conclusion, let me repeat that my brief remarks are offered as a provisional, impressionistic account, remarks that are not and cannot be comprehensive; and again, I know others are much more learned in matters pertaining to the theological meaning of work in the history of the Catholic and Protestant traditions. Accordingly, my concluding reflections, too, are tentative. That said, it seems that it is only in modern Catholic social teaching, beginning in the nineteenth century and first expressed with magisterial *gravitas* in *Rerum novarum*, that we find a serious, robust Catholic reflection on the theological significance of work per se. If that is true, it seems unlikely that the reason for the appearance of these ideas derived from theological reflection on the Gospel message, or the fact that Jesus was a humble carpenter, or biblical passages and parables that mention work or different ancient occupations, and so forth. That message, Jesus' work, and those biblical passages had been there for over eighteen hundred years.

That leads me to suspect that human labor per se finally became a focus for Catholic theology when it did, beginning in the nineteenth century, not for reasons internal to theological reflection but above all because of the enormous changes that were wrought by the industrial revolution. Technological innovation and the creation of wealth made possible new human possibilities that hitherto had been unimaginable, and made it increasingly realistic to think about more forms of human work as desirable, interesting, and fulfilling rather than as repetitive drudgery. At the same time, the concentration of the new wealth in the hands of a small number of rich entrepreneurs, while large numbers of factory workers labored in new forms of soul-crushing and physically dangerous drudgery, posed new problems for traditional theological questions about justice. What now was the common good? How should wealth best be distributed to pursue it realistically? Did increasing affluence and aspirations for material comfort mark an intrinsic threat to the ascetic self-denial central to Christ's message and to the tradition? How were states that protected individual rights and fostered education for more and more citizens to be leveraged for the pursuit of flourishing of all members of society, rather than becoming the mechanisms for the enrichment of the few and the impoverishment of the many? The theological meaning of labor and prospects for thinking in terms of choice, fulfillment, and the realization of one's talents and humanity emerged within Catholicism less for internal theological reasons, as they did in Protestantism beginning in the sixteenth century, than for reasons spurred by the radically changed social and economic realities brought about by nineteenth-century industrialization in Europe.

These questions about wealth and its distribution, social justice, human flourishing, and the common good are broadly speaking the ones that remain with us today and constitute the core of concerns of modern Catholic social teaching from *Rerum novarum* through *Laudato si'*. We encounter them today not in their nineteenth-century forms, obviously, but in ways that have been extended, globalized, and transformed by more recent revolutions in communications, mobility, and economic policy and practice. It seems to me that different theological meanings of work for both Catholics and Protestants remain alive and well today, and that the principal ways in which Christians across confessional lines make sense of work tend to be shaped partly by the sort of work they do, the situations in which they find themselves, and the opportunities they have (or do not have). Pope John Paul II's beautiful vision of the primacy of the subjective meaning of work, and of the way in which, through education and freedom and dedication, one incrementally realizes the potential to become the person God has called one to be, is likely to make most sense to those who are in objective situations of political stability, socioeconomic opportunity, sustained education, and job security. By contrast, the Latin American immigrants who work long hours in backbreaking labor picking fruit and vegetables in the US, as well as the millions of men, women, and children who work in

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the factories of China, Bangladesh, Vietnam, and other countries to make so many of the things wealthy Westerners buy, would be more likely, I suspect, to identify with labor as the toil through which we suffer with Christ, whose passion dignifies and redeems our suffering. And finally, the profound job uncertainty and instability in recent decades created by the combination of neoliberal economic policies and ever-increasing levels of manufacturing automation has perhaps created the conditions for a new spirituality of Christian work—one focused less on the personalist realization of a stable vocation than on a renewed awareness of one's life, including one's work life, as a *peregrinatio*, a pilgrimage in which the final goal is clear but not the path one will take to get there—a journey in solidarity with Jesus, the son of man who had nowhere to lay his head in this life. All three of these basic meanings of work, I think, along with others, are legitimate, understandable, and applicable to Christians' lives today, depending partly on the circumstances in which they find themselves. They are reminders of the one who is always with us and who sustains and supports us regardless of the work we do and how we do it.

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