

## EIR Special Report

# The labor encyclical: an idea that could save civilization

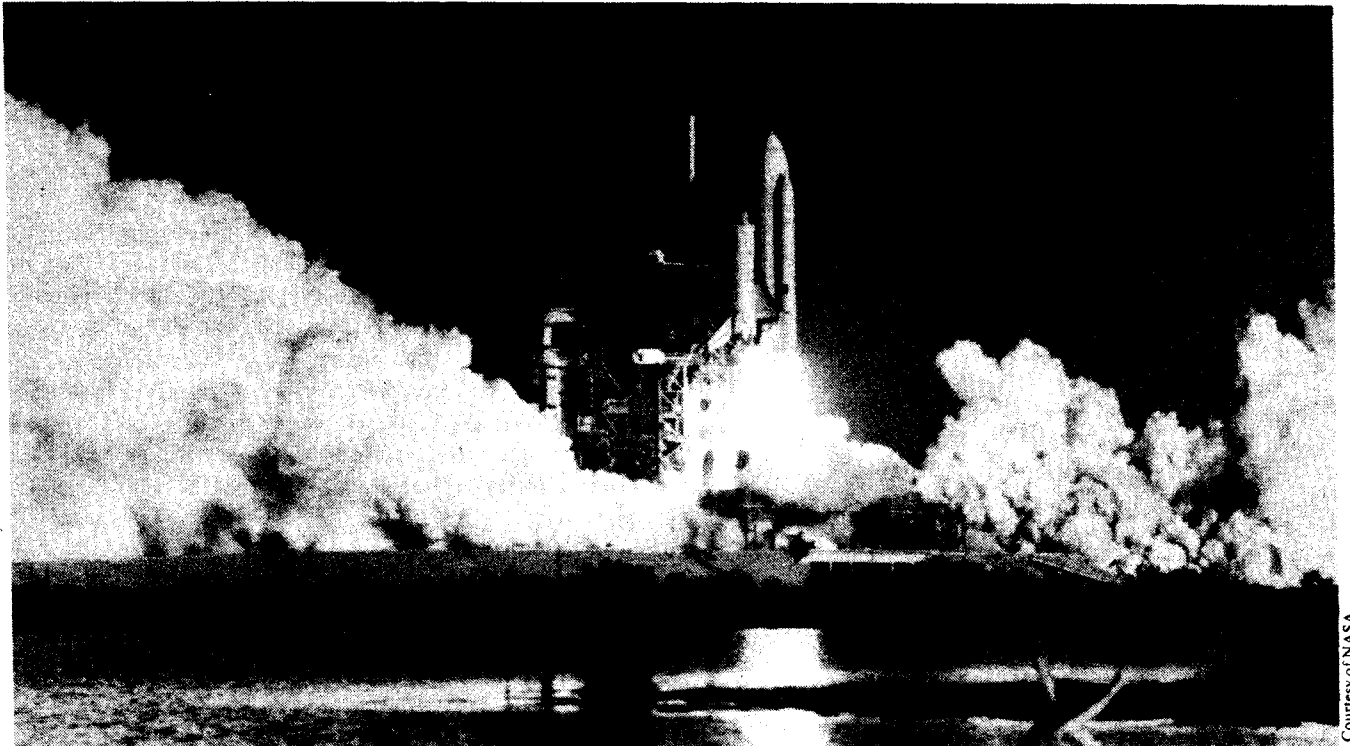
by Criton Zoakos, Editor-in-Chief

If those ideas are true whose existence is necessary, then the ideas contained in the latest encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *On Human Labor*, which begins with the words *Laborem Exercens* are true ideas: they have never been as necessary for the survival of humanity as they are now.

The history of civilizations, their emergence, flourishing, decline or further upward progress is regulated, in the final analysis, by the degree to which the individual citizens of such civilizations, their institutions, their statesmen, their wise men of science and their moral leaders inform themselves, each other as well as their social endeavors by such true ideas. If it is false ideas which inform the conduct of social life then civilizations decline, their institutions disintegrate and their citizens are thrown into moral chaos, confusion of purpose in life and mankind is set adrift into self-destruction. Mankind is now going through such a crisis and it is against such a background of events that the idea in the Pope's encyclical is cast.

That idea is on what is human labor and what is human labor all about. It contains three aspects whose implications regarding imminent political and strategic events are enormous. The *first* aspect is that human work, *for the human race* as a whole, is the way by which—and the only way—we fulfill the divine command to exercise dominion over the universe. The *second* aspect is that human work, *for the individual person*, is the way by which each one of us perfects his or her God-like powers to exercise ever increasing dominion over the universe through science, technology, and industry. The *third* aspect is that human work, *for nations*, is that which their political, economic, and cultural institutions must strive to cherish and perfect, so that individual persons may have the possibility to live their lives as God-like creators and shapers of the universe in the image of man.

Upon reviewing these features of Pope John Paul II's idea of human work, every person of good will, whether Catholic or not, whether Christian



Courtesy of NASA

*The first flight of the U.S. Space Shuttle this April: extending man's dominion over the universe.*

or not, will tend to experience a rush of joyous leaps of thought, let his or her mind race back into the distant past of humanity in a time during which these ideas were first forged, then into the more recent past and the alarming present and then look forward into a future that humanity deserves, arrived at through pathways that this God-like concept of human work is capable of forging.

Then it becomes easier for a thoughtful person to identify the source of the resiliency and toughness of the only continuous and living 2,000-year-old institution of our civilization, the Roman Catholic Church; that source of resiliency and toughness is the tradition of Augustinian thought, as continued by Dante Alighieri, as advanced by Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa and so many others and as reflected in Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*; man is created in the image of the Creator, the cause of scientific advance, technology, and industry.

Then, a thoughtful person of good will compares the present world political and strategic situation with the outlook embedded in *Laborum Exercens*.

### **1. Man's dominion over the Earth**

The first preliminary but true observation one can make about an individual act of work is that its effect, i.e., its meaning is derived not only by what the individual performer of that act intends, but also by what society eventually does with that piece of work. Thus,

the meaning of a parent's work for his family is ultimately given by what the children ultimately turn out to be; the meaning of an industrial worker's labor in producing semi-finished industrial items depends on whether his factory or another factory turns out the finished product—one does not produce windshields, one takes part in the production of an automobile. If the automobile is eventually not put together the act of producing windshields is meaningless.

The farthest extension of this lawful and necessary relationship is the following: the meaning of every act of human work which takes place upon the face of the earth—manual, mechanical, intellectual, scientific—depends upon the “final product” which society as a whole assembles. That “final product” is *Dominion Over the Earth*. If human societies, nations, are not organized in a way appropriate to turning out this “final product,” then the individual labors of citizens and institutions are rendered meaningless and fruitless, regardless of what such individuals may believe about the worth of their individual endeavors. Whoever takes pride in manufacturing “windshields” that shall never become part of an “automobile” is a fool.

The moral content of labor is not located in the individual piece of work of any individual worker, but, primarily in the generalized effort of the human species to increase mastery over the universe. The Papal encyclical locates the moral content of work in the fact that

work is the universal intervention of mankind as a whole upon the creation as a whole. We quote:

When man, who had been created "in the image of God . . . male and female," hears the words: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it," even though these 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. Man is the image of God partly through the mandate received from his Creator to subdue, to dominate the earth. In carrying out this mandate, man, every human being, reflects the very action of the Creator of the universe. Work understood as a "transitive" activity, that is to say, an activity beginning in the human subject and directed towards an external object, presupposes a specific dominion by man over "the earth" and in its turn it confirms and develops this dominion. It is clear that the term "the earth" of which the biblical text speaks is to be understood in the first place as that fragment of the visible universe that man inhabits. By extension, however, it can be understood as the whole of the visible world insofar as it comes within the range of man's influence and of his striving to satisfy his needs. The expression "subdue the earth" has an immense range. It means all the resources that the earth (and indirectly the visible world) contains and which, through the conscious activity of man, can be discovered and used for his ends. And so these words, placed at the beginning of the Bible, never cease to be relevant. They embrace equally the past ages of civilization and economy, as also the whole of modern reality and future phases of development, which are perhaps already to some extent beginning to take shape, though for the most part they are still almost unknown to man and hidden from him. . . . This process is, at the same time, universal: it embraces all human beings, every generation, every phase of economic and cultural development, and at the same time it is a process that takes place within each human being, in each conscious human subject. Each and every individual is at the same time embraced by it. Each and every individual, to the proper extent and in an incalculable number of ways, takes part in the giant process whereby man "subdues the earth" through his work.

This universality and, at the same time, this multiplicity of the process of "subduing the earth" throws light upon human work, because man's dominion over the earth is achieved in and by means of work. There thus emerges the meaning of work in an objective sense, which finds expres-

sion in the various epochs of culture and civilization. . . . Not only in industry but also in agriculture we are witnessing the transformations made possible by the gradual development of science and technology. . . .

## 2. The purpose embedded in 'Dominion Over the Earth'

Man, in order to be truly human must engage in the endeavor to subdue the earth in order to thus obtain the means by which to increase his powers of subduing the earth. Therefore, the purpose of "dominion" is not to access the necessities of corporeal existence per se, but to increase the powers to exercise dominion, i.e., the creative powers of every individual man and woman. Without this thus-completed statement, the biblical command for "dominion over the earth" would be morally empty.

Human work's moral (social) *content is species domination* over the universe; the moral (social) *purpose* of this *species domination* and thus the social purpose of human work is to augment the "*domination potential*" of all individual members of the species. The Pope develops the following argument in the encyclical:

Man has to subdue the earth and dominate it, because as the "image of God" he is a person, that is to say, a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself and with a tendency to self-realization. As a person, man is therefore the subject of work. As a person he works, he performs various actions belonging to the work process; independently of their objective content, these actions must all serve to realize his humanity, to fulfill the calling to be a person that is by reason of his very humanity. . . . And so this "dominion" spoken of in the biblical text being meditated upon here refers not only to the objective dimension of work, but at the same time introduces us to an understanding of its subjective dimension. Understood as a process whereby man and the human race subdue the earth, work corresponds to the basic biblical concept only when throughout the process man manifests himself and confirms himself as the one who "dominates."

And finally:

The word of God's revelation is profoundly marked by the fundamental truth that man, created in the image of God, shares by his work in the activity of the Creator and that, within the limits of his own human capabilities, man in a sense continues to develop that activity and perfects it as he advances further and further in the discovery of the resources and the values contained in the

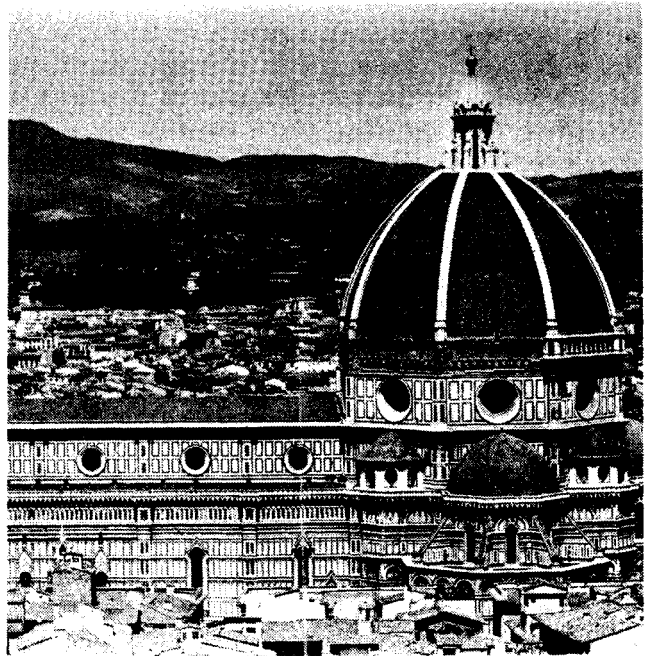
whole of creation . . . Man ought to imitate God, his Creator, in working, because man alone has the unique characteristic of likeness to God. Man ought to imitate God both in working and also in resting, since God himself wished to present his own creative activity under the form of work and rest. This activity by God in the world always continues as the words of Christ attest: "My father is working still," he works with creative power by sustaining in existence the world that he called into being from nothing. . . . Awareness that man's work is a participation in God's activity ought to permeate . . . even the most ordinary everyday activities. . . . The knowledge that by means of work man shares in the work of creation constitutes the most profound motive for undertaking it in various sectors."

### 3. The consequences for society's institutions

The encyclical's concept of human work lays down a political challenge which is bound to produce formidable consequences if the concept becomes assimilated and understood as a practical idea by even a minuscule proportion of persons in positions of trust and responsibility. The challenge is posed both to socialist institutions and capitalist ones of the "free enterprise" variety, in the following way:

In light of the defined *social* content of work (species dominion over the universe) and its social purpose (perfection of the individual's creative powers), it is demonstrated that that which is human, i.e., God-like, in man is *man's potential to increase his Creator-like powers over the universe*. Individual man does so by engaging in work, a *species* activity. But individual man does not possess any mysterious ability to engage in such species activity directly. He must employ the mediation of social institutions—cultural, economic, and political: enterprises, factories, research laboratories, universities, nations and nation-states. How these institutions behave, how they succeed or fail to fashion an assembled finished product out of the immense number of individuals' labors, derives from the intellectual and moral capacities of their leaderships, from the ideas which dominate the minds of individual leaders of these institutions. The most important, the essential, key idea is the idea respecting human work and its proper purpose.

If the encyclical's idea of work were dominant institutionally, then one would observe economic institutions, both private and public, strive to maximize the rate of increase of the creative powers of their employees, universities and research establishments trying to supply the steady flow of fundamental breakthroughs in our levels of knowledge of the causalities governing the corporeal domain of the universe, a flow required



*The Brunelleschi dome in Florence: creative labor.*

for the development of new arrays of technology and new social pedagogies needed to ensure the transmission of such new knowledge and new technologies to all citizens. In such a situation, political institutions were required to ensure that the end product of this huge endeavor remains coherent with natural law: a net increase in individual man's potential to increase his Creator-like powers over the universe.

As the encyclical itself makes clear, this is not the measure by which existing institutions, East or West, measure their performance. The Pope accurately points out that in both great social coalitions, the measure of institutional performance, though different in appearance, is one and the same and derives from the outlook of the 19th century "liberalism," i.e., Jeremy Bentham, the grand-dad of the British school of political economy, both its Marxist and "free enterprise" variants. The underlying outlook which dominates the decision-making functions of individual leaders of human institutions is Benthamite which means "materialist" in the sense that materialism is that outlook which locates "existence" exclusively in corporeal "discrete objects." A civilization whose institutional leadership is informed by such a "discrete object" outlook can at best produce "mass consumer" societies.

### 4. The Aristotle question

The world to whom the encyclical addresses its idea of human work is, at the present time, a moral pigsty. Even the great "oppressed masses," those sunk deep in material impoverishment, the "exploited," tend to experience their distress, in their mind, in terms of lack of

means to enable them to turn themselves into consumerist swine just like the next opulent fellow. This is not people's reality, but it certainly is their deluded self conception. This "discrete object" orientation in the prevailing outlook of our civilization causes an enormous conceptual barrier which gives rise to the question: will the Pope's idea of human work be gotten across?

The idea itself is extremely simple as most profound ideas are: *The purpose of man's creative activity is to increase his potential for creative activity.* Men and women hear it, even delude themselves that they understand it. But its true content, its *causal self-sufficiency* is generally not grasped. So, what in fact is a profound statement respecting causality is banalized into what people of ill will mistake as "circular reasoning" and others of good will mistake as a mere moral precept. The reason is that the prevailing organic outlook which dominates minds living within the present civilization is blind and deaf, totally incapable of identifying the existence of *self-reflexive* causal statements.

Unless an assault is undertaken to dislodge Aristotelianism as the dominant implicit outlook of our civilization, the Pope's idea of human work cannot be assimilated-for-practice by any discernible proportion of people. The Aristotelian outlook, including the subsumed case of Thomism, prohibits efficiently the assimilation of any conception of self-reflexive causality, including the conception of human work developed in the encyclical. In fact, cause does not exist in the Aristotelian scheme; it is replaced by the syllogistic "middle term." Now, who ever heard of a "self-reflexive" middle term? Rigorously, the Aristotelian cause of work is the "middle term." Both individual labor and species labor is done for an oligarchy, the employer of Aristotelianism.

Given the present state of affairs in the world, a shift away from the "discrete object"-centered Aristotelian outlook shall not be effected unless Aristotelianism is conclusively discredited in the domain of its greatest pretensions, the physical sciences. The proof of the existence of efficient self-reflexive causality as a primary existent in the domain of natural-science so-called is the efficient means for overthrowing Aristotelianism, inclusive of Thomism and Cartesianism from that domain.

Embedded in the encyclical are the essential conceptions required for this necessary assault against Aristotelianism. The premises, the historical pedigree and the content of *Laborem Exercens* are in the high tradition of that Augustinian Platonism which has repeatedly rescued civilization from extinction. It is necessary that these traditions be revived and brought to bear now in the battleground of scientific ideas. Discrediting the pseudo-scientific pretensions of Aristotelianism shall be in the spirit of Saint Augustine himself as well as his

heirs, John Scotus Erigena, Alcuin, Grosseteste, the Franciscan friar Roger Bacon, Peter Abelard, and the great Canon Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, who is the ecumenical giant of Augustinian Christianity upon whose legacy rest the foundations of modern science. This is a fact that would be freely attested by Johannes Kepler, Giordano Bruno, Leibniz, Bernhard Riemann and Georg Cantor.

To call upon the aid of these men today is absolutely necessary and unavoidable. One need only look at the composition of the anti-civilization forces today: Just as at the outset of the Dark Age of the 14th century, governments, parliaments, mass institutions and instruments which shape popular thinking are bought for and owned by what Wall Street calls "*Old Money*," what Genoa and Venice once called the family *fondi* of their oligarchy. The family names behind today's "*Old Money*" are the same as those behind the old *fondi* with the additions of what became the allies of the Venetian-Genoese *fondi* in the course of the Reformation, the Thirty Years War and the Counter-Reformation: the British, Belgian, and Dutch oligarchies which, as junior partners to the Genoa-Venice-Hapsburg-Swiss venture of financial holdings, joined in the looting of the then-opened colonial world. That financial hold of those "*Old Money*" families is retained intact today, through vastly diversified financial holdings, control over the modern resource-oriented multinational corporations, control over the Bank for International Settlements, the World Bank, the IMF, the OECD as well as over the \$1.8 trillion Eurodollar market.

It is this cabal of Old Money, whose present owners hail back to the 12th and 13th century *fondi* and from there claim direct lineage to the priest-banking families of the Imperial Senate of Rome. This cabal is the menace to civilization which Saint John in the Apocalypse calls the Whore of Babylon, the Baal-Marduk Babylonian priesthood which devised and deployed the cult of Lucifer-Apollo westward into ancient Greece and Rome.

The most persistent, continuing policy of this faction over the last 25 centuries is its opposition both to fundamental scientific advances and to those methods of inquiry which lead to such fundamental advances. Each time during these millennia that our Mediterranean-centered civilization inaugurated eras of great renaissance, it did so because of prior fundamental advances in science and scientific method, generally identified as the Platonic method of "hypothesizing the higher hypothesis." This method is epistemologically identical with the self-reflexive concept of labor developed in the encyclical, and is coherent with the Christian conception of the consubstantial Trinity.

The enemies of civilization, each time they succeeded in reversing an era of renaissance and in imposing a

Dark Age, did so by first hounding the Platonic tradition of scientific method, whether in science proper as was the case of "British empiricism" which gave us Jeremy Bentham and the "hedonistic calculus," liberalism and materialism, all based on the Newtonian assumption of self-evident "discrete objects" which, precisely as in Aristotle, "do not require the hypothesis of causality."

Now, this Whore of Babylon has assigned the task of final assault against civilization to the shock troops of the environmentalist movement, a mass disease very much resembling the host of Hell described by John Milton; anarchists, irrationalists, enemies of science, sodomists, pornographers, drug addicts, all united in their shrill opposition to the "tyranny of reason." What unites this arbitrary mass of irrational passion is the hostility to the principle of causality, a hostility given currency among so-called intellectual circles by Aristotle who replaces causality by the "middle term" and Newton who obscenely proclaims that he does not need to hypothesize the existence of causality!

Large portions of the world's present population, especially in the English-speaking world, have lost the ability to respond to the concept of causality. This was made possible because of the subversion of the concept which has preceded within the scientific milieu. Since the disappearance of the heirs of the Oratorian Order's Ecole Polytechnique and of the classical German mathematical physicists, no fundamental advances in human knowledge took place. Science became degraded into a handmaid of technology; technology became degraded into the handmaid of military advantage, and commercial profit by technetronic-based mass brainwashing and social engineering. Labor became merely an adjunct of this.

A thus self-degraded science, steeped in stagnation as in the Dark Age of the 14th century when Aristotelianism reigned in the Great Schools of Christendom, has lost the capacity to communicate efficient concepts of causality to the population at large. This causes degradations of outlook which the "Whore of Babylon," oligarchical Old Money moulds into environmentalist movements, rock-and-roll concerts, jacqueries, flagellant processions, sodomy and other forms of centralized, centrally-deployed outbreaks of anarchy. A moral outlook cannot subsist efficiently in a population if it is not nourished by an efficient principle of self-reflexive causality which is practiced by the scientists of society and their institutions.

It is there that the Aristotelian outlook must be assaulted and thus be disabled from erecting the mental barriers which would otherwise prevent a morally competent concept of human work, such as that which Pope John Paul II generously offers to humanity in *Laborem Exercens*.

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## Documentation

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# From the text of *Laborem Exercens*

*Below are further excerpts from the papal encyclical Laborem Exercens.*

Man is made to be in the visible universe an image and likeness of God himself, and he is placed in it in order to subdue the earth. From the beginning therefore he is called to work. Work is one of the characteristics that distinguish 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. Thus work bears a particular mark of man and humanity, the mark of a person operating within a community of persons. And this mark decides its interior characteristics; in a sense it constitutes its very nature. . . .

While in the present document we return to this question [of work] once more—without however any intention of touching on all the topics that concern it—this is not merely in order to gather together and repeat what is already contained in the church's teaching. It is rather in order to highlight—perhaps more than has been done before—the fact that human work is a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question, if we try to see that question really from the point of view of man's good. And if the solution—or rather the gradual solution—of the social question, which keeps coming up and becomes ever more complex, must be sought in the direction of "making life more human," then the key, namely human work, acquires fundamental and decisive importance. . . .

In the modern period, from the beginning of the industrial age, the Christian truth about work had to oppose the various trends of materialistic and economic trend.

For certain supporters of such ideas, work was understood and treated as a sort of "merchandise" that the worker—especially the industrial worker—sells to the employer, who at the same time is the possessor of the capital, that is to say, of all the working tools and means that make production possible. This way of looking at work was widespread especially in the first half of the 19th century. Since then explicit expressions of this sort have almost disappeared and have given way to more