

REPORT ON 'WORK & HUMAN FULFILLMENT'

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In the beginning I suppose it was almost inevitable that a Pontifical Academy founded for the social sciences should have taken up the encyclical, the first social encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, of 1891, and that we should have decided to dedicate our first work to this topic, the topic of work and employment in modern societies. Equally understandably, ten years ago, we were all, wherever we came from, shocked and appalled, in different ways, by the impact of unemployment in our various societies. We were shocked in the western world that in some societies up to 25% of young people attempting to enter the labour market could not find jobs; we were shocked that in the developing world there were millions who could not gain entry to the mainstream economy and yet for whom agriculture no longer constituted a viable means of subsistence. That is why, fairly naturally, we turned to the theme of examining what was called in one of the later encyclicals, 'the dreadful scourge of unemployment' in our societies.

But we were new and we were brash and we had a great deal to learn. Perhaps, in this context, I could draw upon our new President's reference to Thomas Aquinas. When he was towards the end of his great work, the *Summa*, he had a very direct spiritual experience in the light of which he declared that everything he had written so far was a straw – and he put down his pen. I think, in a way, it took us the three years that we devoted to this theme to assume the necessary and proper humility of an Academy of Social Sciences. On the one hand, we were quite right, indeed entirely correct to be shocked and appalled by unemployment but, on the other hand, we had to learn modesty and to recognise that we could not put forward recipes for changing the face of the earth. I acknowledge that I was as guilty as anybody was for being too ambitious in the beginning, for seeking the kind of concrete formulae which the Holy Father has told us

quite rightly that it is not the Church's task to advance. The lesson learnt was that it is not the Academy's task either.

But we have to make our contribution and there were certainly three factors that prompted us to try to think of new solutions to the world of work and how work could become available to everyone. These focal points still seem entirely legitimate.

The first one was something which I remember Mary Ann Glendon pointing out very early on, about the limits of the law. She gave a paper in one of our early sessions in which she noted that although the right to work is embedded in most of the world's Constitutions, in those countries (unlike my own) that have written Constitutions, the right to work actually bore no relationship whatsoever to labour policy or to the actual state of employment in any of these countries. This was the case despite the fact that the right to work was also embedded in the United Nations' 1948 Declaration of Human Rights. In other words, the limits of the law in this respect are very limited indeed and really restricted to providing persuasive normative reminders of the demands of human justice and social solidarity.

Secondly, we were extremely aware about the difficulties that the welfare state was undergoing, difficulties which have become even more pronounced since then. I think we were very well aware that the welfare state, particularly as conceived of and discussed by thinkers like T.H. Marshall at the time, was not simply intended to be an economic safety net but was conceived of as an essential plank in social citizenship: one that would reinforce democracy by strengthening social solidarity and one that would override economic class divisions. Because we were rightly worried that with a reduced role for the welfare state in this respect, then the progressive economic marginalisation of those without jobs, without posts, without employment, would also increase. In turn, this threatened their exclusion from effective political participation. As such, this seems a proper concern for the Academy. It is a concern that we have continued to worry about and to pursue right up to our deliberations this week about the possibility of new mediating structures that could provide the framework for a robust civil society in which marginalisation becomes a decreasing phenomenon.

And finally, we were extremely and acutely aware of the way in which institutions that in the past had performed a proper, appropriate and wholly positive role as the representatives of labour were no longer capable of performing those historic functions: that the trade unions were weakening numerically in terms of their membership and qualitatively in terms of the kinds of interventions they could make in their respective societies.

Moreover, the unions which used to be part of civil society were not providing this bridging function, could not provide this mediating function towards the unemployed – they were representatives literally of those working, of workers with jobs. Now, I think it is true to say that these three contextual factors continue to preoccupy us right up to today.

I will not go into in detail about what we did during the following two years; we have the Acta, the annual proceedings, documenting our efforts. The only thing I would like to do is to give one last reflection in relation to how we went about it. I suspect that we, as we say in English, bit off more than we could chew. We wanted so much to make a positive contribution that we reviewed so many possible ways forward, part-time work, flexitime; we summarily reviewed the finance markets, the role of the multinationals; we travelled into the territory of changes in gender roles and the new entry of women into employment, its repercussions for the family, what this might imply for responsible parenthood, and the famous 'new man' that we keep hoping will one day arrive on the horizon. And we even went so far as to consider, in the vaguest terms possible, that there was a need for some kind of global regulatory body exerting certain controls over the multinational companies and imposing certain fiscal levies over speculative capital gains, etc. Probably, as I have admitted, we were too brash and premature in being too concrete. Conversely, I believe that there is always a balance that we have to strike, because, as the Holy Father stressed in *Centesimus Annus*, countervailing institutions are needed at the global level to ensure, as he put it, that 'les intérêts de la grande famille humaine soient équitablement représentées'. Now, we have not got to this point, this point is not even in view. Yet, just as the Church must be visionary, as the Holy Father was being then, I think we saw it and still see it as part of our function to help to render that vision more concrete. Thank you.