

THE DIGNITY OF LABOUR



PASTORAL LETTER 2012

MOST REV. VALERIAN M. OKEKE
Archbishop of Onitsha

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. This is the Tenth year of my Episcopal Consecration. For these ten years I have seen the grace of God in action. I have witnessed the power of grace, the cooperation, solidarity and love of men and women of good will: the priests, religious and Christ's lay faithful, from the Archdiocese, the Province and beyond. This calls for gratitude. Therefore, I give thanks. I am humbled, I am truly and unreservedly grateful to God and to all.

2. Looking back at the events of last year 2011, we recall the death of our dear Archbishop Emeritus, Most Rev. A.K. Obiefuna. The solidarity exhibited by the Bishops, priests, religious and Christ's lay faithful at the demise of this beloved pastor, was unprecedented and very consoling. The prayers offered, the sacrifices to ensure a successful funeral by the Church and the State, and the active participation in his funeral by many, can only be remembered with gratitude. May he rest in peace. Such an exhibition of solidarity at death, points to our ultimate destiny in God, and serves as an encouragement to other pastors about the appreciation of their work by the people. May God bless you all.

3. On a happier note, we recall the celebration of fifty years of Bishop Otteh's priestly ordination. It is true that Bishop Otteh spent the greater part of his priestly life working in Onitsha; nevertheless, the thankfulness and generosity with which it was done even though he is now a Bishop Emeritus of another diocese, shows brotherliness, unity of the family of God in Christ, charity and gratitude.

4. Again, I remember the celebration of my 30th priestly anniversary with prayers, gifts and enormous display of affection and solidarity. An event, which was intended to be in a "low-key", turned out to be a great celebration. My sincere gratitude goes to God and to all of you who made it so.

Many other events of note happened last year which we may not go on to mention. However, it will be a great omission if I fail to mention the progress of work in the Holy Family Youth Village. Out of the four twin hostels in the original plan, three are already completed with full essential facilities. There is steady supply of light and water. To enhance the already standard security there, a well equipped police post has been built and commissioned. The Youth Village is now a sight to behold. The rooms are fully booked and it has become a hostel of choice for serious minded children or youths who desire to live according to Christian and human principles. It is a joy and blessing to our State. We thank all those playing different roles for the realization of this project; and our ultimate gratitude goes to God. To Him be glory and honour for ever.

5. Finally, we remember that after forty years of the forceful takeover of mission schools by the then state government, last year saw the return of our Catholic schools back to us by the present State Government led by His Excellency, Governor Peter Gregory Obi. May God bless him as well as all those who assisted in taking such a just and noble step.

6. On another note, we regret some very recent events which are novelties in our country but which are certainly condemnable, especially the advent of hitherto unknown suicide bombing. It is mindless violence that does not bring anybody any good. What more, when it is directed against unarmed, innocent human beings and in holy places, such violence shows it can, by no stretch of the imagination, be claimed to be done in the name of God, since God is a God of peace.

We express our deepest sympathy to those affected together with their friends and relatives, as we assure them of our spiritual closeness at this time of sorrow. With all men and women of goodwill, I urge Christians to show restraint and always stick to the moral high ground since evil in all its ramifications has always very short life span before it faces ultimate defeat. They should resist the temptation of maltreating those who live among them in the name of reprisal since the sanctity of the innocent must always be respected. God has the final word. We therefore commend everything to Him in prayers.

7. Being greatly encouraged by the positive reception and appreciation of my previous pastoral letters, I happily present to you, my dear people of God, this letter on the **dignity of human labour**. Your enthusiastic reception of my past pastoral letters and their extensive use, show the people are eager for direction from the Church in different aspects of their lives. The necessity for this direction cannot be overemphasized in the current turbulent situation of our country. Work or human labour constitutes one of the basic truths about mankind. It is first and foremost a human experience; it is not a reality outside of the experience of life. Work is natural to man. It is at the heart of what it means to be human. Man explores, realizes and fulfills himself in and through labour. Work awakens an aspect of God in man which is the creative force. Scripture assures us that God created the human person in his image. Reason and faith affirm this truth. Through grace, that is, an unmerited favour of God, man is made in such a manner that he will be God's collaborator in the task of creation, re-creation and renewal of creation.

8. From the start, God laboured to create man, after which he charged him to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the entire creation (cf. Gen. 1:28). It is through human labour that man exercises this ministry. The exercise of this ministry is a noble and dignified one, as such, we talk of: **The dignity of human labour**.

9. The great commission to subdue the earth and conquer it...could also go for the first commandment of what God wants the human person to do. Moreover, it reveals God's desire and willingness to co-opt man in the task of creation. While creation is God's work, it pleased the divine Master to engage man in the task of on-going maintenance and continued creation. This task of collaboration imposes on the human person, the responsibility of stewardship and participation. As a participator, God uses man as an instrument to bring about realities, while as a steward, he imposes on man the responsibility of caring for creation in gratitude, and as a tribute to God the Creator.

10. This responsibility called work or human labour has dignity in many counts. As an act or process of realizing God's plan, work is dignifying. Again, on account that work is an invitation to participate in the creative work of God, it has dignity. Moreover, man (the human person created in the image of God) who is the subject of work confers dignity onto work.

CHAPTER TWO

CHOICE OF THEME

11. If we call our topic a gospel of work, a theology of work, catechesis on work, or even and apologia for work, it will still be consistent with the intention. Quite recently, in fulfillment of my ministry, I recommended prayer (cf. *The Splendour of Prayer*, Pastoral Letter 2010) as the melting pot of one's life experience, whether thanksgiving for favours received or supplications for surmounting of life challenges or averting dangers. They all coalesce in prayer. I offered prayer as the true path to life's journey, the solution to many problems and guarantor of positive effects. This was followed by *Gratitude* (cf. Pastoral Letter 2011) in order to point out that whatever happens, we ought to offer thanks to God. I used it to teach or catechize on the value of thanksgiving and also I explored it as an opportunity for gratitude. (Giving Thanks for thirty years of priesthood and approaching ten years of Episcopacy).

Having done that, I felt that the stage seems set to launch into the other side of the coin – we now look at the other side of the street, namely, work. “We work as we pray” for the transformation of the society. To build the world according to the plan of God, we must work and pray.

12. Gratitude (which is indeed the apex of prayer) links the dignity of labour to the splendour of prayer. Thanksgiving serves as a strong link between work and prayer. One thanks God for the wonder of one's being – that is life and its responsibilities. One of such major responsibilities is the task of advancing creation for God's sake and in and through that working out our salvation. Gratitude is both the point of departure and point of culmination. Having discussed prayer including gratitude, we now turn our attention to work. However one looks at it, prayer and work are hand in glove for the transformation and advancement of creation – humans and materials.

AIM:

13. Hence, this pastoral letter aims at stating that a well-articulated, conscientious, and ordered work culture can go a long way as a remedy for our decaying society. In doing that, it is my intention not only to teach that work is a way but to sound it loud and clear that there is dignity in labour. In other words, labour can also be and does become a way to salvation. Indeed, labour can be redemptive and salvific when freed from the fallacy of becoming a sort of messiah that leads to activism, workaholism or worship of work. Labour does lead to both personal sanctification and transformation of person and society.

14. Another major reason for the choice of this year's theme is the near turmoil in our country precipitated by what can be generally described as labour disputes. Within the past one year, and in every corner of our nation, many labour unions and associations have gone on strike to make one demand or the other. The point of going on strike is a sign that walls of dialogue between the employer and the employee have collapsed, with untold consequences on the body polity. The Academic Staff Union of University was on strike for months, disrupting the smoothness of our apex educational system. Judicial workers in some states have not been left out; secondary school teachers have had their turn in demanding the implementation of teachers' salary scale, medical workers in some states have abandoned their work for months, the same goes with the workers of

Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and others. They have all had their turn of suspending their services to the nation or states for one reason or the other. This situation is a clear indication on the part of the concerned segment of our society that we have not yet come to the full understanding and respect for the dignity of human labour and the responsibility this imposes both on the worker and his/her employer. Since human labour is a very vital aspect of the human life both individually and collectively, it behoves us as Christians and as Nigerians to spare some reflection on this theme, and to express the mind of the Church about labour or work for the benefit of the Nigerian society as a whole.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

15. However, before we go on with our reflection on the dignity of human labour it may be useful and necessary to give a working definition of the key words or concepts involved. To respect the nature of this pastoral, we may not go into the philosophical complexities of the concepts, rather we shall be contented with simple but objective approach to the definitions. In our clarification of concepts we shall start with the word *work*. This is because in this write-up the word work will sometimes be used in place of labour, though labour is more comprehensive as we shall soon observe. Nevertheless, in this write-up we shall use both words interchangeably.

Work:

16. This can be defined as a complex of activities, both physical, mental or otherwise, done by human beings to ensure sustenance and satisfy other aspects of life, thereby promoting and ensuring the development of the human society. The online dictionary further explains that work is an exertion or effort directed to produce or accomplish something. It can be physical, emotional or mental. Indeed, work is a productive or operative activity (cf. *dictionary.reference.com/work*). Work therefore includes any serious and purposeful activity, including adoration in the contemplative life. In the words of the Moral Theologian, Karl Peschke,

Work is a rational human activity through employment of corporal or spiritual powers for the maintenance and unfolding of a person's life of society and of the world at large (Karl H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics, Moral Theology in the light of Vatican II*, Vol. II, Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1996, 677).

Consequently, work or labour can be understood to be the name of man's divinely ordained role in advancing creation, encompassing a vast range of human activities.

Dignity with Reference to Labour:

17. Dignity is the state or quality of being worthy of esteem, respect or honour. It is an inherent nobility and worth. Dignity therefore, is the regal quality that elevates a thing to the status of nobility and worthiness. Dignity of labour indicates that all work since it is a participation of a person in the universal call or mandate to care for the earth, has respect and is worthy of honour. God Himself conferred dignity and honour to labour, being the first worker. According to the Holy Scriptures, God worked for six days and rested on the seventh (cf. Gen. 2:2). Work or labour is

thus sanctified and glorified. Consequently, the dignity of work is both objectively and subjectively based. Objectively, work has dignity because it is a call to participate in the creative work of God and subjectively because it is the human person who as the subject of work confers dignity on work.

CHAPTER THREE

WHAT IS HUMAN LABOUR?

18. The Creator God endowed the human being with some essential characteristics, which are all geared to his own good, both individually and collectively. These characteristics are embedded in the human nature often in order to enable him to survive in a tolerable way; to improve his condition and that of his fellow human beings, and to strive towards his ultimate destiny, namely – perfect eternal life with his source – God himself. God is thus the destiny of all our qualities, our endowments, our gifts. Hence, St. Augustine was right in saying at the beginning of his confession: *“Fecisti nos ad te et inquietus es cor nostrum donec requiescat in te”* (You made us for you O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you).

19. One of these natural endowments towards perfection is the instinct of self-preservation. The Jewish philosopher, B. Spinoza names it *“conatus sui esse preservendi”* (the instinct of preserving one’s self in being). Preserving one’s being is spontaneous in the event of danger, but in a more general sense, it includes the use of God-given material and other less material things for the benefit and improvement of human life. It is with regard to this endeavour that human labour finds its root. It is thus part of the natural endowment of man to preserve himself, to improve it and to nurture it towards perfection.

20. Labour is a very frequently used word, and consequently, it has acquired shades of meaning which can becloud its proper or deeper understanding or comprehension. The Webster’s Encyclopedic Dictionary defines labour as “prolonged hard work, a task demanding great effort... work as production factor, those who work in contrast to those who manage, workers as an economic and political force.” In this single definition, one notices at once that the word labour is used *as work, as task, as an agent and as a union*. With regard to the last usage, the Larouse Encyclopedia simply defines labour as “the movement of artisans in Anglo-Saxon countries.” It shows that the meaning of this often used word is fluid at best. Thus a proper and more detailed classification can give a broader spectrum to the ramifications of its meaning. The Encarta online Encyclopedia classifies different types of labour according to their role mostly in industries. Thus there is production, distribution, manufacturing, management and personal services. Again here one sees a new and wider meaning. Note that for Webster’s Dictionary, labour represents a class apart from those who manage, while for Encarta, management is an aspect of labour.

21. Labour is also classified as productive and unproductive. This is by no means a value judgement. Productive labour is that engagement that gives rise to something that is material, something that is tangible, while the unproductive labour is the one that results in some valuables that are not necessarily tangible or perceptible. For example, the musician does a very valuable

work, but his labour is not productive in the sense that it does not give rise to an artifact or something immediately materially concrete.

22. Again, labour can be skilled or unskilled. Here the designation is to separate the tasks that require some special training and the aptitude acquired in the process. One needs to be a carpenter to be able to produce furniture. In the same way, to build a proper modern house needs the skill of a building engineer. On the contrary, there is little or no special training required in digging a hole with a hoe or a shovel. Conventionally, such labour is termed unskilled because in a very general way, it is open to most people that have the physical strength and the readiness to exert it in the fulfillment of such tasks.

23. Labour properly understood should also be viewed as both objective and subjective. Labour is objective in the sense that it is concerned with external objects. It involves putting human energy to use in producing and manufacturing from existing external materials. But it is subjective in the sense that the human being, man, who is the agent is also the proper subject of work. This is a special insight of Pope John Paul II in his encyclical, *Laborem exercens* of 1981. It entails that the working human being is also enjoined to work on himself. He is part of nature, in fact a privileged part of it that first and foremost deserves perfection.

24. Another important conception that has become a matter of serious international concern is child-labour. In former times, children joined the members of their families in farm work and other productive engagements. But given the realities of the time, it has come to constitute serious disadvantage to their future prospects. This designation is thus formally applied to the present practice of engaging children to work in factories under very inclement conditions and which generally deprive them of the opportunity and time for the acquisition of education, and endangers their health. Thus it was the introduction of the factory system that gives this practice its current negative connotation.

25. It is clear from the above that the word labour has many connotations, many synonyms and qualifications. But it may be well to clarify it further by referring to the distinction made by the Jewish thinker, Hannah Arendt. She distinguished between three forms of human activities namely labour, work and action. Labour and work are similar but not exactly synonymous. For her the proper domain of the human person is action which is closer to the rational engagement than to the manual or physical. Arendt referred to the production aspect of both labour and work but decries the confusion of the two words in common and conventional usage. Labour is destined to the production of consumable things and hence, its products are more ephemeral. Its value is viewed from the point of view of consumption than the product of work which results to solid and more durable artifacts. The two are thus distinguished according to their “location, function and length of stay in the world.” Nevertheless, distinction between labour and work is very difficult. However, for Arendt, distinct and superior to these two is action (and speech) “which together constitute the fabric of human relationships and affairs.” (cf. Hannah A; *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1998, pp 93-95).

26. In spite of these possible shades of meaning and clarifications, we will choose to use labour as synonymous with work in the loose sense in which it is often associated with gainful employment, job, task, employment, and in which it goes beyond to include both those involved in the

production, manufacture and management of the process of all these, as well as the giving of personal services. In this sense, the word labour or work becomes so all embracing that it cuts off the often negative connotation in which labour is viewed as inferior engagement; in which a labourer is seen as one who is not skilled enough to operate at the level of management and therefore from the beginning excluded from the club of decision makers and managers or administrators. In this broad sense the exercise of labour is seen as the employment of the human endowment for the improvement of God's creation, and so understood, acquires inherent dignity by its very nature. Labour in this context includes labour, work and action. It can simply be called human labour or work.

CHAPTER FOUR

MISCONCEPTIONS CONCERNING HUMAN LABOUR

27. The exercise of human labour has historically been given erroneous understanding and interpretation. This fact is part of the reasons which gave rise to what has come to be called the social teachings of the Church. Historically, apart from the inhuman transaction in slaves and the inhuman use of slave labour, especially in the Americas, there was a well-developed system in which labourers in feudal systems were reasonably taken care of by their feudal lords. With the collapse of Feudalism and the rise of Capitalism as well as the industrial revolution, there was a marked erosion of the protection and privilege enjoyed by workers in the fields.

28. The new class of wealth owners that was, so to say, the successor of the Feudal Lords, did not base their wealth on ownership of land or agricultural engagement. The peasants were thus uprooted from their traditional setting where they had acquired certain rights, and privileges. The new economy created the supremacy of capital and the primacy of production. With the industrial revolution, the roaming workers became bound to the emerging industries for their sustenance, and with their number, the new capitalist could exploit as many of them as it pleased him. This inhumanity was based on the then prevalent liberal economic system which had in its root the misconception that the only thing that mattered was the increase of capital and wealth. It did not matter what means was employed to arrive at this end. The human beings that were practically enslaved in the process were being subjected to sub-human treatments; and made to pass through pitiless schedules simply for the benefit of capital. It constituted a complete neglect of the subject of human labour as the human being lost the primal consideration in the entire process of work and production.

29. Against this draconian exploitation of the worker, a group of intellectuals arose to condemn the plight of workers in the new factories. Prominent among them were the philosophers Karl Marx and Engel. These basing on the doctrines of G.W. Hegel, outlined the so-called historical materialism in which the only thing that is important is material wealth. For Marx and Engel, reality as a whole, the human being inclusive, is like a big machine fixated on material wealth as the determinant of all other things that happen to it. For Marx and Engel, exploited workers (the proletariat) and their exploiters, the wealth owners (the bourgeoisie) are engaged in a tough battle or class struggle. The class of the exploiters is inherently disadvantaged in this way given their

paucity and the fact that more of their number is being pushed into the rank of the exploited. The sheer number of the army of the exploited makes the situation such that they will eventually win the war – against the bourgeois class, and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat.

30. Marx and Engel see the world as the beginning and end of existence. Religion in all its paraphernalia is a clever invention of the exploiting class to keep the exploited pacified. It is like opium which serves to make the exploited hope for pie in the sky when they die. The whole question of after-life and human destiny is for them as pseudo question since it is a mere invention to divert the attention of the working class away from their exploitation by the capitalist class. Marxism does not therefore acknowledge the existence of God in the best tradition of Frederick Nietzsche for whom God is dead.

With the extirpation of God and the after-life, human labour became destined only to improve, not the human being, but the earth, and to make it an alternative heaven to the one preached in different religions. Man's only hope and fulfillment should be based on the extent to which he is able to change the earth and improve it so much that the desire for an after-life will be permanently erased from his psyche.

31. These theories have fundamentally the same error in the sense that they both deprive the human person of the central position he holds in the scheme of work. Liberal Capitalism makes him a slave to capital and production for its own sake. Marxism retains the position of slavery by transferring the ownership of the outcome of his labour to an imagined communal ownership. The human person is in both cases short-changed for the sake of profit. Thus in both systems the human person has no rights, is not respected, and loses out, either to the capitalist wealth owners or to the communist dictatorial cabals. It is interesting to note how these two systems have come to be discredited through history. Marxist-Communism had a field-day for up to about seventy years in Russia and its neighbouring states and collapsed in the 1990s like a house of cards. Liberal capitalism in the sense in which Marx and Engels were criticizing it did not survive for too long. In-between the workers have gained a lot of confidence and have been able to demand their rights in the scheme of things. There have been immense gain in terms of workers' rights which tend to underline the dignity of human labour. Again, the confidence gained by what is left of liberalism after the fall of communism has been seriously dented by the recent global economic meltdown, the ripple effect of which has refused to be wished away in the developing countries of Africa as well as in the capitalist forts of Europe and America.

32. But these false theories are not to be regarded as overtaken forever. There are still shades of the misconception inherent in them in many tendencies that are still holding sway in many parts of the world. In Nigeria, the exploitation of labour continues. What often comes to light is the plight of workers who are employed either in government institutions or in bigger companies. But, there are smaller employers of labour who handle the human subject of work as arbitrarily as erstwhile liberal capitalism and Marxist communism did in the past. The rights of workers are not guaranteed. The level of difference in life between the haves and the have-nots is certainly not praiseworthy or tolerable. Some political office holders wallow in exploiting the nation for their own pockets while those who really engage in work are given little or nothing to enable them live a reasonable level of life.

CHAPTER FIVE

FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN LABOUR

33. The foundations of human labour or work can be traced to God himself through Sacred Scriptures, to human nature and to man's perception of revelation. In other words, it is founded on the Scripture, anthropology and theology.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF WORK

34. The word of God affirms the dignity of human work and the foundation of work. The example of a working God establishes the goodness of work and its normative value. The book of Genesis presents the creation activity as work done by God in six days (cf. Rodger Charles, *An Introduction to Catholic Social Teaching*, p. 65). God worked for six days and rested on the seventh. The divine paradigm is presented as the norm for the people of God. It consists of work and rest (cf. Gen. 2:2).

35. Besides, at the beginning of creation God commanded man to work in order to explore, realize, fulfill and perfect himself on the personal level and develop the world on the general level. The parents of the human race, Adam and Eve, were placed by God in the garden of Eden, to walk and work. Hence, God placed man in the Garden of Eden to till it and take care of it (cf. Gen. 2:15). After creating man, God gave him the command, "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen.1:28).

36. As a result of the above, work assumes a universal obligation upon humans in whom God invested the capacity to be care-takers of God's creation and co-creators as they are also given the power to increase and multiply. The Scripture presents this as a matter of course and adds that it is a thing of honour to work. Hence, man is commanded to work, "You have six days to work and do your tasks" (Deut. 5:13). "Man goes forth to his work and his labour until evening" (Ps. 104:23) and the Psalmist prays that the sweetness of the Lord will be upon us so as to prosper the work of our hands, (Ps. 90:17). Work is presented as a responsibility for the righteous who works and God blesses, (cf. Is. 28:23-29). The Scripture reproves the lazy and slothful showing the consequence of their lifestyle as poverty and praises the industrious and hard worker, (cf. Prov. 6:6-11; Prov. 13:4; Prov. 19:15; Prov. 28:19; and Sirach 10:27).

37. The above gives us a good picture of the teaching of the Old Testament on human work. But it will not be complete if we do not add that work which was part of the original plan of God before time began also shared in the effect of the rift caused by the original sin. Work was never intended as a punishment. Not at all. Since it is an invitation to live one's goodness, to share in the work of God who works, it cannot be punitive as many presume.

38. According to Karl Peschke, "If God created man and woman according to his image (Gen. 1:26), then this includes the obligation to imitate the creator also by the six days of weekday work." (cf. Karl H. Peschke, op.cit. p.678).

39. The grandeur of human work was badly affected by the sin of Adam and Eve. As a result, work acquires the qualities of toil, pain and hardship. For the Book of Genesis says, “In the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread” (cf. Gen. 3:19). However, with the disruption of the initial harmony and trust within creation, soil became sterile, miserly and hostile (cf. Gen. 4:12). It was cursed (cf. Gen. 3:17), “cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of its fruit all the days of your life.”

40. The sin of man created confusion and dualism in the nature of work. All sorts of negative habits and sinful ideologies emerged as a consequence. Gradually, work degenerated to generate oppression, injustice, greed, violence, unjust wages, exaltation of material gain over labour, discrimination between noble and manual work, war between employer and employees, etc.

41. In the face of all these, the Scripture comes in to call for justice and advocate for the welfare of workers. The dichotomy brought by sin led to grouping of some work as noble while some others are inferior. Work became a status symbol of a sort. People erroneously thought that the work they do conferred dignity on them. For that reason some types of work were reserved to the people at the margins of society. Exploitation, abuse and all kinds of tension entered the field of work.

42. All these tensions and indeed all the woundedness of man which is affecting work are healed and redeemed by Christ. In the New Testament, work, manual work, takes an alluring prominence for Christ himself engaged in carpentry work for the large part of his life (cf. Mk. 6:3; Matt. 13:55). Since he was conversant with and a participant in the work situations of his time, Christ witnessed to this integral quality and nobility of work and indeed restored it. His work life reveals that both at home and in the marketplace he was aware and often participated in work with his contemporaries. He engaged in such works like carpentry, fishing, preparing bread, taxation or paying tax, sowing seed in the farms, harvesting, caring for the sick and many more. No wonder his teachings and ministry drew a lot from these experiences. His work typifies that of the Father, so he says, “My Father goes on working and so do I” (Jn. 5:17).

43. When he started his ministry, he invited and deployed working men into the field, the ministry which he described in terms of work, (cf. Matt. 9:37-38). Many of those he chose were fishermen, people engaged in manual work (cf. Matt. 4:18-22; Lk. 5:1-11). The rest of his ministry of teaching, healing and indeed the whole mystery of his enterprise centered on work. He gave illustrations with the world of work and made many remarks about work including talking down on the lazy servant who hid his talent referring to him as wicked and lazy, and praising others for their good stewardship (cf. Matt. 24:45-51; 25:14-30; Lk. 19:12-27). He completed his work by working himself into self-surrender in order to heal the woundedness caused by sin and redeem mankind. By that Paschal Mystery, the dignity of work is thereby restored.

44. Christ having set the example by words and deeds influences his apostles who followed his footsteps. St. Paul exercised his ministry calling people to the correct notion and value of work. He insists that one who does not work should not eat. The nature of this work may not allow us to go into much details, but suffice it to say that the apostles were mostly chosen from the working class, met where they were doing their work, and when they were drafted to the new work to be fishers of men, they enthusiastically continued working. It is clearly established that “unlike the

people of the ancient world, where manual labour was believed to be dishonourable or demeaning, Christians have a strong work ethic. Workers are the image of God and his co-workers in creation. Workers are persons with dignity regardless of what the objective content of the work is (cf. Brendan Leahy, *Believe in Love*, Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2011, pp. 128-129).

In all, the Bible provides us with strong foundation and base for human labour.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF WORK

45. Work is in the nature of man. Man as a thinking being thinks, works and prays. These distinguish the human person from other animals. Other animals may work by instinct but man works creatively because he reasons, he thinks.

It is through work that man creates his future and that of the universe. One can therefore conclude that since work is the means to self-exploration, self-realisation, self-development and self-fulfilment, that it is founded on our genius as humans. Man, the human person explores himself through labour. Requirements and opportunity of development and enhancement of potentials are only obtainable in and through human labour. It is through work and in work that man's capacities are built and developed. Once the human person is able to do some work, he/she learns on the job. Through that means one realizes oneself as a being with potentials. As a special being – a human being, man realizes himself through labour – by progressively becoming human through development of oneself and openness to growth. He progresses in humanity, for in being one becomes. Consequently, work is a vehicle of becoming.

46. A look into the nature of man as recorded in classical literature will give us further insight. According to Old Roman Vigil, "*Labor omnia vincit, improbus et duris urgens in rebus egestas*" which translates to "Work or persistent work overcomes all things, and the stress of need in a hard life."

47. Indeed human work is a noble and enduring enterprise that cuts across humans of all class, culture and climate. Without work civilization will be nonexistent, development of peoples and nation would have been meaningless. The old adage holds which says that "man works to live." In fact, it is really difficult if not impossible to imagine a world without human work, without the material works of man, his technology, systems of commerce and industries, his cultural cum socio-economic institutions, systems of belief and human organizations.

48. It is very interesting to note that human life cannot exist without work or at least cannot be maintained in existence without work. Every activity in life amounts to work. From the most sophisticated physical work to mental work like contemplation all constitute work or human labour. The work of man continues to expand in spite of the increase in the number of human beings. Work expands for the individual as well as the whole human race. All these indicate that labour is ontologically good and founded on the fact of our humanity. There is no meaningful life without work.

49. Henry Peschke agrees that labour is founded on our human nature. He says that, "work is the normal way of self-preservation...to the extent that people are able to work and have no other

legitimate source for their sustenance, they must acquire what is necessary for their livelihood by their labour” (cf. Karl Peschke, op.cit. p. 686). Moreover, we observe that through work the universe is ordered and made to move from chaos to cosmos, also energies for both private and common good are summoned creating commonwealth to the benefit of all.

50. It is important to note that lack of meaningful work hinders self development. In fact, lack of meaningful work makes one unable to unleash his potentials and leads to loss of self-esteem. Consequently, frustration may set in. Sometimes this increases the tendency to violence, deceit, fraud, robbery, kidnapping as routes to accessing and claiming one’s own portion of world’s good. All these show that labour actualizes the human person; it is based on our humanity, and lack of work can be a disaster. The innate desire in all human beings to possess, to own private property including clothes, shoes and even to eat regularly, anticipates work. Labour is therefore prior to capital. Work takes precedence over material gain.

We therefore conclude this part by reaffirming that the intrinsic desire of the human person to have, to possess and to garner material goods reveal also an intimate connection of labour and capital especially rooted in the nature of man.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF WORK

51. The full meaning and significance of work is to be sought and found in God. It is in the theology of work that the full meaning of work is made manifest. This happens in the exploration of the Bible and investigation of the human nature.

52. God’s logic of work presents work as trinity. We can say that human work is trinity since it is a participation in the formation work of God – The Holy Trinity. Human work is a participation in the economic life of the Trinity. (It was Karl Rahner who distinguished the life of the Trinity between immanent and economic. Economic Trinity is attributed to God as he manifest to us *ad extra*). Man was created in the image of God the Scripture assures us. Similarly, human work is a participation in the Trinitarian work of creation until its glorification. Hence, the theology of work reveals the Blessed Trinity as the basis of human work.

GOD THE FATHER

53. Man can trace the root and foundation of human work to God our Father and Creator. The Venerable Fathers of the Second Vatican Council tell us;

*For man, created to God’s image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all that it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness; a mandate to relate himself and the totality of things to him who was to be acknowledged as the lord and creator of all. Thus by the subjection of all things to man, the name of God would be wonderful in all the earth (cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, #34).*

Thus, man has a mandate not only to work, but shares by his work in the activity of the creator, advancing it within the limits of his abilities, resources and vocation to the glory of God (cf. John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*, #25).

54. Consequently, we can say that human work is both a mandate from our creator and an imitation of God the Father who goes on working. “My Father goes on working” (cf. Jn. 5:17).

CHRIST AS THE BASIS OF WORK

55. We can call this the Christology of work – or work as good news. Every good work is a participation in the redemptive work of Christ. This is because by assuming human nature Christ has raised our human nature making it Christological in value. Right from his birth, Christ participated in human work and taught his disciples to follow the path of labour. Indeed he raised his apostles from working men. Christ worked as he walked the roads of Galilee. His work spanned through his incarnation to his resurrection. He extended the frontiers of the Apostles work, moving from the ministry of fishing to becoming fishers of men, from natural work to supernatural level of work.

56. It pleased God to use the work of Christ to save the world. Christ’s work is therefore redemptive and salvific. Since Christ assumed our human nature, any good work by man is a participation in the work of Christ.

57. The culmination of the redemptive work of Christ is the Holy Eucharist, the total self-donation of Christ for the salvation of the world to the glory of his Eternal Father. The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that,

By enduring the hardship of work (Gen. 3:14-19) in union with Jesus the carpenter of Nazareth and the one crucified on Calvary, man collaborates in a certain fashion with the Son of God in his redemptive work. (cf. CCC. 2427).

THE HOLY SPIRIT AS THE BASIS OF WORK

58. We always pray the Holy Spirit to renew the face of the earth. One of the obvious facts about creation is that God keeps on transforming, renewing and sanctifying creation. Creation is not static. It is a reality of the past which is at the same time dynamic and ongoing. It is the Holy Spirit who goes on renewing and perfecting creation. When we do our work the Holy Spirit inspires us and uses us to transform and renew creation. Little wonder our forefathers in the faith composed the prayer to the Holy Spirit inviting him to dwell in the hearts of believers and make them agents of transformation of creation. Hence we pray:

Come Holy Spirit and fill the hearts of the faithful

And kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and you will recreate them

And they will renew the face of the earth.

59. In reality the Holy Spirit continues to work in us and through us. All the good work done by man is indirectly the work of the Spirit who goes on working using human agents. Any work

undertaken in the spirit of responsibility and total dedication for the glory of God and common good, either explicitly or implicitly willed, is in the final analysis the work of the Spirit. Raniero Cantalamessa, tells us that according to the position of St. Basil which has come to be widely accepted within the circles of theologians,

“The Father is the Principal cause, from whom all things come; the Son is the efficient cause, through whom all things are made, and the Holy Spirit is the perfective cause” (R. Cantalamessa, *Come, Creator Spirit*, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2003, #33).

It is therefore the Spirit who goes on recreating and renewing the face of the earth. But the Spirit uses human agents who perform through human work. Therefore, all human agents are co-operators with the Spirit. Human work or labour is a participation in the ongoing work of the Spirit who goes on to transform, renew and perfect creation.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CHURCH: ADVOCATE OF THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN LABOUR

60. The Church is established by divine purpose and is always in alignment with its head, Christ himself, in fulfillment of the will of God for the human being. As the body of Christ, it is essentially engrafted in that tree whose branches it is in a deeply symbolic manner (Jn. 15:5). Given this special relationship with Christ, the Church cannot theologically speaking deviate from its mission. It is like a permanent shining light. This is so even in socio-political matters even though it does so without dictating since these matters are not its natural sphere. Even then, the Catholic Church has been historically proved reliable on many issues that are not her special competence. One important aspect where the position of the Church has been both prophetic and very correct has been in its social teaching, especially as it concerns the right of workers. The Church uses the light of the gospel as guide in social matters. We shall briefly look into some of these now.

Rerum novarum (1891)

61. Given the context of Marxist socialism and the reigning capitalist liberalism which we have already outlined, Pope Leo XIII waded in, in 1891 with the encyclical letter, *Rerum novarum*. This document has since assumed the title “workers’ charter”. Pope Leo focused on the condition of the working classes, and considered the relationships and duties of labour and the current capital. He also called attention to the role of government and citizens. Foremost in the Pope’s concern was the improvement of “the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class.” (R.N. #3). He affirmed the right of workers to suitable working conditions and the duty of employers to provide humane and practicable working hours. For the Pope, “It is neither just nor human so to grind men down with excessive labour as to stupefy their minds and wear out their bodies.” (R.N. #42). He further enjoined adequate rest for workers, and touched on those engaged in hazardous occupation like mines, calling for additional protection for them. He condemned child labour because it interfered with the proper education and development of children. This seminal encyclical defined fair wages as at least a living wage – but went further to

recommended that workers should receive more to take care of themselves, their families and have some savings in order that their condition improves with the passage of time. (R.N. #46).

62. The *Rerum novarum* dwells on other very vital points about the condition of the working class which with the passage of time have become taken for granted. These include the right to hold private property (no. 22); and the right of association (no. 49). He emphasized preferential option for the poor based on their special need, and enjoined public authorities to act in their favour as these include the working class. The Pope says, “therefore the public administration must duly and solicitously provide for the welfare and the comfort of the working classes; otherwise, that law of justice will be violated which ordains that each man shall have his due.” (R.N. 33). Leo XIII was a veritable trail blazer. He started a tradition of the social teachings of the Church in sympathy and solidarity with the working class – namely, those who earn their living by employing their God-given strength, and has since become a reference point both for the world and the Church. It is thus no wonder that several other encyclicals have since been written in commemoration of and in updating of this watershed in upholding the dignity of human labour.

Quadragesimo Anno (1931)

63. To mark the 40th anniversary of the *Rerum novarum*, Pope Pius XI issued the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931. Pope Pius emphasized the ethical import of the social and economic order. The Pope saw unrestrained capitalism as well as dictatorial communism as constituting serious dangers to human freedom. He advocated the reconstruction of the human society that will eschew both dangers and go by the principle of solidarity and subsidiarity. The encyclical also dwells on the question of just wage and affirms that this must be judged in accordance with three conditions: 1. the worker’s family responsibility, 2. the economic condition of the enterprise, 3. the economy as a whole.

These conditions imply that a just wage is not very easily determinable; that many factors, both private and social must be taken into consideration before such a thorny issue is justly laid to rest.

Mater et Magistra (1961)

64. In this document, *Mater et Magistra*, Pope John XXIII took up again the matter of social justice on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of *Rerum novarum* which has now assumed the sobriquet “Workers’ Charter”. While celebrating the anniversary of the Workers’ Charter, *Mater et Magistra* was written under the background of several scientific advances which included the atomic energy, synthetic material, increased automation, modern agriculture, new social system, social security and the growing number of independent nations. John XXIII decried the lack of balance between agriculture and industry and among different countries. He explains the pursuit of the common good as the desirable balance which should exist between the different elements of the society or the economy. Hence, the Pope insists that, “a business must balance its unity of direction with the needs of its individual workers” (MM #92). The Pope wrote specially about the dignity of agricultural work holding up the family farm as an ideal.

Gaudium et Spes (1965)

65. Pope John XXIII convoked Vatican II shortly after publishing the Encyclical, *Mater et Magistra*. One of the most momentous of its ground-breaking decrees was the *Gaudium et Spes*, or the Church in the Modern World. On the issue of workers, the Vatican II reaffirmed and expatiated on the position of *Rerum novarum* – on the right of workers and the dignity of human labour. The document outlined the purpose of human labour and finds its dignity in the creative imitation of the Creator – God (cf. GS #973-975).

Laborem exercens (1981)

66. This document was written by Pope John Paul II in commemoration of the 90th anniversary of the “Workers’ Charter”. The *Laborem exercens* dwells more on the nature of work. Here, John Paul II stresses the position of work in the organic development of the Church’s social teaching (n.9), he further brought out the distinction between work in the objective sense, seen in its external and technical aspects (n. 18-20), and in the subjective sense where man is the subject of work (n. 21-27). He inserts the rights of workers into the broader context of human rights and links work very closely with personal dignity (cf. n. 38-41). Like in the document *Mater et Magistra*, the Pope assigns special dignity to agricultural work, and ends in a highly theological note by seeing Christ as the worker and human work in the light of his cross and resurrection. (cf. n. 125).

Centesimus Annus (1991)

67. At the 100th anniversary of *Rerum novarum*, “the Workers’ Charter”, Pope John Paul II seized the opportunity to emphasize and teach some social issues that were relevant to the time. It was just at the demise of communism, and the Pope took time to condemn the fundamental error of socialism which led to the communist ideology. Socialism is the misreading of the human person as simply an element (cf. n. 13). The Pope puts this error at the doorstep of atheism the doctrine that there is no God. Blessed John Paul sees work as “the human response to God’s gift.” (n. 31). This in itself lends work very high dignity. But the Pope decries what should be seen as the new enslavement and exploitation enabled by technology. It is another way of exploitation, he says, since majority of the people today do not have the means or the possibility of acquiring the basic knowledge to enter the world of technology and intercommunication. They are thus exploited or marginalized (cf. n. 33).

68. The continuous emphasis of the Catholic Church on this all important matter shows how much she is concerned with the dignity of human labour and how solicitous she is that this dignity be maintained by maintaining the right of workers and having a proper understanding of the meaning and implications of human labour. The content of the Church’s teaching on labour is clear and can serve as a reliable guide for those engaged in improving the lot of the civil society.

There are other documents of the Church teaching us the dignity of human labour, but the above selection suffices for our purpose. We now address the purpose of human labour.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HUMAN LABOUR: ITS PURPOSE AND DIGNITY

69. The purpose and dignity of human labour or human work has been partially explained in the previous chapters. Nevertheless, it is useful to bring together the real purpose of human labour and to explain further why it is endowed with dignity – in spite of erroneous doctrines and practices that tend to deprive it of these.

The many questions that arise in the human mind about human labour, like why is there work? Why does man work? Of what purpose or objective is work? Has work any value that transcends space and time? Etc. These questions need to be answered.

70. At the very beginning of *Laborem exercens*, (n. 1), John Paul II outlines three major purposes or functions of work. First, work is meant to enable man to procure his daily bread. Note that other members of the animal kingdom need also to procure their daily bread, but they do not, properly speaking, engage in work. Thus man is animal *laborans*, a working animal, and this is distinctively so. The second purpose of work outlined by the Pope is “to contribute to the continuing development of the technical arts and sciences.” It means that by his labour man is able to keep up the progress of science and technology which help to improve the lot of many human beings and ease their plight. The third is that human labour “helps to raise ever higher the moral and cultural standards of the society in which he shares his life with his brothers.” It entails that it is through the labour of man that the level of civilization is constantly raised for the benefit of all human beings especially those who will inherit the earth when the current generation has passed on.

71. These three purposes are apt to encapsulate the external or objective purpose of human work. However, before *Laborem exercens*, the *Gaudium et Spes* spelt out the purposes of human labour which embrace some of those outlined by *Laborem exercens*. According to *Gaudium et Spes* (n. 67), the purpose of work is that through it:

72. 1. “Man ordinarily provides for himself and his family.”

This entails the quest for sustenance and the elementary material goods. Providing for himself naturally entails also providing for those who are naturally bound to his care, including members of his family, and those who by custom or choice must expect care from him. This is especially significant in the African cultural context. By family here is meant primarily the nuclear family. But the African concept of the extended family should contextually be included in this destination of the fruit of human labour.

2. “Associates with others as his brothers”

This is particularly an apt presentation of the role and function of human labour. Labour is not a solitary affair. It is not a project conceived and carried out by a single individual. For work to be possible and effective, it must be a cooperative affair. Even in its historic dimension, human labour is carried out in the society of humans, and the society as Edmund Burke said is something like a contract, both between the living and the dead and those yet unborn. This image properly describes

the activities of the human being. He inherits techniques, space, knowledge which was already worked on by generation past. Even in the present he is often at a particular point in the chain of events that link so many invisible people to whom indirectly he owes the present outcome of his labour. Everything that is employed in labour is first the product of human labour itself. (*Laborem exercens*, n. 55). There are many dimensions to this such that it can genuinely be said that at work man “reaps the harvest which others worked for”. Thus every man lives in a state of dependency on God and on his fellow human beings past and present who have made possible his present occupation. The *Gaudium et Spes* further emphasizes that he should associate with these as brothers, not as enemies, not as rivals, and not as warring parties in the struggle for limited goods and privileges. Brotherhood is a very fundamental Christian principle, since we are all one in Christ. Thus labour serves the purpose of realizing our oneness in our saviour in such a way that we are nudged to render service to each other.

3. “He can exercise genuine charity”

The type of brotherhood that goes with human labour is the one that generates brotherly love which the letter to the Hebrews urges Christians to continue unabated (Heb. 13:1-2). Charity in labour includes both the services rendered in the course of the exercise of labour and other assistance that becomes possible because of the earnings that come with labour. He who gains more than he actually needs should be more disposed to part with some part of what he has in excess, or deprive himself in sacrifice of even what he can genuinely need but can offer up for the benefit of others. The person who cannot earn because he is unemployed and dependent has little or no opportunity to do real charity.

3. “Be a partner in the work of bringing divine creation to perfection.”

This is done by the occupation of taking care of nature, increasing its potentials and increasing its endowments through useful and respectful invention. By human labour, there is continuous and positive transformation and improvement of nature. There are many dimensions to this fact. For example, through his work, man can invent ways of improving agricultural yield. He can endeavour to care for his fellow human beings by taking care of them through health services. He can improve the living conditions of those whom he should care for, and in general the human being has the capacity to re-fashion his environment in such a way that it becomes both enduring and aesthetically pleasant. Such efforts should not be isolated from God’s creative and sustaining act. In a way it should be seen in terms of the *ratio seminalis* of St. Augustine in which the Creator put into nature the seed of its development, ready to germinate at the application of human labour.

5. The Subjective Purpose of Human Labour

The above also recalls the subjective end of human labour. This subjectivity is incidentally based on the command of God in Genesis, to till the earth and conquer it (Gen. 1:28). Even in this task of conquering, dominating and improving nature, his primacy must not be compromised. This is in fact the canon of rightness (*Laborem exercens*, n. 60). The human being is the subject of work in the sense that it both originates from him and refers back to him (ibid. n. 40). The dominance over nature which is instructed by God refers first and foremost to man’s dominance over himself. This self-dominance places him in a better position to bring himself and the rest of nature back to

God (cf. *ibid.* n. 112). But he must be conscious of the duty of remaining in dominance (*ibid.* n. 24). He must not be dominated by the things he makes or by the process of making those things. It is on account of this centrality of the human person in the whole economy of work that the *Gaudium et Spes* asserts that “human work whether considered independently or in subordination to another, proceeds from the human person who as it were impresses his seal on the things of nature and subjects them to his will” (GS. n. 67).

73. In very simple terms we can summarize the purpose of human work as to enable man provide the means of daily livelihood, food, shelter, and basic needs; it provides one the means to practice genuine charity; helps one to associate with other human beings; provides the means and opportunity for personal development; it is a means of sanctification and a source of grace, a check to laziness and above all a means of partnering with God in the work of bringing divine creation to perfection.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN LABOUR

74. The foregoing already points to the lofty dignity inherent in human labour. In the first place, through his labour man is enabled to improve himself and his fellow human beings, to leave a legacy through doing his quota in improving the life of those even yet to be born by improving the standard of civilization. He is able to co-operate with others and to serve them in genuine charity as well as be a part of the work for bringing God’s creation to fulfillment. Above all, on account of the subjective purpose of human labour, he is invited to perfect himself while perfecting God’s cosmos. And he becomes the test of rightness or lack of it. This primacy given to the agent of labour has telling implication in his valuation. Given his centrality, it follows that in spite of different occupations and their different specific objective values reposed on them, no differentiation may be made between the agents of these different types of work as persons. Given that all men are alike in their being the *imago die* – the image of God, all human work is to be evaluated from the point of view of the dignity of the subject of work, that is, the human being himself. This fact places the final significance for work not really on the outcome of the specific work, but on man himself who is the true end or purpose of any kind of work (*Laborem exercens* n. 27).

75. That work proceeds from the human person throws it back to God the creator of man. And in that sense the effort put in labour belongs genuinely to man only when it is done primarily on account of love of God who commands man to work and for the service of his children who have need of it. Thus human labour should be imbued with its own spirituality. Work is personal action which involves the participation of the whole person. Since it is to the same human person that the word of God is directed, the human being must be guided by faith and charity to ensure that work is in practice given the meaning which it has with God, and guided into the work of salvation like the other things with which that work is entwined. According to Pope John Paul II, work possesses the property of community building (LE #96). It is a fundamental dimension of man’s life on earth (n. 12), and man is born to work and is called to it (n. 13).

76. The dignity of human labour is based strongly on its origin in the human nature, and its anchoring on God who orders it and lends it dignity. The centrality of labour in man through the creator ensures that the dignity of labour is in fact the dignity of the agent of labour and not primarily that of the external outcome or product of labour. In a sense, the duty to work is a mission which unites man with his fellow human beings, enables him to improve himself and improve God's creation in fulfillment of the divine plan. *Gaudium et Spes* expresses this in the following words:

When men and women provide for themselves and their families in such a way as to be of service to the community as well, they can rightly look upon their work as a prolongation of the work of the creator, a service to their fellow men, and their personal contribution to the fulfillment in history of the divine plan (GS. n. 34).

CHAPTER NINE

WORK AND REST: THE MYSTERY OF DIVINE BALANCE

77. Rest is a means of balancing work so as not to become enslaved by it. Beyond work, as accomplishment of tasks there is a mystery of relationship with God which at once entails worship in prayer and good works. Here rest fits in. work as a way of participating in the divinity of God, schools and learns at the foot of the divine Master following his example and mandate. According to Henry Peschke, the sequence of six days of creation and a day of rest on the seventh is set before the people of God as a model and incentive for their own rhythm of weekday labour and Sabbath rest (cf. Karl Peschke, 678).

In addition to the command by the authority of his example (cf. Gen. 2:2), he, the divine Master, goes further to give the injunction, "six days you shall labour and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord" (Ex. 20:9ff). Therefore, Sabbath is a rest from work and a worship unto God who is the origin of work. It is a sort of recognition that work is not absolute in one's sustenance. One enjoys his sustenance through the benevolence of divine providence – the one who provides through work.

78. Rest forms part of divine wisdom. The fact that God rested on the seventh day after six-day work (cf. Gen. 2:2) does suggest humanly speaking, the need to restore and renew strength after hard work, tedious labour. But it says more than that. It gives more the meaning of rest as a sort of contemplative affirmation – of the goodness that is creation.

The dynamics of "work and rest" should take the path of God, who works and rests. This is the proper way work will present itself as a participation in the mystery of divine activity of creation and in the contemplative affirmation of the same goodness called rest. For the Jews who observed Sabbath rest, rest is for worship.

When taken to its logical conclusion, rest is an act and an opportunity to pray, contemplate and worship. Rest is differentiated from leisure which is a sort of idleness or passivity. Rest is as

activity, it is a sort of work and in rest one contemplates, relaxes, savouring the goodness of the Lord. In fact one worships.

79. It is therefore very important to work and rest since that refreshes us physically and strengthens us spiritually. Rest is a right and a duty unto each worker after the example of God who rested on the seventh day and commanded us to do so. The Fathers of the Vatican Council II also insist that workers should be allowed sufficient rest leisure to cultivate their family, cultural, social and religious life... (cf. GS. n. 67).

Employers of labour should always remember and respect this God-given right. And people should not force their subordinates to over work for example, work on Sundays, work beyond the stipulated work hours without some form of compensation.

80. It is good to discover the relationship between rest and worship. Rest is commanded by God to afford us some time to contemplate the God of works. It affords us time to renew our physical and spiritual strength. Too much work without rest is to distort the nature and value of work while no work or idleness is a sin against God and the nature of man.

God has provided us with work as an avenue of accessing the benefits in creation. He has also provided us with rest in order to balance and harmonize human affairs and link us back to the Creator.

CHAPTER TEN

RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF WORKERS

81. The dignity of labour entails that no aspect of it should be disdained, since its dignity stems from the dignity of the agent of labour which is in turn anchored on God at whose command the human being is bound to work. The Church, since the era of the *Rerum novarum*, has been a constant advocate of the dignity of human labour, and in stressing this dignity has also been quick to realize that we cannot speak of dignity for something or someone who has no rights. In fact, these rights are the direct outcome of the dignity with which the activity of human labour properly understood is by its very nature imbued with. Accordingly, there are several rights which have become known as the rights of workers which all go to protect and enhance the dignity of their engagement.

82. 1. Right of Employment.

The right of employment is a fundamental one in this regard, since it is one who is employed that has the possibility of exercising labour. The right of employment has also been proclaimed as a fundamental human right contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Right of 1948. This right enjoins those in charge of the management of the polity and its economy to work in such a way that each person who can work is given the opportunity to find something to do (*Laborem exercens*, n. 82).

2. The Right to Form Association without Reprisal (Right to Freedom of Association).

This right derives from the right of free association of individuals in the society either for political, economic or other purposes. *Lumen Gentium* puts this right in the following words:

Among the fundamental rights of the individual must be numbered the right of workers to form themselves into associations which truly represent them and are able to co-operate in organizing economic life properly, and the right to play their part in the activities of such associations without fear of reprisal. (LG. n. 68).

This association enables them to play a better role in the whole process of economic organization as well as making their presence felt in the society. It is also an avenue for contributing to the common good.

3. The Right to Engage in Dialogue.

Industries are often so organized that decisions are taken by some who may not be very directly involved in many ramifications of production and distribution. Those who are more directly involved have the right of making their views known to the management as a show of responsibility and concern for the good and improvement of the whole economic and social organization. Dialogue is especially necessary as a way of resolving labour disputes.

4. Right of Striking

The right of dialogue does not remove the right of workers to go on strike: the strike remains even till today a necessary (although an ultimate) means for the defense of workers' right and satisfaction of their lawful aspirations. Nevertheless, even in times of strike, workers' union should resume negotiation and dialogue as soon as possible.

5. Right to Just Wages.

The question of a just wage is a thorny issue but it remains the right of those who are paid employees. There are circumstances which can influence what can be called a just wage in any context. Sometimes it is called "a living wage" to stress the function it should perform in the life of workers. The principle is that someone who is employed devotes his working hours to this particular employment, has the right to live by what he earns, feed his family and fulfill other basic necessities of life. For Pope John Paul II, such a wage is the test of the proper functioning of a wage economy (cf. *Laborem exercens*, n. 89).

6. The Right to Develop their Talent and Personalities.

Workers must also be allowed to develop themselves even in the process of working. This can be done through in-service training or other opportunities granted for them to improve on their performance and their contribution. Those who have special talents should also not allow such talents to peter out as that will constitute a loss to humanity.

7. Right not to be Exploited.

The right not to be exploited derives from the fact that economic activity is a collaborative and collective activity. Reference to the law of economics is not enough to subject workers to a condition that amounts to exploitation, and in extreme cases to enslavement.

8. The Right to Rest and Leisure.

Even though work properly understood is a lifelong activity, man, in imitation of God himself, deserves to have adequate time to rest in order to recuperate from the effect of previous exertions. He should not be given schedules as if he were a machine. Leisure and rest are in imitation of God who according to the Book of Genesis rested after creating for six days. But this is not to be understood as retirement or idleness since God's creative and salvific work goes on unabated. The necessity of rest and sufficient leisure is meant to allow the worker to have enough time for reflection on the purpose of his life and to increase his efficiency.

9. Right to Exercise Religious Activity.

This is part of religious freedom or freedom of worship. A worker should not be forced to abandon his religious obligation or conviction on account of the nature of his work. Care should be taken that his schedules of work are able to accommodate his right of worship. Worse still are the cases where employers insist on the employee converting to the religion of the employer to retain his or her employment.

DUTIES OF WORKERS

83. There is no right without corresponding responsibility. In fact very often the rights the human being enjoys emanates from the responsibilities imposed on him. The duties of workers can be seen encapsulated in the purpose of work, for it is their responsibility to see to it that these purposes are brought to their desired ends. The worker must endeavour to fulfill the end of human labour. He must transcend mere materialism and not see work simply as a means of earning wages. It is the duty of the worker to come to the full realization of the dignity of his occupation which enables him to be somewhat a co-worker with his fellow human beings and his God, in bringing God's purpose to better fulfillment on earth. A worker thus becomes a co-operator in making God's Kingdom to come on earth. He should therefore see his task as given by God who expects him to use it as an opportunity to serve his children, his fellow human beings and his God. The encyclical, *Rerum novarum*, outlines some of the individual and collective duties of workers which include "fully and faithfully" to perform their agreed-upon tasks, to refrain from vandalism or personal attacks, to refrain from rioting or violence. But in general, these are based on the dignity assigned to labour by God himself who expects the worker to strive for perfection through his engagement and see it as an opportunity to improve his life and that of his fellow human beings by co-operating with God's will and his designs.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE SITUATION OF THE NIGERIAN WORKER

84. What has been outlined above should apply to the Nigerian worker and even more poignantly. If these rights and duties are taken into account, the situation of the Nigerian worker is far behind the ideal and even far behind what has been achieved in many other countries. The rate of unemployment in the country is simply alarming. If we add to this number the underemployed and hidden unemployment, it appears our country is far off the mark set by the Church's social teaching and is thus hanging on a precipice. If we take as guide the situation of so many young and highly qualified young people who have no jobs and whose number or existence the government is hardly aware of, then the seriousness of the problem can begin to be more apparent. In our country there are so many university graduates who wait for between five to ten years in quest of gainful employment. Such a situation leads to frustration and threatens the very foundation of the country. The endemic unemployment in the country is a serious breach of the right of people to contribute their quota in the society by the God-given mandate to work.

85. Those who are employed very often exercise their labour in unprintable conditions. Vast majority of Nigerians work without health insurance, without social security, and in very dangerous conditions. Thousands of Nigerians, youths who should be in school are daily seen on our major roads hawking all sorts of wares, dangerously pursuing moving vehicles in order to sell to their occupants. For the sake of quick gain, many others prefer to engage in riding commercial motor-bikes in place of learning useful trade which will grant them self-employment and eventually gain them increased income for life.

86. On account of massive unemployment, the Nigerian worker is exploited by the powerful and rich employers in government and in private sector. Some commercial banks force some of their employees to rate their work based on the deposits they attract by any possible means. They receive unimaginable quotas of monetary deposits which they must bring into the bank periodically or risk being sacked. This practice is close to exploitation and inhuman psychological pressure on human beings. In recent times many foreigners who are employers in Nigeria have been known to be very harsh and unfair to Nigerian workers because of the latter's lack of advocacy. Such workers are employed for a pittance; they are made to work long hours and are very often dismissed without notice and for flimsy reasons. Some are forced to work without leisure or rest. Some work through Monday to Sunday in some industries, and are thus effectively hindered from developing their talents and personalities as well as from paying due attention to their families and fulfilling their religious obligations.

87. The Nigerian worker is almost completely closed off from the process of decision making in their places of work. The country has over-time developed a military culture where those who are in charge act like army generals in fields of battle, issuing orders without any meaningful dialogue.

88. Some are deprived the right of exercising their religious activities. Some employers even see it as a God-given duty to make their employees change their religion or denomination to the one of the employer for fear of possible reprisal or for the prospect of keeping their job.

89. The Nigerian worker many a time receives very pitiable wage and wage issues are constantly matters of industrial disputes mainly because of very unjust social order and on account of a sizable roaming number of people ready for employment and willing to thereby subject themselves under any condition for the sake of getting employed.

90. Workers in Nigerian private sector are very often not allowed to form associations and are visited with reprisal for any attempts to protest. Such reprisal most commonly involves the sack of such workers as a warning to others who may attempt to protest. Private universities in Nigeria today seek students by advertising that their lecturers do not go on strike in contrast to public universities where strikes are the order of the day. They fail to realize that the right of workers to strike belongs to the fundamental human rights and this right has been repeatedly supported by the social teachings of the Catholic Church.

91. Again, most Nigerian workers work without pension, without any reasonable gratuity and without old age insurance or any form of social security. Such workers who form the vast majority of Nigerian employed workers in the private sector are collectively exploited, powerless and frustrated. Partly as a consequence of this situation, there is evident low productivity on the part of workers – which is very often deliberate. Many workers spend precious time of the employers without serious purpose, and their constant effort is geared just to earning more pay without commensurate effort to improve on their services or more fundamentally, themselves.

92. Many Nigerian artisans have developed a disgusting degree of dishonesty and double-speak in the services they provide. Such people are always scheming to cheat their clients through lies and false pretense, and in so doing depriving their service of the type of dignity that belongs to it by nature. The image of the Nigerian worker today can be expressed as: unemployed or underemployed, exploited, maltreated, poorly paid, dishonest, and sometimes irresponsible.

The Church insists on giving workers their due rights and improving on their conditions of service. Also the Church insists on workers recognizing the dignity of their engagement, its godly aspect and making sustained effort to maintain that dignity.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE ISSUE OF MINIMUM WAGE

93. Minimum wage which entails the least salary a worker is allowed to be paid in an economy has constituted a thorny issue in labour disputes in Nigeria. In a way, this dispute has made it impossible to focus attention on other important aspects of labour relationship. In Nigeria, the minimum wage has been adjusted from time to time by different governments. The impetus for adjusting minimum wage is the obligation to pay people rightly or what can be called a “living wage”. In recent time the adjustment of minimum wage has resulted in work to rule actions in many states of the country.

94. The issue of minimum wage has become a difficult one mainly on account of vast unemployment in the economy. Public institutions, departments and ministries have bloated work forces that are mostly ineffective and sometimes almost useless. This is because these institutions are the main employers of labour in the states. Many in authority use both fair and foul means to get their own people employed in such institutions, either on account of nepotism or bribery. As a consequence, in our country, available employments are given to people who are unfit, and this drastically reduces productivity. Too many people are employed without any consideration for the need of the institution. The government as a consequence is burdened with a bloated workforce whom it cannot pay any reasonable wage.

95. The minimum wage should be such that it would be enough to sustain the worker and his family and enable him to fulfill some basic responsibilities and still make some savings. It is clear that such a standard in Nigeria is a very tall order, not because it is impossible but because of some endemic circumstances. Prominent among these is over-compensation of political office holders. Again, the wide gap between the highest earners and the lowest which must be among the widest in the world, together with the disproportionate percentage of overhead cost in running the nation both in terms of the federal and state levels, as well as the local government level, all these create the challenging circumstances. Further, the endemic and massive corrupt practices constantly having a sway in the affairs of the nation eviscerates much of our economic gain and lands them in private pockets and bank accounts.

96. But the Church is uncompromising in her stance in favour of workers and advises governments to create the situation (condition) where not only governments but also other employers of labour are able to pay just minimum wage.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

DUTIES OF CHRISTIANS IN UPHOLDING THE DIGNITY OF LABOUR

97. All the members of the society are enjoined to contribute towards maintaining the type of dignity that naturally belongs to the exercise of human labour. In a very special way Christians should see it as part of their mission in Christ and as part of the obligation to fulfill the will of God and the divine plan.

98. Justice is the cornerstone of public institutions, and as St. Augustine says, without justice, what is a state but a band of brigands. It is necessary that Christians in high offices should work for the common good and eschew foisting selfish interests as their first and most important preoccupation.

99. Those who do not have the opportunity to lead or serve in public offices should nevertheless contribute their quota from their own corner. Since little drops of water constitute an ocean, everybody should feel concerned and be a partner in the enthronement of the dignity of labour through which God advances the fortunes of his people on earth.

100. It is very important that they do not take their God-given duty as an opportunity only to enrich themselves, and that they should make sure that the beautiful ends of human labour are not tainted by selfishness and greed which are served by corruption. They should cultivate honesty, hard work and sense of the common good.

101. Christians should insist on being just to all both the high and the low. They should first of all value the human person which is the source and the destination of human labour. By so doing dignity will be accorded to all irrespective of the task that has been given to each person. They should frown at a situation where office holders live in opulence and far above their means and those who work and live with them, the masses, wallow in abject poverty. The universal destination of the resources of the world cries against such a situation.

102. They, Christians and all men and women of good will, should consider the very wide gap between the highest paid and lowest paid employee as contrary to the will of God. Christians should develop the awareness that a just and peaceful society which human labour helps to enthrone is for the good of all. The human society is a gift to all and must be protected and made livable.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

DUTIES OF GOVERNMENT IN UPHOLDING THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN LABOUR

103. The government has tremendous duties in upholding the dignity of human labour. Since it is the duty of the government to protect and promote the common good, she has also an indispensable role in upholding the dignity of human labour. To fulfill this role, the government has to create massive employment opportunities through well thought-out policy. This will enable many capable hands within the age to be properly employed. The government has to fight corruption through proper punishment for corrupt officers. It is the duty of the government to ensure the rights of workers, stop exploitation of poor workers and enforce a just distribution of wages. It is further the duty of government to reduce the cost of governance, reinvest what accrues from such to create more employment and demonstrate as well as emphasize preferential option for the poor. It rests on the government to develop trust on the side of workers and the populace at large; enforce respect for all the fundamental rights of workers both in the private and public sectors and institute healthy incentive or remuneration for law abiding and responsible productive workers.

It is important to note that the policy of “no work no pay” for striking workers is unjust. There must be a better way of promoting dialogue as that policy is against the principle of the international labour organization and against the teachings of the Church. However, workers should always remember that strike action should be a last resort when all other avenues for resolving the problem have failed.

CONCLUSION AND PRAYER

104. The Blessed Virgin Mary, our Mother, is a good example and role model with respect to human labour. She was able to perform great works in the Holy Family as a wife and mother. She took her motherhood as a full-time job and taught Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, the value of work. She did her duties to her neighbours and relations, consequently travelled distances to visit her cousin Elizabeth. May she obtain for us the graces to go back to work with renewed vigour in appreciation of its dignity conferred by God.

105. PRAYER

God our Father,

By the labour of man, you govern and guide to perfection the work of creation.

Hear the prayers of your people and give all men and women

work that enhances their human dignity –

and draws them closer to each other in the service of their brothers.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(From the Collect of the Mass for the Blessing of Man's Labour)

**Given in Onitsha, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, On 22nd February,
Ash Wednesday, in the year of our Lord, 2012**

– the Tenth Anniversary of our Episcopate.

+MOST REV. VALERIAN M. OKEKE

Archbishop of Onitsha