

PARTICIPATION, PROPERTY AND WORK IN CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

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Catholic social teaching developed mainly as 'an answer' to what has been traditionally called 'the social question'. Put simply, this question is about how people can live together and collaborate in a way as to ensure and promote not only their own individual interest but also the common good. As Pius XI wrote, it is basically "the problem of human fellowship."¹ Human fellowship is problematic for the simple reason that it is a fellowship which needs to be re-affirmed and built up again and again in the face of continuous conflict and oppression. The *status quo* is questionable in so far as it constitutes a state in which individuals, classes, regions or countries are somehow excluded from adequate participation.

As the Church became more aware of the conflictual aspect of the social reality, the more it perceived the need of emphasizing and encouraging participation. Paul VI spoke of the *aspiration* to equality and participation that is becoming increasingly more widespread today and represents a constant living protest against discrimination, marginalization and other forms of oppression.² Having sketched the extensive and pervading network of domination existing in the contemporary world, the Bishops' Synod of 1971 declared that participation "constitutes a *right* which is to be applied both in the economic and in the social and political field."³

The right to participation is today the subject of wide discussion. There is, in the first place, the question about its status in relation to other rights. Since it has a very wide scope of application, covering the economic, political, and other areas of social life, it has been placed generally on the same level as freedom and equality which are the roots from which several particular rights are derived.⁴ For the same reason, it has been related to the right to life which

1. *Quadragesimo Anno*, (Catholic Truth Society Edition 1960) n.2. To be referred to as *QA*.
2. *Octogesima Adveniens*, (Vatican Polyglot) nos. 22-23. To be referred to as *OA*.
3. "Justice in the World" in Vincent P. Mainelli, *Social Justice: A Consortium Book*, (North Carolina 1978) 1039-1114, no. 1055. Italics not in the original.
4. Cf. Wolfgang Huber and Heinz Eduard Tödt, *Menschenrechte: Perspektiven einer menschlichen Welt*, (Stuttgart/Berlin 1978) 88ff.

again is not just another right but the right on which the other human rights rest.⁵ It has also been related to development which also enjoys a special rank among human rights, since it points to where the exercise of all other rights should lead.⁶

The second area of discussion centres on the specific function of the right to participation. Given its basic character, this right, as I have noted, is generally considered to fall within the same class of such basic rights as freedom and equality. Freedom, equality and participation complement and explain each other. Paul VI touches precisely on this point in *Octogesima Adveniens*. Equality and participation, he says, are two forms of freedom, that is, two ways or modes in which human freedom should express itself. In the absence of "the preferential respect due to the poor ... equality before the law can serve as an alibi for flagrant discrimination."⁷ The Marxist ideology of freedom is untenable, he holds, because it restrains individual freedom more than is necessary and, hence, it renders participation impossible. The liberal ideology of freedom is equally untenable as it generates various kinds of domination rather than a truly participating form of life. Besides complementing each other, freedom, equality and participation offer, as Huber and Tödt argue, a hermeneutical key for the proper understanding of the various human rights. They function like Weber's concept of "type" in the explanation of complex social and historical processes.⁸

The subject of this essay is the concept of participation in the context of the early and later phases of the Catholic social tradition (beginning with *Rerum Novarum*). Oswald von Nell-Breuning maintains that the priority which the Church has assigned to ownership until recently has now been shifted to work.⁹ Today this is a commonly accepted view among experts in Catholic social teaching.¹⁰ It is useful, however, to try to bring out the relevance of this important

5. Cf. Jacques Meurant, "'Droit de vivre' et participation" in *Essais sur Le Concept de 'Droit De Vivre'*, (Daniel Prémont, ed.) (Bruxelles 1988) 121-131.
6. Cf. Bishops' Synod, "Justice in the World." For a discussion on participation and development in recent Catholic social teaching see David Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition*, (New York/Ramsey/Toronto 1979) 84-100.
7. *OA*, 23.
8. Huber/Tödt, *Menschenrechte*, 80-83. The authors argue that to understand the full meaning of a human right one has to see it in the light of freedom, equality and participation.
9. Oswald von Nell-Breuning, *Mitbestimmung — Wer Mit Wem?* (Freiburg/Basel/Wien 1969) 51,63.
10. Cf. Gregory Baum, *The Priority of Labour: A Commentary on Laborem Exercens, Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II*, (New York/Ramsy 1982); Friedhelm Hengsbach, *Die Arbeit hat Vorrang: Eine Option Katholischer Soziallehre*, (Mainz 1982) especially pp.239-242; Franz Klüber, *Der Umbruch des Denkens in der katholischen Soziallehre*, (Köln 1982) 65ff; Hermann Josef Wallraff, *Eigentumspolitik, Arbeit und Mitbestimmung*, (Bachem Köln 1968) 145ff.

shift of emphasis or, better, perspective for a more adequate understanding of the right to participation.

Participation and Property

The major problem which Leo XIII and Pius XI raised was the right of the working class to participate in the fruits of economic progress. This was a particularly urgent problem since most were living in a condition that was only a little better than that of slavery itself.¹¹ At the time, it was possible to speak of 'the working class' as a more or less sociologically identifiable group. This was the class of skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled workers who were trying to earn a living as farmers or, which was increasingly more the case, employees in the newly established industries.

Share in the Fruits of Production

Leo XIII and Pius XI thought that the only way of emancipating the working class was to give workers a much larger share in the fruits of production than they were actually receiving. Since the wage was, as it still is, the usual source of income for the average worker, the central question was that about the nature of the wage-contract and the criteria establishing a just wage.

Leo XIII rejected the liberal view that labour is merely another factor of production that may be bought and sold like any other piece of merchandise according to the market law of supply and demand. Keeping wages low because there are many people seeking few jobs may unjustly deprive the worker of even the minimum of material means he requires to support himself and his family. Although Leo XIII and Pius XI were extremely cautious regarding State intervention in economic and social life, they insisted strongly on such intervention in order to ensure that workers receive a just wage.

The edifice on which Leo XIII and Pius XI were trying to build their whole argument on wages, however, could stand only on one condition, namely, that the worker could keep his earnings. This is one of the main reasons, if not the main reason, why they gave so much importance to the right to private property. Leo XIII declared in very clear and explicit terms that the first and most fundamental principle to improve the condition of the masses "must be the inviolability of private property."¹² He called upon the State to give priority to suitable legislation to safeguard effectively the institution of private property.

11. *Rerum Novarum*, (Catholic Truth Society Edition 1964) 2. To be referred to as *RN*.

12. *Ibid.*, 12.

Similarly, Pius XI was convinced that the right to private property was a basic element in the structure of society.¹³

Unlike the prevailing liberal philosophy, however, Leo XIII and Pius XI developed the doctrine, which was an essential part of the earlier Christian tradition, about the use of private property. The original purpose of natural resources and the goods which mankind produces in the course of history is that they should serve everyone to maintain oneself and one's dependents. The distribution of goods according to sound principles of justice is, therefore, a central question in both ethics and politics. The fact that ownership confers the right to hold and to control one's property does not entitle one to abuse of one's goods. They are neither to be wasted nor to be used as a means of domination. They have to be given to those who need them and they have to serve as a means of promoting solidarity and collaboration. Pius XI taught that social charity should dispose one to discern the needs of the other and help him or her, while social justice should lead, especially the State, to prevent the exclusion of some people from a share in the available resources. Regarding the working class, he stated that every effort must be made that "at least in future a just share only of the fruits of production be permitted to accumulate in the hands of the wealthy, and that an ample sufficiency be supplied to the worker."¹⁴

Independence

Why was it, in the first place, so essential to uphold the right to private property? The reason was the need of protecting the individual and the group, especially the family, from the threat of increasing State interference in social life. Even the traditional natural law theory seems to have been adapted specifically to provide the ultimate ground for individual freedom *vis-à-vis* the looming power of the totalitarian State.

In fact, a comparison between the view of Aquinas and that of Leo XIII on private property reveals a very significant difference.¹⁵ The former regarded private property as an institution which may be called natural only in a derivative or secondary sense, having been discovered in the course of history to be useful for the maintenance of orderly human relationships and for the promotion of

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13. For Pius XI's understanding of ownership cf. *QA*, 44-51.

14. *Ibid.*, 61.

15. For a study of the sources of Leo XIII's teaching on private property and a comparison between Leo XIII and Thomas Aquinas see Helmut Sorgenfrei, *Die Geistesgeschichtlichen Hintergründe der Sozialenzyklika "Rerum Novarum"*, (Heidelberg/Löwen 1970) 99-158.

ersonal and group initiative.¹⁶ The latter spoke of the right to private property simply as “a natural right” which enables one to rely on a stable and permanent source of self-subsistence (which he identified with the land) rather than on the State. “There is no need to bring in the State,” he asserted, for “man precedes the State, and possesses, prior to the formation of any State, the right of providing for the sustenance of his body.”¹⁷ Similarly, he interpreted “the natural and original right” of marrying and having a family as the ultimate proof of the priority of the family in relation to the State. The family or “the ‘society’ of a man’s house” is “older than any State” and has rights and duties “peculiar to itself which are quite independent of the State.”¹⁸ Again the State is bound to recognize and protect, Leo XIII confirmed, the natural right of association. If the State forbids its citizens to form associations, “it contradicts the very principle of its existence, for both they and it exist in virtue of the like principle, namely, the natural tendency of men to dwell in society.”¹⁹

The affirmation of independence in the sense of freedom from State interference was, however, only meaningful to the extent that the individual or group, especially the family, were really independent. By itself the right to private property was not enough to give the person actual independence for the simple reason that he could not actually be in a position to own anything. This is why Leo XIII stressed that the solution to the labour, not to say the social, question lay in giving an opportunity to “as many as possible of the people to become owners.”²⁰

The inviolability of the right to private property had to be defended in view of the threat of totalitarian regimes to the right of the individual to a relative measure of independence from the State. At the same time, it was essential to insist on the right use of private property, since so many people at the time were dominated by a liberal capitalistic regime which, in practice, denied them proper access to the fruits of economic progress.

Pius XI followed basically the same line of thinking. Like his predecessor, he was preoccupied by the ‘individualist’ and the ‘collectivist’ trends in contem-

16. Cf. *S. Th. 2a 2ae*, Q. LXVI, art 2. In his reply to the first objection, he stated that the right to private property is not contrary to natural law; it is an addition to natural law: “Unde proprietatis possessionum non est contra jus naturale, sed juri naturali superadditur per adinventionem rationis humanae.”

17. *RN* 6.

18. *Ibid.*, 9.

19. *Ibid.*, 38.

20. *Ibid.*, 35.

porary society. On the one hand, man was more and more constrained to fall back on his own individual resources, having lost the social backing that had characterized pre-industrial society. On the other hand, man was threatened with being absorbed into the collectivity and losing his personality. The reconstruction of social life, hence, involved the cultivation of individual initiative from the base. The ethical principle that should guide this process of growth from the base was, Pius XI claimed, the principle of subsidiarity. As its very name suggests, this principle requires that, as a general rule, the larger group, above all the State, should not absorb and eliminate but help and promote the smaller groups.

Oswald von Nell-Breuning is certainly correct in saying that the right to private property plays a key role in the early Catholic social teaching. At least for both Leo XIII and Pius XI, individuals and groups, especially the family, could actually and effectively emancipate themselves from the domination of a liberal capitalistic regime and, at the same time, maintain a measure of relative independence from the State, if they owned and used, as they deemed fit, those means which they required for their own self-development.

The 'personal' aspect of work, as Leo XIII called it, was not excluded.²¹ But it was the notion of work as a means of earning a living or, better, as a title of ownership that was elaborated in *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*. The reason is very simple: man develops himself not so much in and through productive labour as in and through other activities. The worker has a right to a just wage, because it is only with the help of the remuneration which he receives for his work that he can raise and manage his own family properly. At the place of work, the worker is expected to follow the orders and instructions of the owner/s and manager/s. In this sense, he is in a subordinate position. At home, he is 'the head'. The human person, Leo XIII wrote, "receives a wider extension in the family group."²² It is in his capacity as 'father' that the worker realizes his profoundest wish that his children "carry on, so to speak, and continue his personality."²³ But the worker can only exercise his responsibility as 'head' of a family and realize his deepest aspiration as 'father', if he is not denied the right to keep what he earns through his labour and if he actually earns enough to enable him to fulfill adequately his responsibilities in life.²⁴

21. *Ibid.*, 34.

22. *Ibid.*, 10.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Quoting Hanna Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, (London 1961), Andrew Reeve notes that the ancient Greek and Roman concept of independence presupposed power over others: "A precondition of independence from necessity was power over others, but this freedom was

Workers' Participation

Neither Leo XIII nor Pius XI made any distinction between reasons justifying *personal* and reasons justifying *productive* property. They used the same kind of arguments to justify the right of the individual to own a house and those means which are normally required to live one's own personal and family life in relative independence as well as the right to own land, natural resources and technological means of production. It is well known that the latter type of property may give excessive power to the owner.²⁵ It is one thing to justify the right to own personal and quite another to justify the right to own productive property. The absence of such an important distinction led to a fundamental prejudice. This was the assumption that the capitalist, that is, the one (individual or group) who owns the means of production is "the head" of the enterprise. As the workers generally have no share in the ownership of such means, they can, at most, only ask for, without demanding, some kind of participation.

Indeed, Pius XI encouraged the gradual introduction of a system of partnership or, as it is called today, workers' participation. "We deem it advisable," he wrote, "that the wage-contract should, when possible, be modified by a contract of partnership, as is already being tried in various ways to the no small gain both of the wage-earners themselves and to the employees ... (so that) wage-earners and other employees participate in the ownership or the management, or in some way share in the profits."²⁶ But he was merely *recommending* the introduction of workers' participation in the form of co-ownership, co-management or profit-sharing.

Pius XII re-affirmed the teaching of his predecessor on workers' participation. He continued to promote the gradual introduction of workers' participation. But he also maintained that the owner of the means of production should, always within the limits of the public law regulating economic activity, "remain master of his own economic decisions."²⁷ Surely, as F.X. Arnold noted, the Pope

to be located in a particular sphere a man could call his own, the base from which his operations in the public world could be conducted," *Property: Issues in Political Theory*, (Hampshire/London 1986) 81.

25. Pius XI, however, acknowledged that: "... certain forms of property must be reserved to the State, since they carry with them a power too great to be left to private individuals without injury to the community at large," *QA*, 114. But he did not explain the relevance of this fundamental idea to the imposition of certain limitations to the ownership of, at least, some kinds of productive property.
26. *QA*, 65.
27. "Il proprietario dei mezzi di produzione qualunque esso sia — proprietario particolare, associazione d'operai o fondazione — deve, sempre nei limiti del diritto pubblico

was limiting his assertion to the right of the owner/s to decide on matters connected with the *economic* aspect of the enterprise and he acknowledged the right of civil authorities to impose certain restrictions.²⁸ This was a very relevant remark at the time since it was generally taken that the Pope was reacting to a very key statement made at the conclusion of the *Katholikentag* which had been held in Bochum in 1949. It was stated that the workers' right to co-determination in social, personal and economic questions was a natural right.

We may accept that Pius XII was not actually giving the owner/s of the means of production very wide power of decision. Nevertheless, he seemed to have been caught in the same net of difficulties which his predecessors had to face as a result of the emphasis they had placed on the rights emanating from ownership. Oswald von Nell-Breuning rightly stressed this point when commenting on the controversy that ensued. "The crux of all the difficulties concerning the right to co-determination," he wrote, "lies in that the owner should share the power of control over his own property, which as such belongs to him, with a non-owner or also with a multitude of non-owners."²⁹ In other words, the way in which Leo XIII, Pius XI and Pius XII understood and interpreted the right to own productive property gave the workers no right as such to demand participation in ownership, management or profits.

Yet the arguments which Leo XIII adduced in support of the usefulness, if not the need, of agricultural workers to become owners of the land they were cultivating could easily open the way for a better understanding of the reason or reasons why workers' participation, for example in industry, should be regarded as something which is intrinsically related to the pre-eminent value of work. The Pope developed two lines of argument.

One line proceeds from the remuneration due to work. He held that such remuneration was just, if it enabled agricultural workers not only to support themselves and their families but also to become eventually the owners of the land they were cultivating. Such ownership, he believed, would make farming more enjoyable and self-satisfying and would increase the level of production.³⁰

dell'economia, rimanere padrone delle sue decisioni economiche." Address "Ai Congressisti delle Associazioni Patronali Cattoliche," 7.5.1949, reproduced in *Atti e Discorsi di S.S. Pio XI*, Vol. XI, (1949) 115-120, p.119.

28. Cf. F.X. Arnold, *Das Mitbestimmungsrecht im Lichte christlicher Soziallehre*, (Stuttgart 1951) 35-40.

29. Oswald von Nell-Breuning, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Heute*, Vol. II, (Freiburg 1956) 96.

30. *RN*, 35.

The other line of argument proceeds from the nature of the relationship which the farmer establishes with the land through his work. Echoing Locke, he argued that through his work the farmer leaves “the impress of his individuality” on the portion of land which he is cultivating.³¹ The further elaboration of these arguments and their application to the question of workers’ participation came later as a result of the change of perspective in Catholic social teaching. This was the change from (private) property to work as the fundamental element of social life.

Participation and Work

The right of ownership which Leo XIII, Pius XI and Pius XII regarded as a basic element of social life concerns mainly one aspect of participation, namely, one’s right to share in the fruits of production. Besides, it is only related to the question of remuneration that is due to work. But the right to participation includes, above all, one’s right to take an active part in the development of oneself, society and the world. Moreover, there is much more to consider in work than the problem of remuneration.

A New Perspective

It was John XXIII who broke fresh ground on the nature both of participation and work. His predecessors emphasised particularly the space of freedom which man required to develop on the personal and social level. They appealed to the natural rights of man — e.g. to own private property, to marry and raise a family, to associate with others — principally to assert the freedom of the individual from outside interference. While John XXIII continued to uphold the fundamental value of individual freedom and, consequently, the necessity of the institution of private property, he observed that people had developed closer ties with each other on the national and international levels. This new development which he called “socialization”, changed the earlier view of freedom and independence.

In his view, the right of freedom from outside interference was still fundamental. It constituted the so-called right to independence, that is, the right to take a direct and active part in the process of one’s development. But he noted that today man has to exercise his freedom in a world where people have become increasingly more dependent on each other. It is an illusion to pretend that one can actually develop on an individual and collective level without taking part in decisions that are affecting whole groups, areas, countries and, ultimately, even

31. *Ibid.*

the whole of mankind. In the context of an inter-dependent world, the right of independence is only meaningful to the extent that it implies the freedom to take part in the shaping of a new world.

The change in the notion of independence was accompanied by a corresponding change in the notion of work. Leo XIII recognized the personal aspect of work. But he was concerned only with the right of the person to dispose of his work as something which is “his” in so far as it is his “own” activity. He mentioned this aspect of work to say that it could not provide an altogether valid criterion for the determination of a just wage. In fact, he argued that if one does not take into account that work is the normal means of earning a living, one may (falsely) conclude that the worker is free to offer his work for any amount of remuneration. But while seeing the importance of the “necessary” character of work, that is, work as a means of earning a living, he ignored the more positive dimension of work as a creative activity. This explains why he did not regard work but other human activities such as raising up a family as the medium of self-realization and self-development.

In work John XXIII saw much more than a means of earning a living. He saw in it much more than something which man must undertake in order to live. He introduced in Catholic social teaching the Hegelian notion of work as one of the media of human self-expression and self-development.³² “Every man has, of his very nature,” he wrote, “a need to express himself in his work and thereby to perfect his own being.”³³

The way in which man expresses and develops himself through work, however, is a very complex process. One aspect of this process, as Vatican II observed, is the control or mastery which man seeks to acquire over nature. Science and technology which are themselves a product of human labour, constituting, as John Paul II says, the *objective* aspect of work, allow man to control not only the world but also the physical, the biological, including genetic, psychological and sociological nature of man.³⁴

Surely, this control over nature can only help man to become more human and to create a more hospitable world, if it is exercised in the interest and for the benefit of each and every person and his environment. The fact that science and technology are produced by human labour should be a constant reminder that their original purpose is not to serve as an instrument of domination but as

32. For a discussion of Hegel's concept of work, especially its relationship to the right to private property see Reeve, *Political Theory*, 136-142.

33. *Mater et Magistra*, (Catholic Truth Society Edition) no. 82. To be referred to as *MM*.

34. *Laborem Exercens*, (Vatican Polyglot) nos. 4-6. To be referred to as *LE*.

an instrument of liberation, that is, as a means through which man can continue to develop and perfect himself and the world.³⁵

The notion of work as a medium of self-expression and self-perfection opened the way to a reconsideration of productive labour. Work includes but goes beyond the production of economic goods. It embraces all that human activity in which men and women are engaged to promote the well-being of society.³⁶ Vatican II regards “even the most ordinary everyday activities” as part of human labour and John Paul II extends the notion of work to “any activity by man whether manual or intellectual, whatever its nature or circumstances”.³⁷ The Church adopts this rather very wide concept of work because it believes that any human activity, whether paid or unpaid, that contributes in some way or another to the development of a more human life should be considered as being useful for the well-being of society and recognized as being worthy of the dignity that is due to work.

Participation in Development

In the light of this comprehensive notion of work the Church has been in a better position to explore the logical link between the right to work and the right to participation in development and the fruits of development.

If the transformation of the self, society and the world is a process taking place through the work of each and every individual, the right to work implies the right of contributing to human development. “Each and every individual, to the proper extent and in an incalculable number of ways,” John Paul II wrote, “takes part in the giant process whereby man ‘subdues the earth’ through his work.”³⁸ The right to work is not a natural one, simply because man is bound to work in order to maintain himself. Work is not merely a natural necessity. It is a natural right for man to work, because it is natural for him, being a member of a human community, to contribute, in his own way, toward his individual and social well-being. John XXIII said that it is a natural need — one can say that it is a natural right — for man to participate in the creative process through which man becomes more human by means of his work.

35. “*Gaudium et Spes*” in *The Documents of Vatican II*, (W.M. Abbott/J. Gallacher eds.) no. 35. To be referred to as *GS*.

36. John Paul II mentioned the work of mothers at home which is essential for society and yet is not properly recognized as such. *LE*, 19.

37. *GS*, 34; *LE*, Preface.

38. *LE*, 4.

Men and women, however, are truly participating in their own individual and social development to the extent that they are doing so as *responsible human beings*. In fact, it is not enough for them to work together in order to change the conditions of life in the world. Co-operation has to be accompanied by co-responsibility. It would be unjust to have people contributing materially to development and then exclude them from those decisions on which the quality of development depends. Indeed, the person remains, as John Paul II says, “the subject of work,” as long as he is actually in a position to guide the course of history — something which is possible only through decision-sharing.

In this context, I cannot enter into the scope of this basic ethical principle. It should suffice to recall that John XXIII made it the cornerstone of his social teaching. He maintained that the criteria that one should apply to judge the justice of an economic system are not those of efficiency and productivity or even equity in distribution. There is one basic criterion, namely, the scope people actually have to exercise their own responsibility in the system: “... if the structure and organization of an economic system is such as to compromise human dignity, to lessen a man’s sense of responsibility or rob him of any opportunity for exercising personal initiative, then such a system, we maintain, is altogether unjust — no matter how much wealth it produces, or how justly and equitably such wealth is distributed.”³⁹

On the basis of this principle of co-responsibility, he argued, workers in industrial enterprises and other employees have the right to participate in management; farmers have the right to establish cooperatives. Besides, since conditions of work depend, partly at least, on decisions taken by public authorities and institutions on the national and international level, as a working community, people are also entitled to influence such authorities and institutions. Likewise, Vatican II focused on the emergence of the sense of personal responsibility people were exhibiting in the context of a growing inter-dependent world. It said that alongside the trend toward “socialization”, which John XXIII had already explicitly noted, there was the trend toward “personalization”.⁴⁰ This second trend, the Council said, had generated a need in individuals, groups and countries to take their own history and destiny, in other words, their development, into their own hands.

John Paul II introduced the distinction between the direct and indirect employer to elucidate the complex network of dependence of workers on such factors as the national labour and trade policy as well as the international

39. *MM*, 83.

40. *GS*, 6.

economic system. Following his immediate predecessors, he said: "it is respect for the objective rights of the worker — every kind of worker: manual or intellectual, industrial or agricultural, etc. — that must constitute *the adequate and fundamental criterion* for shaping the whole economy, both on the level of the individual society and State and within the whole of the world economic policy and of the systems of international relationships that derive from it."⁴¹

Share in the Fruits of Development

The notion of work as a direct and active way of participating in the development of oneself, society and the world has enabled the Church to shed new light on the problem of sharing in the fruits of development.

In the first place, it enabled the Church to view the problem in a far wider context than it had done in the past. Originally, it discussed the problem in terms of the share which capital and labour were entitled to have in the fruits of production. This made sense, because what was involved was the enterprise as the basic unit of production. The Church has realized in the meantime that the whole issue today is not so much how the fruits which the economic enterprise produces are to be fairly distributed between capital and labour as to how the whole human community can actually benefit from the development that mankind has achieved through its collective effort.

The Church took a long time before it arrived at this extremely important conclusion. In fact, both Leo XIII and Pius XI acknowledged that the wealth of a country is the product of human labour. But they presupposed that natural resources as well as the technological means of production have their proper owner or owners and that the interests of these should be safeguarded. The right of ownership which the capitalist possessed over natural resources and means of production was considered to be a legitimate one, even though it was not acquired through work. Although the Church always insisted that the goods which nature gives or man produces are to be used for the benefit of all, it originally explained the relations that should govern capital and labour on the basis of the principle that everything has its proper owner. Relying on the earlier tradition on property rights, it maintained that not only work but also first occupancy confers a valid and legitimate title to ownership.⁴²

Now one can conceive the possibility that at a time when not the whole land was occupied and people were not organised in different states as they are today,

41. *LE*, 17.

42. "The original acquisition of property takes place both by first occupancy and by labour ..." *QA* 52.

an individual could acquire a title of ownership simply by occupying a portion of the still unowned land. This is, however, inconceivable in the present circumstances. Besides, the natural resources which are being discovered, developed and used today for various human purposes would not have been available had it not been for the high level of present-day scientific expertise and application of advanced technology. It is for this reason that John Paul II is justified to maintain that the discovery and development of natural resources have been possible only through work. This is only in part the work of this or that individual; ultimately, it is the accumulation of knowledge and the development of technique over the years that are responsible for such discoveries.⁴³

This is even more so in the case of the means of production. Such means, John Paul II said, “*are the result of the historical heritage of human labour.*”⁴⁴ In other words, these means are the product of generations’ building on the work of previous generations. They are the fruit of the collective labour of mankind which gradually builds up a common heritage.

Men and women share in this common heritage of mankind originally for the simple reason that they are human beings having the same fundamental dignity and right. Although this point is not explicitly stated by John Paul II, it is presumed. His statement that through his work man enters into “the inheritance of what is given to the whole of humanity in the resources of nature, and the inheritance of what others have already developed on the basis of those resources ...”⁴⁵ has to be understood in the light of the more fundamental principle of the primacy of the human person over work. The right of everyone to share in the fruits of human development is grounded ultimately on the fact that one is a human being and, as such, part of mankind. Nevertheless, it is true to say, as John Paul II said, that through work the person enters into the common heritage that generations have built up through their collective labour and have passed on to each other in the course of *history*. In fact, the process through which men and women actually appropriate this common heritage and contribute to it is work.

The notion of common heritage can easily be extended to other human resources besides technology. Such human resources as know-how and skill in the use of highly sophisticated technology, in the organization and management of productive factors and in the anticipation and satisfaction of people’s needs — resources to which John Paul II gives importance in *Centesimus Annus* —

43. *LE*, 12.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*, 13.

also form part of a common heritage for they have been developed through the collective labour of mankind. They provide an additional and even clearer proof of the key role which work has acquired as a productive factor of non-material wealth.

The right of everyone to share in these human resources lies in the fact that one has a right to develop one's own potential and in the fact that these resources also form an integral part of a heritage that is common to all.

Workers' Right to Participation

One of the areas to which the Church, from John XXIII to John Paul II, has applied the principle of the priority of labour over capital is that of workers' participation. As I have pointed out, Pius XI and Pius XII did encourage the gradual introduction of some form of workers' participation. In their opinion, workers' participation was to be promoted as a highly desirable goal, but it was not to be demanded as a natural right. Besides Pius XII presupposed, the lawful right of the owner/s of the means of production to decide, at least, on economic matters.

The new perspective which the Church has formed in recent years has allowed it to approach the problem of workers' participation in a theoretically more adequate way. Yet its present position can be viewed as an evolution of the two lines of argument which Leo XIII developed in order to justify the need of agricultural workers to become owners of the land they were cultivating.

In fact, the first argument which the Church has brought lately in support of workers' participation is precisely that remuneration for work should allow the worker not merely to earn a living but also to come gradually "to share in the ownership of their company by suitable ways and means."⁴⁶ Basically, this is an extension of what Leo XIII had said regarding agricultural workers to other categories of workers. The central point here is that remuneration for work is not adequate, unless and until it is enough to enable the worker to share in the ownership of the means of production, besides meeting his own personal and family needs. The present Pope sought to justify such a claim by explaining that the discovery and use of natural resources as well as the development of the means of production are, in the last resort, to be considered as the fruit of the collective labour of mankind and, hence, they form part of a common heritage.

It is the right which workers have to co-ownership of the means of production as a right flowing from the remuneration due to work (considered on a

46. *MM*, 77.

collective rather than merely on an individual plane) that John Paul II analyses in his encyclical on work.⁴⁷ To some this may seem a deviation from the position of Vatican II on the matter.⁴⁸ Indeed, the Council tried to justify workers' participation on the basis of the concept, already noted by John XXIII, of the enterprise as "a community of persons".⁴⁹ But this actually constitutes a separate justification, mentioned also by John Paul II, of the right of workers to participate in the activity of the enterprise with which they are working.⁵⁰

The argument in support of the right of workers to co-responsibility and co-determination is based on the principle that the worker is entitled to participate in the economic process as a responsible human being. In other words, irrespective of who is the owner of the means of production in a particular firm, each and every worker is a human being who has the right not just to earn a living through his work but also and, above all, to express and perfect himself in his work. Leo XIII, as I have pointed out, perceived precisely the significance and value which greater interest and initiative on the part of farmers in their work could have for the humanization of agricultural work. Again the attempt of the more recent Catholic social teaching to derive the workers' right to co-responsibility/co-determination from the right of the worker to develop himself through his work is continuous with Leo XIII's view that the farmer has a right to a self-satisfying type of work.

Final Remark

The right to participation is an extremely complex one. It was not the purpose of these few observations to discuss its relationship to such values as freedom and equality, even though, as I have pointed out at the beginning, this is quite a relevant area for further investigation.

The analysis of what the main social documents of the Church have said on the relationship of participation to property and work has shown, I hope, how

47. On workers' participation in *Laborem Exercens* see Oswald von Nell-Breuning, "Mitbestimmung in Laborem Exercens," in *Sinn und Zukunft der Arbeit: Konsequenzen aus Laborem Exercens*, (Wolfgang Klein and Werner Krämer eds.) (Mainz 1982) 161-165.

48. See, for example, the view of Friedhelm Hengsbach, "Die Gesellschaftliche Dimension menschlicher Arbeit," in *Sinn und Zukunft*, 85-99, p.92.

49. *MM*, 91; *GS*, 68.

50. "When man works, using all the means of production, he also wishes the fruit of this work to be used by himself and others, and he wishes to be able to take part in the very work process as a *sharer in responsibility and creativity* at the workbench to which he applies himself," *LE*, 15. Italics not in the original.

a change in the meaning of property and work has resulted in a change in what it means for man to say that he has a right to participation.

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