

**Work, Remuneration, and Justice:
Pope John Paul II's Social Encyclical "Laborem Exercens" (1981)**

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The Source: Laborem Exercens, Chapter 19

Abstract

In the 19th chapter of the encyclical "Laborem Exercens," Pope John Paul II discusses the concept of justice in regard to work and society. Justice is especially located in the relationships between workers and employers and is carried out when providing just remuneration for the work done. Furthermore, factors such as family and the role of women have to be taken into account. Additionally, the Pontiff supports the safeguarding of the social benefits and rights of workers and their families. These aspects are included in the vision of a rightly ordered relationship between employers and employees.

The aspect of coercion is not articulated and presented directly to the reader, as it remains hidden behind papal demands. Thus, whenever the Pope writes about changes that should occur, we can point to the injustices perceived and condemned in the relationship between worker and employer.

Additional remarks:

The original emphases were kept, and the Latin text has not been altered except for the removal of end-of-the-line hyphens. The English translation has been lightly edited for clarity.

Latin (Official Version)

19.

Praecipuo ita circumscripto officio, quod secum infert cura tribuendi singulis operariis laborem, ut in tuto collocetur observantia iurium hominis, quae abalienari non possunt, quod ad eius attinet opus, propius iam convenit ut haec iura tractentur, quae ad summam conglobantur in vinculum coniunctionis *inter opificem ac directum operis conductorem*. Omnia enim, quae adhuc sunt tradita de *indirecto* operis conductore, eo tendunt ut definiantur subtilius haec coniunctionis vincula, demonstratis illis nempe multiplicibus condicionibus, quibus *indirecto* modo ea constituuntur. Huius tamen considerationis non est res tantum describere; nec brevis ea est tractatio de re oeconomica vel politica. Nam hic interest ut sua ponatur in luce *ratio deontologica et moralis*. Quaestio ac veluti cardo rei ethicae socialis, hac in causa, est aequa remuneratio laboris completi. Hodiernis enim in temporum adiunctis nullus gravior invenitur modus implendae iustitiae in rationibus inter opificem conductoremque operis quam is qui remunerationem respicit operis. Utcumque enim hic labor contingit — sive fit in systemate privati domini instrumentorum ad bona gignenda sive in systemate, ubi privata haec possessio formam aliquam induit collationis in commune —

English (Translator unknown)

19. *Wages and Other Social Benefits*

After outlining the important role that the concern for providing employment for all workers plays in safeguarding respect for the inalienable rights of man in view of his work, it is worthwhile taking a closer look at these rights, which in the final analysis are formed within the relationship *between worker and direct employer*. All that has been said above on the subject of the indirect employer is aimed at defining these relationships more exactly, by showing the many forms of conditioning within which these relationships are indirectly formed. This consideration does not, however, have a purely descriptive purpose; it is not a brief treatise on economics or politics. It is a matter of highlighting the *deontological and moral aspect*. The key problem of social ethics in this case is that of *just remuneration* for work done. In the context of the present, no way is more important to secure a just relationship between the worker and the employer than the remuneration for work. Whether the work is done in a system of private ownership of the means of production or in a system where ownership has undergone a certain “socialization,” the relationship between the employer (first and foremost the direct employer) and the worker is resolved on the basis of

vinculum coniunctionis inter operis conductorem (in primis *directum*) atque operarium conficitur mercede, id est aequa remuneratione operis, quod est patratum.

Illud quoque efferendum est: iustitiam cuiusvis systematis socialis-oeconomici et, quaequae ea est, iustam illius administrationem demum merito iudicandas esse ex modo, quo opus eodem in systemate aequae rependatur. Hic reditur nimirum ad primum principium totius ordinis ethico-socialis, *ad principium communis usus bonorum*. Quovis enim in systemate, missis rationibus illis primariis, quae inter opes « capitales » et laborem intercedunt, mercedes sive operis remuneratio manet *via concreta*, per quam maxima pars hominum illis bonis valent potiri, quae usui destinantur communi: bonis, inquam, tam naturae quam iis quae humanis efficiuntur subsidiis. Hominibus operi deditis aditus ad ea bona per ipsam patet mercedem, quam uti laboris sui remunerationem percipiunt. Hinc merces iusta semper fit solida comprobatio totius systematis socialis-oeconomici atque, utcumque res se habet, recti processus eiusdem systematis. Non est quidem haec sola comprobatio, sed habet peculiare

the wage—that is, through just remuneration for work done.

It should also be noted that the justice of a socioeconomic system and, in each case, its just functioning, deserve in the final analysis to be evaluated by the way in which man's work is properly remunerated in the system. Here we return once more to the first principle of the whole ethical and social order, namely, *the principle of the common use of goods*. In every system, regardless of the fundamental relationships within it between capital and labor, the wages—that is to say, *remuneration for work*—are still a *practical means* whereby the vast majority of people can have access to those goods which are intended for common use: both the goods of nature and manufactured goods. Both kinds of goods become accessible to the worker through the wage which he receives as remuneration for his work. Hence, in every case, a just wage is the concrete means of *verifying the justice* of the whole socioeconomic system and, in any case, of checking that it is functioning justly. It is not the only means of checking, but it is a

momentum estque quadamtenus ipsa comprobatio et totius negotii cardo.

Probatio haec iustitiae tangit imprimis familiam. Iusta enim remuneratio operis hominis adulti, in quem onus familiae recidit, ea nominatim erit, quae ad familiam condendam digneque sustinendam sufficiat atque ad eius prosperandam aetatem venturam. Remuneratio autem istius modi reddi poterit tum per *solarium familiare*, quod dicitur — unicum id est salarium capiti tributum familiae ob ipsius laborem ut ita necessitatibus familiae satisfaciat neque alius oporteat labor retributivus extra domum ab uxore suscipiatur — tum per *alia praesidia socialia*, qualia sunt scidulae nummariae familiares vel subsidia matri concessa, quae soli se familiae dedit, quae subsidia veris necessitatibus debent convenire, scilicet numero ipsi hominum e familia pendentium in totum illud tempus, quamdiu nequeunt in se digne recipere propriae vitae curandae officium.

Probant experimenta enitendum esse ut ab integro *aestimentur sociali iudicio munera materna*, necnon fatigatio cum iis coniuncta et necessitas, quam filii habent, curae amoris affectus ut crescere valeant in homines sui iuris suorumque officiorum conscios, in homines moribus fideque maturos et animo aequabili praeditos. In societatis cedet omnino honorem, si licuerit matri sese

particularly important one and, in a sense, the key means.

This means of checking concerns above all the family. Just remuneration for the work of an adult who is responsible for a family means remuneration which will suffice for establishing and properly maintaining a family and for providing security for its future. Such remuneration can be given either through what is called a *family wage*—that is, a single salary given to the head of the family for his work, sufficient for the needs of the family without the other spouse having to take up gainful employment outside the home—or through *other social measures* such as family allowances or grants to mothers devoting themselves exclusively to their families. These grants should correspond to the actual needs—that is, to the number of dependents for as long as they are not in a position to assume proper responsibility for their own lives.

Experience confirms that there must be a *social re-evaluation of the mother's role*, of the toil connected with it, and of the need that children have for care, love, and affection in order that they may develop into responsible, morally and religiously mature, and psychologically stable persons. It will redound to the credit of society to make it possible for a mother—without inhibiting her freedom,

filiorum curationi devovere educationique secundum varias aetatis illorum necessitates, ita tamen ut libertas eius non impediatur, ut nihil patiatur ea discriminis psychologici aut practici neque sociabus suis ullo pacto inferiorem se sentiat. Coacta officiorum talium derelictio propter retributivum opus extra domum est absona, considerato societatis familiaeque commodo, si repugnet eiusmodi propositis materni officii vel ea difficilia reddat.²⁶

Talibus in rebus inculcandum est latiore modo oportere omnem laboris cursum ordinari ita et accommodari ut personae observentur necessitates vitaeque eius formae, imprimis autem domestica vita secundum cuiusque aetatem ac sexum. Constat enim multas apud societates operari mulieres in omnibus paene vitae regionibus. At eas decet plene exsequi posse munia propria *secundum peculiarem suam indolem*, nullo facto discrimine nullaue officiorum exclusione, quorum sint ipsae capaces; verumtamen haud neglegi licet observationem familiarium desideriorum earum necnon operis particularis, quod congruit iis in societatis commoditatem una cum maritis. *Vera mulieris provectio* efflagitat ut sic labor disponatur ut non debeat illa promotionem sui compensare exuenda indole sibi propria et peculiari, cum

without psychological or practical discrimination, and without penalizing her as compared with other women—to devote herself to taking care of her children and educating them in accordance with their needs, which vary with age. Having to abandon these tasks in order to take up paid work outside the home is wrong from the point of view of the good of society and of the family when it contradicts or hinders these primary goals of the mission of a mother.²⁶

In this context it should be emphasized that, on a more general level, the whole labor process must be organized and adapted in such a way as to respect the requirements of the person and his or her forms of life, above all life in the home, taking into account the individual's age and sex. It is a fact that in many societies women work in nearly every sector of life. But it is fitting that they should be able to fulfil their tasks *in accordance with their own nature*, without being discriminated against and without being excluded from jobs for which they are capable, but also without lack of respect for their family aspirations and for their specific role in contributing, together with men, to the good of society. The *true advancement of women* requires that labor should be structured in such a way that women do not have to pay for their advancement by

detrimento familiae, pro qua uti mater partes pernecessarias explet.

Praeter mercedem hic occurrunt etiam varia *beneficia socialia*, illuc nempe spectantia ut vita salusque opificum eorumque familiarum tuto praestetur. Sumptus impendendi in valetudinis curationem, potissimum in adversis casibus circa ipsum laborem, poscunt ut facile pateat operario aditus ad sanitatis subsidia et quidem, quantum fieri potest, parvo pretio vel etiam gratuito. Aliud deinde argumentum, quod illa beneficia respicit, cum *iure requietis* coniungitur: agitur ante omnia de communi otio hebdomadali, inclusa saltem die dominica, ac praeterea de longiore quiete, id est de annuis feriis, quas vocamus, vel quae, si fieri potuerit, saepius in anno per breviora intervalla transiguntur. Agitur denique de pensionis socialis iure et cautione pro senectute necnon pro casibus adversis cum opere faciendo conexas. Intra horum iurium praecipuorum ambitum summa iurium particularium viget, quae una cum laboris remuneratione rectam statuunt necessitudinis formulam inter opificem operisque conductorem. Quibus in iuribus semper est numerandum ius operis faciendi in rerum locorumque adiunctis et tali effectiois modo, quae corporis valetudini opificum non

abandoning what is specific to them and at the expense of the family, in which women as mothers have an irreplaceable role.

Besides wages, various *social benefits* intended to ensure the life and health of workers and their families play a part here. The expenses involved in health care, especially in the case of accidents at work, demand that medical assistance should be easily available for workers, and that as far as possible it should be cheap or even free of charge. Another sector regarding benefits is the sector associated with the *right to rest*. In the first place this involves a regular weekly rest comprising at least Sunday, and also a longer period of rest, namely the holiday or vacation taken once a year or possibly in several shorter periods during the year. A third sector concerns the right to a pension and to insurance for old age and in case of accidents at work. Within the sphere of these principal rights, there develops a whole system of particular rights which, together with remuneration for work, determine the correct relationship between worker and employer. Among these rights there should never be overlooked the right to a working environment and to manufacturing processes which are not harmful to the workers' physical health or to their moral integrity.

officiant neque morum noceant integritati
illorum.

²⁶Cfr. Conc. Oec. Vat. II, Const. past.
Gaudium et Spes de Ecclesia in mundo
huius temporis, 67: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1089.

²⁶Second Vatican Ecumenical Council,
Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the
Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*,
67: AAS 58 (1966): 1089.

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