

(English translation)

Rome, 3 June 1984

### **Work and the rediscovery of a social awareness**

From Chiara Lubich's speech at the meeting on Economy and Work in the New Humanity Movement

Dearest all,

We are here today from all parts of Italy, from other European nations and with representatives from other continents, as people from the “world” of work, an expression of the new Humanity Movement, whose purpose is to incarnate in all expressions of human life the Focolare Movement’s Gospel-based ideal.

Why are we here? We are here because we believe that the charism of our Movement has something to offer also on the subject of these two aspects of our daily life: economy and work.

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But we members of the Focolare Movement have our own particular way of seeking the kingdom of God. We must seek it in accordance with the way God has pointed out to us. It is a way we travel along, not individually but together. In fact, we feel that we are sons and daughters of an era in which the Holy Spirit is underlining the words which form a synthesis of the Gospel: “This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you” (Jn. 16:21), and is underlining the unity which Jesus asked of the Father. In so doing, he is forcefully calling people to work side by side and form, with all those who so desire, one heart and one soul.

This, however, has important and noteworthy consequences. One example, typical of the members of our Movement from its very birth, is a practical expression which must be at the basis of every other activity and consideration concerning the use of goods and the solution to social problems. This practice is the communion of goods, which is achieved by some members in a total way – they give all they have – and by other members through regular contributions of their surplus.

This practice touches each individual in a personal and very real way, and so it forms a more legitimate and fruitful basis for any other good and lawful method of guaranteeing an honest and dignified means of livelihood for all.

Since we know how to walk through life united to one another, being one heart and one soul, we have the possibility of giving a hand to humanity today, so that it may reach its very important goals.

We know that the economic situation of present-day society is characterized by industrial production in which the individual is often subordinate to the efficiency and production of the machine.

The center of the entire productive system is no longer the person, but production itself. The goods count, not the person and his or her work.

Often the laborer’s work has become meaningless because it is not in function of the individual as God intended and does not contribute towards the fulfillment of one’s potential for creativity and intelligence. Work has taken on an alienating character. At times it is also dangerous physically, but even more so, psychologically damaging – as work tolerated because there is no alternative, as a mere means of survival. It frequently produces a sense of emptiness and people reject such a concept of work.

Then, alongside the physical fatigue, there are other elements which in some places still make work a drudgery, like the repetition of movements. This makes of the person, not a being created in the image of God the Creator and therefore always an innovator, but a machine that repeats the same motions, the same gestures time and again.

Furthermore, we know that too often work can be oppressive if it is to the benefit of a group of persons or nations but not of the individuals and of all peoples.

Therefore, as Pope John Paul II affirms, this difficult road of the indispensable transformation of the structures of economic life, is one in which it will not be easy to go forward without the intervention of a true conversion of mind, will and heart.”<sup>1</sup>

First of all, one should reaffirm the primacy of the human being on capital, property and structures, creating an ethical meaning of work which keeps in mind that “through work man ... *achieves fulfilment* as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes "more a human being".”<sup>2</sup>

A second change of attitude, however, must come into play here, and must be made by all.

In the name of God who created them, human beings must be aware of their sociality, of their social nature, otherwise they are not completely human. In fact, another of their characteristics, according to the Bible, besides communion with God, besides being required to support themselves and dedicate themselves to work, is sociality – the interweaving of human relationships.

We know what sociality means for God. It means to love others as ourselves. As ourselves, not less. Indeed, to love them with a love which, since it comes from more than one person, becomes reciprocal; and, because it is inspired by Christ, generates unity.

Herein lies the meaning of what we stressed earlier, namely that we walk through life together being one heart and one soul. Our collective spirituality, derived from the Gospel, not only can contribute to, but can be of vital importance in finding solutions to the present problems of the working world.

In this spirituality, every person in the working world (from the owner to the administrator, from the director to the technicians, from office workers to laborers) in order to build solidarity with others, must love everyone in such a way that he or she becomes “one” with the others.

In this spirituality, mutual love leads to reciprocal understanding, to sharing the fatigue of the others, to making our own the problems of the others and to seeking solutions together. It leads us to find common agreements for new forms of organizations in the working world. All come to share and participate together in the means of production, and in the fruits and profits.

With what consequences? If, previously, for example, for individual laborers, industrialized work was synonymous with being crushed and deprived of their personality, with being unable to see the fruits of their intelligence and efforts, now because they consider their own all that regards the others as well, work cannot help but take on meaning, indeed a stimulating meaning.

What is needed, therefore, is a new awareness of the social dimension. We need to realize that in the world, humanity is one family, and live accordingly. Just as in a natural family even the youngest of ten children feels that everything that belongs to the entire family is his or hers: father, mother, goods, house, objects, and so on, similarly, every worker and in particular laborers today, in order to regain awareness that they are human beings, indeed more so because of their work, must know that all that the industrialized world produces belongs to them.

We know, it’s difficult, and every day the newspapers bear witness to this. It’s difficult to reach these goals simply through good will, with mere human strength or with a vision of work which is purely an earthly one.

We know, for example, that it was solidarity which led laborers of the last century to fight against the injustices of the rising industrial system. This was described by Pope John Paul II as “a just social reaction”.

Although definite improvements have been achieved since then in safeguarding the basic rights of workers, still in many countries, under various systems, old injustices persist and new ones have arisen.

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<sup>1</sup> *Redemptor Hominis*, n. 16:3.

<sup>2</sup> *Laborem Exercens*, n. 9.

The fact is that it is not sufficient to unite laborers to resolve economic problems. It is necessary to unite all men and women who are involved in this field of human endeavor which we call the working world.

Not only this, but the working world itself is linked with all the other “worlds” of human endeavor – to the political world, to legal structures, to health, education and so forth.

In order to work to regain its full significance for the individual person, there must be the rediscovery of a vast social awareness. Indeed, since the economy of each country is so linked to that of other nations, the situation requires a “global” social awareness as the Pope has also affirmed.

Who is capable of helping individuals to fully achieve this and to regard themselves as members of one great human family... “without denying man’s origins and the membership of his family, his people and his nation, or the obligations arising there from...”<sup>3</sup>

Who can accomplish this after human beings have shattered their union with God through sin, thus seriously compromising over and over again, communion with other brothers and sisters and therefore human solidarity? Who can do it?

Only Christ can – he who is so often relegated to our private life. Only his supernatural and universal love – so often considered as something limited to people’s prayer life and is instead the indispensable leaven for the whole of human existence in all its expressions.

It is only with his love that we can build confidently a world of lasting justice and peace. As far as work is concerned, it is only with his love that selfishness and hatred – often considered the law of social life – can be eliminated. It is with his love that working communities will witness how unity rather than conflict can truly improve work. With his love the life of society itself will not be conceived as a struggle against someone but as a commitment to grow together.

Therefore only a new civilization based on love will be capable of offering a solution to the complex problems of the world of work.

It is to this civilization of love that we too feel particularly called. Very often we have asked ourselves why God has scattered us over all the earth; why we form this network, still loose in certain areas, but one which embraces the entire world and which will become tighter and tighter as time goes by.

One answer could be this: we as others, must contribute, in the name of God, to making this planetary social awareness blossom forth in the hearts of people everywhere. We too must contribute to the forming of men and women filled with the Spirit of Christ, who because they are often in contact with cultures of different lands, are better equipped to open the way to others and to open the hearts of many to a worldwide dimension.

As a result, we will witness a rich blossoming of good in the world of work as well. Indeed, there will be unpredictable results if we consider the fact that through mutual love, Christ will again be present in the world of work. Christ who said: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt. 18:20). His spiritual but real presence will be there – among the laborers in workshops, in factories, in lumber yards, in mines; he will be with farm workers in the fields; we will find him among business men and women, among people in public service, in each and every work environment.

He will guide the world of work towards its true destiny.

We often think of Christ as being far away from us. Certainly, he is God, but he is also man, one of us, who today too wants to live among people and manifest, with his wisdom, the beauty and significance of work. It is Christ and only Christ who will fully free the working man and woman from the new form of slavery of the year 2000.

Therefore, we need a planetary social awareness.

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<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, Address to the International Labor Organization in Geneva. June 15, 1982, n. 10.

In fact, only people who are open to the entire world, people with a universal dimension of life, people who seek to open their hearts to the dimension of Christ, the God-Man, can rise today to the nobility to which every person is called by God.

To bring this about, however, we need to look at the world from a Christian point of view. In fact, around us today, there is a materialistic vision of work and of history. It asserts the priority of production (this is a capitalistic vision), or of human labor as a determining factor in history (this is a Marxist vision) eliminating God completely.

Instead there is a Christian vision of work and of history which radically differs from these. It affirms that if human beings agree to place at the basis of their entire life (including their work) love for every neighbor, God associates them with his work as Creator and Redeemer.

On the seventh day God the Creator rested, almost as if to say that there our turn was beginning to continue God's work.

Through our work, nature receives the human imprint, but since in loving we live out the fact that we are made in the image of God, nature transformed by us, and therefore our work becomes almost the work of God.

Thus human beings continue the work of God, the Creator; and, in a way, they also continue the redemptive work of Christ.

We know that there is an intimate bond between humans and the universe. They have been formed from the earth and when they die they return to the earth. They live off the fruits of the earth and breathe the air around them. We know how original sin had an effect on the universe as well, in that because of it the original harmony of nature was broken. "Accursed be the soil because of you. With suffering shall you get your food from it every day of your life" (Gen. 3:17).

Ever since then, all forms of human work have been inevitably linked to fatigue and suffering. But God sent his son on earth, and the redemption he brought about reaches the entire person, therefore, the aspect of work as well. Fatigue and suffering remain, but the person who loves, in some way, through his or her fatigue and suffering, cooperates with the Son of God towards the redemption of all, and towards all becoming children of God, that is, towards the reality we call the kingdom of God.

Through the individual, the merits of redemption penetrate all creation.

In Christ the redemption of the universe has already been accomplished. Since, however, in us and through us it is fulfilled in the measure in which we allow the Spirit of God to move us, "the whole created world (as Paul says) eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God... because the world itself will be freed.... We know that all creation groans and is in agony even until now..." (Rm. 8:19-22).

Groaning and "is in agony". Why? Because it awaits the new heavens and new earth.

We know neither the moment – says the Second Vatican Council – of the consummation of the earth and of man nor the way the universe will be transformed. The form of this world distorted by sin, is passing away and we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling and a new earth."<sup>4</sup>

This transformation, which is first and foremost a gift of God, through his Spirit, is also our responsibility, and we participate in it through suffering and work in the measure in which we unite ourselves to the death of Christ.

Human work is, therefore, a continuation of the creative work of God.

The fatigue of work is a contribution towards the redemption of mankind and the restoration of the universe.

"Then I saw new heavens and a new earth – says the Book of Revelation – the former heavens and the former earth had passed away... I saw a new Jerusalem, the holy city... I heard a loud voice from

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<sup>4</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 39

the throne cry out: ‘This is God’s dwelling among men. He shall dwell with them and they shall be his people and he shall be their God who is always with them’.” (Rev. 21:1-5).

This is the Christian vision of things which we must always keep before us – the future which awaits us all, and which we can hope for if we cooperate by working in unity with our God – Creator and Redeemer.

However, we can have a certain foretaste of this reality already here on earth by bringing about through universal love that kingdom which transforms every working environment into “God’s dwelling among men.”

It is a life of great faith, therefore, which can help Christians of this century, as in the past, to resolve, together with all people of good will, the pressing social problems of our day.

We must not deprive the world of our contribution in this direction.

The early Christians lived universal love in a very decided way, and they looked to the new heavens and new earth which awaited them in the future. They were therefore able to solve their economic questions almost without realizing it, using methods which went with their times: “None of their members was ever in want” (Acts 4:34). Likewise, if we have the courage to believe fully in Christ and to live his words with total commitment, then in this century marred by hunger, discrimination, social inequality and the danger of nuclear catastrophe, we will bring about his kingdom of love among all people and discover the ways and means of reducing to the smallest possible number the persons in need.

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