

A B S T R A C T

Laborem Exercens (*On Human Work*, 1981), John Paul's third encyclical, is a significant new development in Catholic social teaching. The papal document argues that the present capitalist system (the so-called capitalism) can no longer provide people with the basic requirements for their existence.

Laborem Exercens advocates a particular form of socialism, although it distinguishes itself from socialism. In a critical and creative dialogue with socialism, *Laborem Exercens* tries to integrate certain socialist paradigms while it remains in continuity with the Church's social teaching. It takes socialism seriously and is willing to learn from it. John Paul follows the socialist perspective in understanding society and history very largely in terms of human labor. But he transcends socialism from within at a number of crucial points. Man as laborer, constituting himself through labor, is the result of an extended dialogue with socialism, especially Marxism. The encyclical tries to widen the socialist notions, and vindicates the preeminence of the subject of work. It tries to overcome the errors of both socialism and capitalism with arguments drawn from Christian personalism.

In the debate between capitalism and socialism, John Paul offers elements for a trenchant critique of both systems, elements that enable each system to check and correct itself in order to respond to the full demands of

human dignity. *Laborem Exercens* tries to show where the two different systems have gone wrong and the values they ought to promote.

Speaking of the social problems, two elements have always been seen by *Laborem Exercens* in opposition to each other: capital and labor. Human labor is the essential key to the whole social question. According to John Paul capital must serve *labor --the priority of human work over capital*. All the instruments of work are exclusively subordinated to human labor. In other words, *the primacy of the human person over things*.

While the encyclical remains in continuity with the Church's social teaching, it introduces new ideas, derived from a critical and creative dialogue both with socialism and capitalism. John Paul II permits himself to be impressed by certain Marxist insights, but at the same time he tries to overcome the rigidity, expand them toward new meaning, and thus tries to produce a social philosophy that transcends socialism from within. *Laborem Exercens* is insistent in calling for a transformation of the present structures with the aim of ensuring that the person is respected. It favors a struggle for justice as expounded by liberation theology

With regard to *Laborem Exercens* our High School students can reflect on the meaning of human work. *Laborem Exercens* offers education in values. It can inspire them to struggle for social justice. *Laborem Exercens* hopefully will challenge our High School students in living out their faith to become agents of social change for a better and just society.