

From the Heart & Hand of a Polish Pope

By Robert Graham, SJ
RNS Correspondent

Vatican City — Pope John Paul II writes his own encyclicals. His latest message to the world, the third of his pontificate, unmistakably bears his own personal imprint.



Some may wonder whether a papal statement of this solemnity should be dashed off with a free hand (written in Polish, the pope himself revealed) without any tell-tale trace of what is called "staff work."

In compensation for the absence of theoretical thoroughness, there is an appealing directness, simplicity, originality and unity in the message. The subject is "labor" and here Papa Wojtyla is on home territory, especially in relation to human personality. They are the insights of a former archbishop of Cracow, raised in close contact with the working man. They are the insights of a man vested with a higher authority and command a respectful hearing.

The encyclical is sort of a hymn to labor. But the labor in question is not the narrow class-conscious labor of Karl Marx or the "commodity" of predatory capitalism creatures of the 19th Century and long since passed, in reality, into mythology. For the pope labor is taken in its widest sense; intellectual labor as much as physical labor, farm labor as much as industrial labor, "unorganized" as well as "organized."

The key to the encyclical, as the official commentators took pains to explain, is the "primacy of the person over things, and over work itself." With work, man-works not only to transform nature, but fulfills himself.

It is clear that the pope was impressed powerfully by events in his native country. Did not the Polish union leader Lech Walcsa come to Rome to be received by the pope in the early days of the encyclical's preparation? Where else in the industrialized world is the worker facing situations where the dignity of man and his work are so much at stake?

The pope's words have a universal intent but they take on dramatic significance in the light of the Polish situation. Here are workers in the most authentic traditional sense, creatures of the industrial revolution — miners, dock workers, railroaders — in strike against a government party which has for so many decades paraded as the authentic representative and spokesman of the "working classes."

The pope refuses to accept the idea of work as identified in any way with the idea of class. Nor does he accept the idea of "class conflict" as the inevitable condition of the working man. Less does he envisage the "dictatorship of the proletariat" as the ultimate solution of the social question.

One may ask if the Polish pope is not translating for our benefit the aspirations of the embattled workers in today's Poland from which capitalism has disappeared, to be replaced by an equally oppressive "socialism." In any case, the pope inserts the human, the personal, dimension in a problem area that for so long has seemed bereft of human and personal emphasis.

Encyclical Stresses Women's Work Choice

Vatican City (RNS) — Pope John Paul II in his new encyclical has reiterated his firm conviction that mothers belong at home while their children are growing up.

However, the head of the Roman Catholic Church appears to say not that women should not be forced to stay home but rather should be given the freedom of choice to do so if they prefer.

In a passage sure to be quoted by those opposed to forcing welfare mothers to work, the pope said the state should provide women with sufficient income to carry out their "primary... mission" of raising their children.

Society, he said, should "make it possible for a mother — without inhibiting her freedom, without psychological or practical discrimination and without

Workers

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property in the collectivist system is by no means equivalent to 'socializing' that property. We can speak of socializing only... when on the basis of his work each person is fully entitled to consider himself a part-owner of the great workbench of which he is working with everyone else."

John Paul said a way to this goal can be found "by associating labor with the ownership of capital, as far as possible, and by producing a wide range of intermediate bodies with economic, social and cultural purposes."

Such bodies, he said, are ones "enjoying real autonomy with regard to the public powers, pursuing their specific aims in honest collaboration with each other and in subordination to the demands of the common good."

The encyclical defends the right of workers to form labor unions, calling them "a mouthpiece for the struggle for social justice." But it also stresses the responsibility of workers to take into account "the limitations imposed by the general economic condition of the country."

It cautions that the role of unions is not to "play politics," stating that "unions do not have the character of political parties struggling for power, they should not be subjected to the decisions of political parties or have too close links with them."

The encyclical treats many specific issues and topics — jobs and unemployment, wages and social benefits, agricultural labor, the disabled person and work, work and emigration, women and work — in the framework of a "personalist" view of workers' and work.

"The person who works desires not only due remuneration," he noted, "he also wishes that, within the production process, provision be made for him to be able to know that in his work, even in something that is owned in common, he is working 'for himself.'"

"This awareness is extinguished within him in a system of excessive bureaucratic centralization, which makes the worker feel that he is just a cog in a huge machine moved from above, that he is, for more reasons than one, a mere production instrument rather than a true subject of work with an initiative of his own."

"The Church's teaching has always expressed the strong and deep conviction that man's work concerns not only the economy but also, and especially, personal values. The economic system, itself and the production process benefit precisely when these personal values are fully respected. In the mind of St. Thomas Aquinas this is the principal reason in favor of private ownership of the means of production."

"While we accept that for certain well-founded reasons exceptions can be made to the principle of private ownership — in our own time we even see that the system of 'socialized ownership' has been introduced — nevertheless the personalist argument still holds good both on the level of principles and on the practical level. If it is to be rational and fruitful, any socialization of the means of production must take this argument into consideration."

The pope's two previous encyclicals were Redemptor Hominis (The Redeemer of Man) in 1979 and Dives in Misericordia (Riches in Mercy) in 1980, emphasizing Christ-centered spirituality.

Encyclical Available

Readers wishing a copy of the encyclical may receive one by sending \$1 for each copy desired, to cover the cost of postage and handling, to Courier-Journal, Dept. E3, 114 S. Union St., Rochester, N.Y. 14607.

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."

The thoughts expressed in the encyclical echo those voiced by the pontiff in November 1980 when he spoke to 1,100 delegates attending a congress in Rome on "The Family and the Situation of Women."

John Paul said then that women's "specific vocation" in life is that of "mother and wife" and that popular movements should not seek to "liberate" her from that role.

Being a wife and mother should be recognized as "authentic professional work," he said. He cautioned that women should not seek to "uniformly imitate the manner in which the masculine partner fulfills himself" by joining the professional work force

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outside the home.

In his encyclical, the pope said, "In many societies women work in nearly every sector of life." He added, however, that women "should

be able to fulfill 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, for the good of society."

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