

Christian Perspectives on Work before and after Marx: A philosophical approach

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Work is a reality whose study calls for a multidisciplinary approach (Budd 2011). In my case, the approach will be philosophical, but atypical since I refer to the reflections of three very different authors, two of whom never intended to make significant contributions to philosophical thought, namely, **Luther**, the author of the Protestant Reformation, and **St. Josemaria Escriva**, whose sole purpose was to proclaim the universal call to holiness. Both, however, offered a Christian perspective on the question of work. Between them stands the figure of **Karl Marx**, who was not concerned with religious questions, but nevertheless is considered one of the main theorists of work in the modern age (Frayne 2016). The first part of my contribution will involve sketching a general picture within which it makes sense to include such heterogeneous authors.

1. Economics and spirituality

Luther and **St. Josemaría** both drew attention to the dignity of human labor by underlining its ethical and spiritual projection; **Marx** shifted nearly exclusive attention to the effects that forms of production and social structures have on the reality of labor (Hughes 2007). Certainly, looking first and foremost at the mind and heart of the laborer— as the former authors did— has its own social consequences, as Weber recognized when he emphasized the importance that the Reformation played in the emergence of capitalism. In this same vein, we could ask ourselves if his preaching presents similar virtues and inspires a social organization of work consistent with the Gospel in the context of advanced capitalism. In any case, these two Christian authors presented the topic of work in a way that overcomes historical prejudices and conceives of it as something rooted in, and not simply marginal to, spiritual life itself.

- The first of these prejudices has to do with one of the earliest meanings associated with the term work, which equates it to suffering. While suffering certainly can accompany human work, this prejudice reduces the human experience of working quite unilaterally, in addition to not being sufficiently distinctive. After all, certain games are also hard, and yet we do not consider them "work." Unlike games, work is presented as objectively oriented toward the improvement of man and the world. For this reason, work is usually linked to a productive task.

- This has to do with the second prejudice, which involves thinking that work is reduced to its productive dimension, ignoring the fact that relational and social dimensions are also objective dimensions of work. Exclusively considering work from the perspective of production, as *poiesis*, involves subordinating the worker to something other than himself. This would explain why Aristotle defines work as "limited servitude," (Pol.I,13, 1260a13) an activity halfway between free activities, such as knowledge and action in which the agent is the beginning and end of the activity itself, and the tasks of slaves, which **Aristotle** characterizes as a living instruments (Pol I 4, 1253b2).

Faced with this double reduction, modernity also revealed other aspects. **Locke** was the first to link work and property. (2ndTreatise, n.27); **Smith** emphasized the division of labor as a factor of economic and social progress, although for him the same division of labor

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obeys a more basic inclination, that is, the inclination towards exchange (Wealth of Nations, 2007:9). **Kant** wrote of the duty to cultivate one's talents and become a useful member of humanity (MS,6:444;446). Work appears at the center of philosophies of history marked by the idea of progress. **Hegel** saw work as an expression of the spirit; man recognizes something of himself in the fruits of his labor (PR#198). In different ways, Enlightened and Romantic thinkers warned that productive work cannot be thought of apart from its historical insertion in a social fabric that involves humanity as a whole (Hegel, PR#198).

With this background, thinking about work leads to thinking about productivity in relation to historical, structural and cultural features that condition the worker's life; this is what **Marx** did when he reflected on the capitalist system of production.¹ **Marx** took from **Hegel** the idea of work as self-realization of man and from classical economists the idea of work as a source of value. In fact, classical economists' approach inspired **Marx**' shift from anthropological categories to socioeconomic ones; he thus began to understand the division of labor between intellectual and manual labor as a way of perpetuating a bourgeois social system and interpreted economic science itself accordingly. Along these lines, he conceived of a different economic science that, instead of beginning with the tendency toward exchange, started with work. He thought that if bourgeois consciousness developed from a concrete historical praxis and found expression and justification in certain cultural products, the proletarian consciousness would emerge from another praxis, of a revolutionary nature (Bermudo Avila, 1975).

Conceiving of work as a praxis in the Marxist sense, as genesis of class consciousness, is different from thinking of it as praxis in the Aristotelian sense. The latter involves seeing it as something more than a productive activity, as possible when the worker engages in it for a reason and in relation with others. Indeed, all *poiesis* is in fact inserted into a praxis, from which the ethical value of work arises, and in which its spiritual projection is also rooted. This is obviously the main focus of **Luther** and **St. Josemaria**, who clearly aimed to foment the Christian life of the faithful rather than offer social analysis. For this reason, they did not emphasize the structural dimensions of work, which, in turn, stand out in **Marx**. However, especially in **St. Josemaria**, we see a clear awareness of the central place occupied by work in social life— "as a bond of union with other men and a means to contribute to the progress of all humanity," "as a source of resources to support one's own family," as an "opportunity for personal development," (Letter 1948n.4) from which follows a unique insight into the social and historical projection of the message that he saw himself as called to preach.

He insisted in a thousand ways that materiality does not give meaning and value to our work, but rather its relationship with the human and spiritual good of the person who works and of those with whom he comes in contact in the process (Letter29VII1965,n.13). All of this presupposes that it is man himself who is at the center of reflection on work, motivating a more general question about the place of work in human life. **Aristotle** noted that, "nature herself, as has been often said, requires that we should be able, not only to work well, but to use leisure well." In this understanding, leisure should be distinguished from rest, since rest is ordered to work, which in turn is ordered to leisure (Pol.VIII 3,1337b31ss); we could translate the latter as something like "the life of the spirit." **Josef Pieper** took up this notion of leisure from a Christian perspective, criticizing the vision of

¹ En sus *Manuscritos económicos y filosóficos* (1844) -lo que en la interpretación de Althusser habría que incluir dentro del Marx joven, "humanista"— encontramos ya un texto sobre el trabajo alienado -expresión que toma de Feuerbach- uno de sus conceptos más característicos y complejos, por los múltiples sentidos que adquiere (alienación de la actividad productiva, alienación del producto de trabajo, alienación de otros trabajadores, alienación de la propia humanidad); posteriormente, el Marx maduro, desarrolla en volumen I de *El capital* (1867), su teoría del valor trabajo, con la que propone medir el valor de las mercancías según el tiempo de trabajo socialmente necesario empleado producirlas, lo cual supone incorporar el sistema productivo, el mercado y la competencia.

man as a simple *animal laborans* enclosed in an endless cycle of working in order to rest and resting in order to work. Leisure, festivity, liturgy (Pieper 2006:42) free us from work insofar as they open up a space for life and meaningful work (Pieper 2006, 12-13). Although **St. Josemaria** would generally subscribe to this analysis, he presents a slightly different vision. He defends work as a central part of human life— not just as necessary for subsistence, but also as the usual place for human and spiritual growth in which the dichotomy between action and contemplation find higher ground.

Luther and **St. Josemaria** both refer to Genesis. On the one hand, **Luther** stresses that God himself imposed man's mandate to work and he further illustrates that doctrine with New Testament examples. On the other, **St. Josemaria** directly points to God's creative design in constituting human nature as that of a worker— God created man *ut operatur*, to work. He also stresses the sanctifying value of work, based on the fact that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, fully assumed this human reality (*Conversations*, Chapter 55). Hence, sanctifying work means more than just taking on its "penitential" or "productive" dimensions and instead includes taking on the whole reality of human labor in all of its anthropological depth, which is inseparable from living in the world: *man builds himself while he builds the world, which means he assumes all the technical, social, relational and existential content of work from an ethical nucleus that, starting from the heart, opens man up to the action of the Spirit without renouncing rational discernment of what is just and unjust*. Along with this, ethical conscience is imbued with theological depth. It could not be otherwise since, for **St. Josemaria**, faith takes reason seriously and that which reason identifies as deserving of attention. The message of the sanctification of work assumes the reality of human labor in all its dimensions, including, of course, the ethical and social dimension, which is revealed to the critical eye.

Certainly, these considerations are nothing but corollaries of a spiritual message that **St. Josemaria** considered to be "both as old and as new as the Gospel." Indeed, **St. Josemaria** spoke of human work from a deep meditation on Sacred Scripture and in theological key. What I want to emphasize here, however, is that he does so in the light of the modern experience of human work, which, even though it has some timeless features, is also very idiosyncratic. We owe **Luther** and **Marx** for having explained crucial aspects of that experience.

2. Luther: Work as a mandate and as service

Luther did not specifically write about work; nevertheless, his doctrine of work becomes clear in his comments on Scripture and his preaching because of how they contrast with the preceding tradition. This doctrine must be understood in the theological and historical framework in which it was developed.

We must consider that before obtaining **Aristotle's** translated works, medieval Christianity oscillated between several influences that set limits to the appreciation of work found in the New Testament (Schelke; Gülzow 1978: 625-626). Although the Bible as such speaks more of God's work than of man's work (Preus 1978:615-618) -- Judaism did value work (Brocke 1978:622). However, this contrasted with Hellenistic culture's lackluster appreciation for work, a way of thinking that was later taken up by Rome. This view has marked Western consciousness, since the barbarians from the north did not especially value it either. In this sense, it is noteworthy that the medieval world evolved initially towards a growing appreciation for work. This can already be identified in the Carolingian renaissance and then later in the twelfth century; it is significant, for example, that trades began to be represented on so many cathedrals and churches in Gothic capitals. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, the old contrast between intellectual work and

manual labor again deepened (LeGoff 1978:626-634). This background allows us to better understand the sense in which the Protestant Reformation brought with it a meaningful, though paradoxical, revaluation of work in human life.

Indeed, convinced that salvation comes only from faith, and not from works, **Luther** did not recognize a soteriological or sanctifying value to work² that is, after all, human work. However, he used the Scriptures to emphasize the human dignity of work, arguing that it responds to the original mandate of God, constituting a practical way to realize one's vocation³ and manifest love for one's neighbor. Thus, although he used the term "work" relatively often in the negative sense of "effort" and "suffering," his observations reflect a new approach to the reality of work. Obeying the divine mandate to work, we are to avoid leisure,⁴ earning our own sustenance and helping our neighbors to fulfill their needs in a concrete way. While in his vision of work as a remedy for leisure, it is still possible to appreciate a primarily ascetic or disciplinary view of work, the fact that he connects it with service to one's neighbor and constitutes a humanistic trait (Mühlen 1978:635).

Likewise, and in marked contrast with how the Gospel passage of Martha and Mary was then interpreted, **Luther** avoided asserting the superiority of the contemplative life over the active one. He simply puts it in front of the attitude that considers work as an end in itself, something that he appreciates in Marta's anxiety when faced with increasing work⁵ that reveals an absence of freedom, which comes only from faith and constitutes the core of a truly Christian life. This is consistent with something that **Luther** expressly stated, i.e., the efficacy of work does not depend so much on us as on God, who invisibly works through our labor, using us as his instruments.⁶

Thus, the work that **Luther** appreciates proceeds from faith and abandons effectiveness to God, manifesting itself in works of service to one's neighbor. This constitutes a theological approach to work that levels or relativizes the difference between contemplative life and active life, resulting in a "revaluation of ordinary life" and secular activities that, according to **Charles Taylor**, the Protestant Reformation triggered. (Taylor 1996:228) The interesting thing is that said revaluation refers to God's mandate as its source. This is why **Luther** sees the work of the faithful as a vocation, analogous to that which the Apostles received,⁷ and also understands every man as meant to serve God in the place where he is called. According to **Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen**, even within later Lutheran orthodoxy, **Johann Gerhardt** was able to say that human professions are based on a divine vocation, distinguishing between a universal vocation and a personal vocation; while the former

² "Opera legis in abstracto... sunt bona, sed in concreto... mala sunt, quia nos sumus mali", en *Die Promotions disputation von Palladius und Tileman*, Martin Luthers Werke Kritische Ausgabe (MLWKA), 39, I, p. 253, 25.

³ "Gott wil... man sol trewlich und vleissig erbeiten, ein jglicher nach sinem beruff und ampt", *Der 147 Psalm, Lauda Jerusalem, ausgelegt 1532*, MLWKA, 31, I, p. 437, 8; "von Gott selber odder durch menschen an Gottes stat gewissen beruff und befelch haben", en *Von den Schleichern und Mintel predigern*, 1532, MLWKA, 30, iii, p. 521, 24; "Ihn iglicher belib inn dem beruff, darinn er beruffen ist". *Kirchenpostille 1522. Evangelium am S. Johannes-Tage, Jn, 21, 19-25*, MLWKA, 10 i.i, p. 310, 24; "Wie sich ein jeglicher in seinem beruff und stand erkennen und halten sol, er sey geistlich oder weltlich, hoch oder nidrig", *Crucigers Sommerpostille*, MLWKA, 21, p. 200, 32; "Zu einem guten wreck gehöret ein gewiser Göttlicher beruff", *Glosse auf das vermeinte kaiserliche Edikt 1531*, MLWKA, 30, iii, p. 386, 20.

⁴ "Deus voluit hominem non otiosum esse, sed laborare", *Predigten über das erste Buch Mosse, 1523/24*, MLWKA, 14, p. 117, 34.

⁵ "Martha geet hin und wil essen machen, wasser holen, schüssel waschen. Nu sagt das Evangelium, das sich Martha gantz allain der arbeti understanden hab, Christus aber sitzt da und hat ein ander werck für, prediget und hett Mariam under den füssen und wirt nit ains gewar ,was die hene thut". *Predigten des Jahres 1522. Nr 43 (10 August), br 44, (15 August)*, MLWKA, 10, iii, p. 269, 29; Interpreta el pasaje diciendo: "Martha du hast vil sorg. Ich hab bisher gepredigt das Evangelium, wie man nit sorgen soll: arbeatien sol man, aber dennoch nit sorgen, und sonderlich, wenn das wort hergeet, da sol man das geschefft auch nachlassen, ja nit allain das geschfft, sonder auch weibt und kind, vateer und mutter, feind un freund, eer und gut und allain dem wort anhangen. Da secht ir hie, das Martha wiewvol sie ain frommes sind gewesen ist und hats auch gut gemaint, noch tahdelt der herr ir mainung und strasset ir werd". Así pues, fue corregida no por trabajar, sino por su excesiva preocupación (o.c. p. 270, 17)

⁶ "Was ist aber unser erbeit auff dem felde, im garten, in der stadt, im hause, im streit, im regiern anders gegen Gott, den ein solch kinderwerket, dadurch Gott seine geben zu felde, zu hause und allenthalben geben wil? Es sind unsers herrn Gotts larven, darunter wil er verbringen sein und alles thun". *Der Psalm Lauda Jerusalem ausgelegt, 1532*, MLWKA, 31, I, p. 436, 7-11.

⁷ "Darum vermanet nu S. Petrus beide, die im Preidgampft sind, und andere Christen, die da etwas sind und haben, von Gott inen gegeben, das sie bleiben ben irem Beruff und Ampt, und dasselb mit demut füren, gerne andern gehorchen und dienen"- *Crucigers Sommerpostille. Epistel am dritten Sonntag nach Trinitatis, 1. Petri 5-, 5-11*, MLWKA, 22, 23, 27. "... Wie ist unser geistlichen, die im ampt sitzen, und ist in befohlen, da ssie der Christenheit fustehen und öffentlich leuchten solten mit irer lere, so stecken sie es unter die banck, ja sind noch viel erger worden, das sie eben die sind, die das wort verfolgen und das liecht wollen auslesschen, hetzen keifer, Könige mi taller welt nur dawidder, Sitzen gleich wol im haufe und wollen allein die kirche regieren, haben predigstul, Tauffe, Sacrament und alles innen was zum beruff und ampt gehört..." *Wochenpredigten über Matt. 5-7. 1530/2-Druck 1532*, MLWKA, 32, p. 351, 21.

proclaims the message of salvation for all men, the latter refers to one's specific work (Mühlen 1978:638).

It has been said that, by emphasizing the equal value of all work, **Luther** reinforced a bourgeois ethos that then emerged, indirectly contributing to the generation of cultural conditions conducive to the Industrial Revolution. That is part of **Weber's** argument. What **Luther** could not offer, however, were conceptual tools with which to perform a critical analysis of the forms of work that were then emerging. How could he do so? While criticizing the position of those who exploited their neighbors' work through usury, his considerations on work were inevitably conditioned by the economic life of the sixteenth century, which predated the modern economy and machinery, as well as the complex social problems that arose from the associated changes. Employing reason in all its depth and analyzing how changes in the conditions of production affected the human reality of work was needed in order to measure up to the times and to prevent confining the Christian spirit to a petty-bourgeois ethic that was critical of an "unproductive" aristocracy, but incapable of coping with the reality and needs of a new working class, which later in the nineteenth century took on a historical role.

Marx was the first thinker to seriously reflect on the effects of these transformations on the human spirit, calling them as a whole "alienation," a word that picks up **Hegel's** romantic philosophy, but above all **Feuerbach's** critical materialism. It is worth asking ourselves what **Marx** saw that had not been seen before. Was it a new look at the same world, or a new world that was beginning to reveal itself to him? What remains of what he saw in contemporary work?

3. Marx: From alienated work to emancipated work

It is worth noting that speaking of alienation in the terms we use today— as a "wound" of the spirit with man somehow feeling torn, because he is separated from his context, his fellow men, from the work of his hands, is only possible in a modern, and specifically romantic, context in which the value of individuality holds primary sway. This mentality is in open contrast with a petty bourgeois mentality, which is inclined to identify the moral universe within the small world of proximate social conventions. From this perspective, it makes sense to say that **Marx's** communism was only possible on the basis of preceding romantic individualism, which now forms part of our way of seeing the world, according to which man recognizes something of himself, in the products of his hands and in the work of culture.

The worker aspires to overcome the alienation that, according to **Marx**, undermines the capitalist system of production, as well as to return to his complete being. Deprived of the means of production and reduced to pure "labor power," the worker is stripped of himself and inserted in a production process controlled by others, who ignore the value and ends of his efforts.⁸ The same generic and undifferentiated concept of work⁹ became, in part, an effect of said changes. (Renault 2014:185-6) **Arendt's** observation that **Marx**— like many other modern intellectuals— confused *Ponein-ergazesthai*, *Labore-facere*, *Arbeiten-*

⁸ Marx considera indiscutibles las siguientes dos tesis. Por un lado "El trabajo solo es fuente de riqueza y de cultura en cuanto trabajo social o, lo que es lo mismo, dentro de la sociedad y a través de ella... pues el trabajo del individuo aislado (presuponiendo sus condiciones materiales), también puede crear valores de uso, no puede crear riqueza ni cultura". Y, por otro: "En la medida en que el trabajo se desarrolla socialmente, convirtiéndose así en fuente de riqueza y de cultura, se desarrollan también la pobreza y el desamparo del obrero, y la riqueza y la cultura de los que no trabajan", y considera que "esta es la ley de toda la historia hasta hoy", si bien en la sociedad capitalista se darían las condiciones para que los obreros podrían romper por vez primera "esa maldición". Marx, K. *Crítica del programa de Gotha*, pp. 20-21.

⁹ En efecto, según escribe Marx en el libro III de *El Capital*, "El trabajo, que es nada más que una abstracción y que considerado de por sí no existe en absoluto o, si consideramos ... la actividad productiva del hombre en general, merced a la cual él media el metabolismo con la naturaleza, despojada no solo de cualquier forma y carácter determinados sociales, sino incluso en su mera existencia natural independiente de la sociedad, eximida de toda sociedad y como exteriorización y confirmación vitales comunes al hombre que todavía no es social en absoluto y al que de algún modo está socialmente determinado". Marx, K., *El Capital*, Libro III, capítulo XLVIII, p. 850

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Werten, Labor-Work, corroborated the emergence of this new generic category of work. (Arendt 1993:157-198;344-9) For **Arendt**, while labor is inserted in the cycle of life, productive work distinguishes itself and stands out from organic activity because it creates a world and culture. However, in the course of the transformations linked to the division of labor and the Industrial Revolution, the activity of *homo faber* was socialized and reabsorbed into the activity of *animal laborans*. The multiplication of objects, as well as cultural objects, to which we are witnesses in modern times as an effect of the Industrial Revolution, no longer necessarily speak of their individual authors, but is rather the result of a massive social transformation which, through the division of tasks, parcels out the productive process and removes the final product from each worker. According to **Marx**, this transformation led the "labor force" to emerge forcefully as a pure natural force¹⁰ of unskilled labor that definitively relativized the difference between intellectual and physical work because all work activity combines physical and mental elements. Everything was eventually integrated into a quasi-biological process aimed primarily at ensuring the conditions of subsistence not just on the individual level, but also for the human race (Nilo 2016) as a whole.

This explains why **Marx** indiscriminately understands all biological labor as work. In the meantime, the term also designates the effort by which humanity assures its subsistence and reproduction as a species, as well the means by which humanity transforms nature and itself. The latter, however, indicates that work is no longer considered just an "eternal *necessity* imposed by nature," but also a source of historical and social progress, the "place" in which there is a deep and singular symbiosis between man and nature, the forge where the entirety of humanity's progress takes form. All of this would be clearer if, as **Tiago Nilo** points out, in speaking of humanity, "Marx does not refer to human beings in the singular, but rather in terms of social relations, in the entirety of life in common and coexistence." (Nilo 2016) This view qualifies the reproach **Marx** has so often received concerning reducing the human experience of work to its productive aspects. (Renault, 2014:180) However, as **Renault** notes, **Marx's** words open up other questions:

"Does Marx consider labour to be one of the distinguishing characteristics that defines humanity within the animal kingdom (anthropological conception of labour) or as a production of capitalism (historicization of labour)? Does he conceive labour essentially as a vital activity ("living labour") or as a commodity and a social relation? Does he critique capitalism from the viewpoint of labour or is he taking aim, on the contrary, at the fundamental role given to labour in capitalism? Is his ambition to free labour from the forms of domination that grip it or, on the contrary, to liberate us from labour? These alternative interpretations can be distilled into a single question: is it a matter of a critique through labour or a critique of labour? However, it might also be doubted whether these alternatives adequately take Marxian thinking into account" (Renault, 2014:185)

In **Renault's** view, **Marx** developed an anthropological view of work in the sense that he saw a difference between men and other animals; in addition, he distinguished between work as it develops in any society and its development and valuation in the framework of capitalism. But, for **Marx**, the real problem lies in examining the way in which the social relations involved in different modes of production affect the configuration of work, for which reason he directed his critique of the capitalist system, in which, as he put it, the worker loses control of his own activity dominated by "collective rhythm, machines

¹⁰ "Entendemos por fuerza de trabajo o capacidad de trabajo el contenido de las capacidades físicas e intelectuales que existen en la corporeidad, en la personalidad viva de un ser humano, y que éste pone en movimiento siempre que produce valores de uso de cualquier especie". Marx, K., *El Capital*, vol. I, sección II, en *Obras de Marx y Engels*, vol. 40, Barcelona-Buenos Aires-México: 1976, p. 182. "La fuerza de trabajo posee un valor, al igual que todas las demás mercancías. ¿Cómo se determina ese valor? El valor de la fuerza de trabajo se determina, igual que el de cualquier otra mercancía, por el tiempo de trabajo necesario para la producción –o sea, también reproducción– de este específico artículo. En la medida en que es valor, la fuerza de trabajo misma no representa más que una determinada cantidad de trabajo social medio objetivado en ella", p. 185.

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and technological knowledge," and is converted into a means to create exchange value. He believed that, in the capitalist system, work is part of a specific relationship of domination; it becomes a product, an object—the labor force—for sale on the market just like everything else, obviating the fact that it constitutes the original source of the value that will then be multiplied in the market "in conformity with the norms that define socially useful and necessary work." (Renault: 2014:187) Ultimately, as wage labor, it becomes the medium of a social relationship between capitalists and workers, which **Marx** considered intrinsically alienating. (Capital, v.3,xlviii,p.849).

Although **Aristotle** thought that work done simply for money corresponds to slaves, **Marx** extended this judgment to the capitalist system in general on the grounds that wages are not what they appear to be. They do not correspond to the value or price of labor, only to that of the labor force. In the capitalist system of production, however, the worker generally employs more force than would be strictly necessary for his own sustenance, generating a surplus value from which the capitalist, rather than the laborer himself, benefits. Insofar as it relies on prolonging this free work, **Marx** considers the capitalist system to be a system of slavery (Marx, Gotha 2004: 41). In the case of **Aristotle**, the alternative would be to perform the work freely, for its intrinsic value rather than dominated by necessity. **Marx** does not seem to go in a very different direction, when in a famous passage in Book III of *Capital*, he purports that it would be ideal to remove work from necessity to introduce it into a regime of freedom. This corresponds to emancipated work:

"The realm of freedom does not commence until the point is passed where labor under the compulsion of necessity and of external utility is required. In the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of material production in the strict meaning of the term. Just as the savage must wrestle with nature, in order to satisfy his wants, in order to maintain his life and reproduce it, so civilized man has to do it, and he must do it in all forms of society and under all possible modes of production. With his development the realm of natural necessity expands, because his wants increase; but at the same time the forces of production increase, by which these wants are satisfied. The freedom in this field cannot consist of anything else but of the fact that socialized man, the associated producers, regulate their interchange with nature rationally, bring it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by some blind power; that they accomplish their task with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most adequate to their human nature and most worthy of it. But it always remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human power, which is its own end, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can flourish only upon that realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working day is its fundamental premise." (Marx, Capital III, XLVIII, 2003: 854)

From this text, it follows that the realm of necessity never completely disappears: there will always be needs to satisfy. However, in the realm of freedom, they are satisfied with the minimum force and in a dignified way. **Marx** attributes this to the very development of the forces of production—for example, the development of machines—which should no longer be under the control of the few. Only then would the free development of one's own forces be possible. This reading is consistent with **Renault's** interpretation, according to which **Marx** does not understand free labor as work free from suffering, but as work that is *more* than suffering and in which the subject betters himself. This work is not understood as a game, but it nevertheless constitutes an attractive activity; it is not organized as a function of a relationship between employer and employee, but rather is organized deliberately and cooperatively among the workers themselves (Renault, 2014:191-2).

In fact, for **Marx**, arriving at the regime of freedom supposes first of all abolishing the employer-employee relationship and replacing it with work organized collaboratively among the workers themselves. From our perspective, the problem lies in that **Marx**

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thought that communist society would be preceded by a dictatorship of the proletariat, which is unconvincing in pragmatic, as well as ethical, terms; putting it into practice supposes violating the opinion and freedom of many people who have reason to doubt that such measures could lead to a truly just order. To believe that this order is indebted to a bourgeois idea of justice, and justify revolutionary violence on that ground, is another way of giving primacy to ideas and structures over people.

Marx's criticism is directed at structural features of the capitalist system. It also refers to the contradiction between "factory discipline" implicit in the modern rationalization of labor and "production anarchy" characteristic of the capitalist productive model (Rodrigues Lucas, 2016: 658-9). His observations in this regard are a permanent counterpoint to the rational organization of work that opened up not only in the West, but also in the former Soviet Union and which **Taylor** advocated for at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It constituted one of the constant, but inevitable contradictions that Marxism had to face in the last century, which motivated **Lukacs'** effort to develop an ontology of work capable of revealing the alienating aspects of contemporary labor organization (Rodrigues Lucas, 2016: 664-5).

Now, what is the goal of this critical and revolutionary endeavor? As **Claude Bitot** points out, labor liberated from the chains of the capitalist mode of production is not quite heaven on earth because the realm of necessity persists. But if production is outsourced to machines, neither work—which **Marx** understands in terms of production—nor communist society—which he initially described as a producer society—makes a lot of sense. Ultimately, **Marx** aspires to bring us back to the world of romanticism—a society in which, with needs met, without interdependencies of any kind, individuals freely engage in the activities that most contribute to their development (Bitot, 2009: 77 ss).

Marx thought that the upper phase of communist society, described in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* (2004:30-31), would be prepared by the very capitalist system of production, in as far as it fostered the polyvalence of workers (Rodríguez Lucas: 671-2) and their progressive training for the realization of any kind of task. In a recent paper devoted to the future of work in the twenty-first century, **Geoffrey Hodgson** explicitly criticizes this thesis, noting that, contrary to **Marx's** prediction, more and more sophisticated forms of production are being generated, requiring more and more specialized work. Paradoxically, it is this development, not the polyvalence of workers, that fosters more flexible and collaborative forms of work (2016:198), in which the rigid identities of capitalist, worker and entrepreneur inherited from the first instance of modernity are blurred.

In any case, if, as some people argue, we are currently witnessing the genesis of an alternative economy, (Rifkin: 2014) it must be based on previous economic and technological developments, as well as on the ideas and ideals that direct and motivate economic agents. Wherever they are located in the chain of production, they are in no way accidental pieces in the transformations that their activity introduces into history; whether they know it or not, they are not alone, but rather are the creators of said changes in reciprocal interdependence with others. And as they become better craftsmen, they better understand the social projection and the ethical meaning that their work must have because, in that same measure, they are in a position to adopt a critical position when facing the historical forms in which they are immersed, a position that is as equally far from bourgeois conformity as it is from revolutionary violence.

From this perspective we can better appreciate **St. Josemaria's** contribution to the question of work because, precisely by putting the worker qua person at the center,

without dwelling much on the nature of his particular work, he introduces novelty in the world, an open window to the discernment of reason and the action of the spirit, which goes beyond the rigidity of any system.

4. An alternative approach to the relationship between work and social progress

From the moment that any social organization of labor inevitably leads to certain structures of domination, it must be accompanied by a continuous critical revision of associated working conditions in order to respect the difference between political dominion in the governance of free men and despotic domination that defines the relationship between master and slave. Contemplated from this perspective, the question of work is interchangeable with the political question in the broadest sense of the word. I do not think it is a coincidence, therefore, that **St. Josemaria** once defined government as "making work with order and joy." This definition contains, on the one hand, the centrality of work in human life and, on the other, the importance of working in a specific way— with joy, which is another way of saying with freedom that is not anarchic, but rather in cooperation with others. This, however, depends on workers perceiving that what they do has a meaning that transcends the most immediate personal benefit; a meaning that can be shared with others.

From here, by stretching the term, we arrive at what can be described as a "liturgical" conception of work (Derville 2006). As far as I know, **St. Josemaria** never used this expression, but he used similar ones when, for example, he suggested turning the work-day into an act of worship (Forja 69) with which he alludes to the possibility of making work an offering to God, uniting it to the offering that Christ makes of himself to the Father. This means that work, rather than being opposed to prayer, is the most perfect source of prayer. **St. Josemaria** thus relativized the distinction between action and contemplation, between Martha and Mary (Letter29.VII.1965n.1). In the end, work itself is prayer when it is performed with Christ's same spirit, which is a spirit of charity, a virtue that **St. Josemaria** always understood as an overflowing of justice. Thus, he wrote:

"When you hear me speak of justice, it is not meant to be understood in a narrow sense because people's happiness goes beyond establishing their relationships on justice, which coldly distributes each person his due. I speak of charity, which presumes the existence of justice and goes beyond it, and of Christ's charity, which is not charity in the strict sense, but rather affection("cariño")" (17). Therefore, when acting in society, always avoid turning men against other men because a Christian cannot have a class or caste mentality. Do not sink some to raise others up because that attitude always contains a materialistic conception. Always give everyone the chance to develop their personality and to improve their lives through work; and do not settle for avoiding hatred because our common purpose should be sowing peace and love" (I-59, n.18).

This is the antithesis of **Marx**. Although **St. Josemaria** shares with **Marx** the conviction that the question of labor lies at the heart of personal and social progress, his approach to the human and social reality of work— contained in the message of the sanctification of labor— is diametrically opposed because it is based on the primacy of the spirit over the material. In contrast to **Marx's** assessment of religion as "the opium" of the people, **St. Josemaria** speaks of religion as "the greatest rebellion of men, who refuse to live like animals, who are dissatisfied and restless until they know their Creator" (AD, 38). The fact that he affirms the primacy of the spirit, however, does not convert his message into spiritualism. In fact, by assuming the Christian faith to the fullest extent as faith in a God who became man, **St. Josemaria** explicitly lays down his doctrine on the sanctification of work as an expression of genuine "Christian materialism." In his own words, Christian

materialism "is boldly opposed to that materialism which is blind to the spirit" (Conversations, Chapter 115) which, in the 1940s, he thought was among the most worrying features of his time. He described the situation in a letter he wrote to the faithful in 1942:

"The general ethos of the civilization that surrounds us has altered how many things are seen. These things could (and should) in fact be otherwise, that is, they should be changed in accordance with the meaning of sanctified and sanctifying work, the meaning of our supernatural hopes' personal projection in the world of work done with perfection, and the effective action of efficient and organized honesty. And we will make it known that no noble and human path closes you off to finding God, but rather that all these paths can respond positively, if young people know how to rid themselves of seductive materialistic solutions in life" (Letter 24-X-1942 n.57).

These words clearly reveal concern for the advance of theoretical materialism, which obstructs the progress of the spirit. **St. Josemaria** spoke in similar terms ten years later when, in a letter about the importance of cultivating the human sciences, he pointed out that, ***"Social phenomena born of the development of industry and of recent methods for the rationalization of work have significantly contributed to the growing materialism around us. Hence it is especially necessary today to bring God to all human activities"*** (Letter 9-I, 1951, No. 5). His words reflect changes in the organization of work throughout the twentieth century, which he associated with increasing materialism. Along the same lines, in 1969 he insisted, ***"Not everything in the most economically developed societies necessarily equates with advancement, because economics is not the highest norm in life"*** (Letter 29. VII, 1969, No. 26). In this context, he stressed the urgency of "bringing God to all human activity," a way of referring to the sanctification of ordinary work through which **St. Josemaria** saw the seed from which a renewed humanity would be born: ***"We will effectively help create a climate of mutual understanding and coexistence with a broad and universal vision, which will subdue all hatred and resentment with charity. Class struggle, nationalism, and discrimination will disappear; dare to dream and not even your wildest imagination will be enough"*** (Letter 24-X-1942, No. 58).

Certainly, faith in the transformative potential of sanctified ordinary work may be naive or unsatisfactory to those who seek spectacular or revolutionary solutions to our countless social problems. However, **St. Josemaria** did not seek to offer solutions of this kind and instead intended to preach the gospel; for him, faith in the sanctifying potential of ordinary labor is nothing other than faith in the power of God, who can feed the multitude by multiplying five loaves of bread and two fish. At the same time, however, it presupposes placing at the center of social transformation the very sanctification of the worker: "these world crises are crises of saints;", he wrote (*The Way*, Chapter 301); this of course does not in any way imply that the sanctification of work is an individualistic program. He excluded this implication from an objective point of view by using the very social dimension of both man and work, and, from a subjective point of view, by the intentionality that should guide sanctified work, which is, in fact, an intention of service. This is the double reading of the motto "to serve, be useful" with which **St. Josemaria** synthesized professional competence and a spirit of service. (*Christ is Passing by*, Chapter 51) In effect, sanctifying work means that man must decide to work hard, well and with a spirit of serving others because he loves God. For this reason, **St. Josemaria** noted that message of the sanctification of work implies learning to "materialize spiritual life," deepening the nature and the projection of work itself in a way that, sooner or later, involves the full gamut of realities found in the secular world.

For this reason, he could affirm that, "***The sanctification of ordinary work is, as it were, the hinge of true spirituality for people who, like us, have decided to come close to God while being at the same time fully involved in temporal affairs***" (*Friends of God*, Chapter 61), not simply because the competent realization of one's work brings out practical virtues that are necessary to build one's character and spiritual life, (*Friends of God*, Chapter 72), but also because, objectively, all work constitutes a way of contributing to the construction of the earthly city, a way of humanizing the world. (*Conversations*, Chapter 70) Asked in an interview about the meaning of the expression "sanctifying work," **St. Josemaria** replied as follows:

"...the expression 'sanctifying work' involves fundamental concepts of the theology of Creation. What I have always taught... is that a Christian should do all honest human work, be it intellectual or manual, with the greatest perfection possible: with human perfection (professional competence) and with Christian perfection (for love of God's Will and as a service to mankind). Human work done in this manner, no matter how humble or insignificant it may seem, helps to shape the world in a Christian way. The world's divine dimension is made more visible and our human labour is thus incorporated into the marvellous work of Creation and Redemption. It is raised to the order of grace... We see in work, in men's noble creative toil not only one of the highest human values, an indispensable means to social progress and to greater justice in the relations between men, but also a sign of God's Love for His creatures, and of men's love for each other and for God: we see in work a means of perfection, a way to sanctity" (*Conversations*, Chapter 10).

Saint Josemaria often added the adjective "professional" when speaking about work to emphasize that work is not an activity for amateurs, but rather a serious endeavor that involves responsibly using one's talents, as well as devoting time and energy to training in a given field's technical and ethical aspects. (Letter 29.VII.1961,n.32). Professionalism is herein seen as value, a trait that, for **Weber**, could only appear when projected on labor activity, differentiated according to the needs of civil society and the proper dedication to religious life, a process that he referred back to **Luther** (Weber, 2008:148). Accordingly, qualifying an activity as "professional" implies both the technical ability required in the exercise of a particular task and the socially recognized, vital dedication of time and energy that a given ability usually presupposes. **St. Josemaria** also welcomed the contemporary way of referring to all if this in terms of "human vocation," a reality as dynamic as life itself (Carta 15.X.1948,n.33), which he considered an integral part of the "divine vocation" (*Christ is Passing by*, Chapter 46) of those who live their Christian faith in the midst of secular realities (*Friends of God*, Chapter 58). Thus, in order to make explicit the meaning of the term "professional" for the men and women of our time, wherever they work and whatever the circumstances that might motivate them to change occupation, **St. Josemaria** enumerated qualities involved in genuinely professional work that can be translated into any job: caring about the details without losing sight of the whole, keeping in mind the way in which our work conditions that of others, cultivating relationships that are established through work, a willingness and the generosity to train others even when they have the potential to progress beyond us, contributing to solving shared problems, finishing things well, etc.

St Josemaria's emphasis on the virtues needed to successfully complete one's work (*Friends of God*, Chapter 81) corresponds to the leading role he gives to people's free response to God's calling (Surco 974). Both ideas scale back the weight that modern theorists of work give to structures and their determining force. Even for **Weber**, the specialization required by a profession, despite its original religious inspiration, is an aspect of the rationalization of life that defines modernity: an ambivalent process ultimately leading to the triumph of pragmatic reason and, with it, to dehumanization, or **Marx's**

alienation. This is reflected in the ambiguous final paragraphs of his famous text *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, where, while allowing for the possibility of new prophets, he foresees a world of "specialists without spirit, sensualists without hearts:"

"Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world, material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history. Today the spirit of religious asceticism – whether finally, who knows? – has escaped from the cage. But victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer... No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development, entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the fast stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved" (Weber, 2008: 149).

This is not the case in **St. Josemaria's** preaching, who, while encouraging competent (*Christ is Passing by*, Chapter 50) and well-organized work, openly preached about miracles and poetry throughout the sanctification of work:

"The "miracle" which God asks of you is to persevere in your Christian and divine vocation, sanctifying each day's work: the miracle of turning the prose of each day into heroic verse by the love which you put into your ordinary work. God waits for you there. He expects you to be a responsible person, with the zeal of an apostle and the competence of a good worker" (Christ is Passing by, Chapter 50).

A critical spirit, with little inclination toward recognizing new prophets, may find these words excessively naïve, too confident in the possibilities of the human spirit, too ignorant of the power of structures; a coherent Marxist, in turn, would dismiss the whole discourse as a way of legitimizing an unjust social order. Undoubtedly, **St. Josemaria** did not consider it his mission as a priest to focus on structures over people, but his preaching rested on the conviction that those same structures are not impenetrable to the spirit, which in no way constitutes a legitimization of the status quo, but rather promotes its transformation from within. Indeed, while recognizing that there are alienating structures—what the Church's social doctrine has sometimes called structures of sin—he also understood that at the root of said structures are personal flaws and sin. Thus, reversing this situation and generating spaces where the spirit can freely circulate precisely depends on the "sanctification of work," an idea that in **St. Josemaria's** preaching goes beyond a simple ascetic exercise, which is personal and private, since, with its own logic, it presupposes an affirmation of secularity and of secular realities *as a Christian way of being in the world*.

5. St. Josemaria's contribution to reflections on work

Strictly speaking, the sanctification of work as a way to reverse the alienating aspects of the world of work constitutes an approach to life for practicing Christians. However, in my view, **St. Josemaria's** theological articulation of this message contains evident philosophical elements, which allow us to enter into fruitful dialogue with contemporary thought on work.

- The first clear contribution is the consideration of work not simply as *poiesis*, or technical activity, but as human praxis. This means that the technical perfection of a task is not enough when discussing human work. Instead, the ends for which the work is done must be taken into account, as well as the way it is done, the relationships that are established therein, ... All this indicates work's central place in

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the configuration of cultural and social life, which is implied in the idea of "sanctifying the world from within."

- Secondly, the insertion of work in the context of a theology of creation leads to seeing it as *participation* in the creative work of God, and not simply as the execution of a divine mandate. Here we find an eminently positive view of work itself, whose dignity is affirmed free of any misgivings, and of temporal realities, i.e., "the love for the world that is found in Christianity:"

- Thirdly, and partly as a consequence of the two points above, as well as and especially because of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, the commitment to a "Christian materialism." As mentioned, this doctrine reveals a vision of social relations in which classism and class struggle are replaced by fraternal cooperation:

- As a corollary of the above, a specifically Christian way of being in the world emerges for which the world is not a strange reality, but rather a natural one. That is, it contains a positive vision of secularity:

"Work is the vehicle through which man inserts himself into society, the means by which he assembles with the whole of human relations, the instrument that assigns him a place in the coexistence of men. Professional work and existence in the world are two sides of the same coin; both realities make demands of the other, making it impossible to understand the one without the other" (6-V-1945, n. 13)

Praxis, "participation," "Christian materialism", "secularity"— these are, in my opinion, the categories that St. Josemaria spontaneously used to articulate his message about work. Nevertheless, I consider **St Josemaria's** most significant contribution with regard to the question at hand to be his particularly successful synthesis of reason and faith, of old and modern ideas, found in his everyday preaching.