



Humanum

ISSUES IN FAMILY, CULTURE & SCIENCE

ISSUE FOUR

A Laborer Is Worthy of His Wages: Work and Justice





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A Laborer Is Worthy of His Wages

MARGARET HARPER MCCARTHY

With this last issue on work we come to the question of justice in all that concerns work: the one doing the work—the worker, what is done or made—the worker’s labor, and the one on the receiving end—the consumer. In sum, we offer an issue on the just order in the workplace.

To think about work that is just, it is necessary to think **just about work**, to think about what is fulfilling in itself, not just a means to an end, be it money, fame, even the “glory of God.” It is necessary to think, therefore, about what kind of work makes us more human? This is the theme of the review on Russell Muirhead’s gem, *Just Work*.

Going to the heart of this question we offer two seminal texts. The first is from Charles Péguy which contrasts the ancient and Christian understanding of work with the bourgeois and post-Christian one. The second is from *Laborem exercens*, where St. John Paul II takes up one of the characteristic features of the modern workplace, where the laborer is an instrument of production (and separated from the means of it). According to Genesis, says St. John Paul II, “man alone, independently of the work he does—ought to be treated as the effective subject of work and its true maker and creator,” and never as a cog in a machine, be it a capitalist or collectivist one.

Naturally, a discussion on justice and work must have the Catholic Social Doctrine in view, beginning with its “big picture”—the whole context in which our work is done. Russell Sparkes, an authority on the Catholic Social Doctrine, provides just this in a feature review which centers on John Médaille’s *Towards a Truly Free Market* where the author looks at the market from the “distributist” principle, offering both criticism of the contemporary economic world as well as viable alternatives to some of its key practices (and features). Then too, apropos of the idea of exchange we take for granted in the “free-market,” we offer a discussion of the older “gift exchange” in a review of Lewis Hyde’s modern classic *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*.

Turning to one of the linchpins of Distributism—the place of the family in the economy—Brian Rottkamp introduces us to Robert Putnam’s *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, a discussion of (among other things) the link between the increasing economic inequality and the rise of children born out of wedlock. Is this not an illustration of the “creative destruction” (to use Schumpeter’s phrase) at work in the economy that undermines the very institution which props it up? We are also pleased to have economist Ernie Tedeschi, former senior advisor at the U.S. Department of the Treasury, weigh in on what a “family friendly” tax policy means—especially as this pertains to the most recent tax reform bill.

For all of its promotion of justice in the world, the Catholic Social Doctrine is not simply worldly. Or better, it is deeply “in the world” because it offers something “not of the world.” This is the fundamental message of *Not as the World Gives*, by Stratford Caldecott, our founding and much-missed editor. Reversing the common view that functionalizes the Church for merely social ends, Strat insists that the Catholic Social Doctrine brings the world up into something beyond itself, through the believer who radiates into the world what he has gazed upon in the liturgy: the Beauty of God.

This theme was central to the founders of the Catholic Worker Movement, as is clear in Dorothy Day’s *Peter Maurin: Apostle to the World*. For Maurin, good work was tied up with the three-fold way of life: cult (Mass), culture (the common life), and cultivation (agriculture). Understood and lived in this way, work could be seen as directly tied to the sustenance of a common life that was drawn up into something “not as the world gives,” since it helps sustain the culture generated by the sacraments even by cultivating the food necessary for life and the “Creator’s own Body and Blood.” And with respect to the injustices of the day which Day and Maurin fought assiduously as they promoted fair wages, humane working conditions and job security, any call for change at the “structural level” necessarily involved personal voluntary charity (and poverty) in the form of hospitality to the poor. For Day and Maurin the goal was not just to “meet needs”; or better, it was to meet needs most adequately through works of mercy. You will love this review.

Finally, this issue offers some assessment of the current situation relative to the ideals of the Catholic Social Doctrine. Looking at the question globally, Edward Hadas, a seasoned financial analyst, economics journalist and political philosopher, offers a fair-minded discussion of the “lights and shadows” of the modern workplace. As an example of the “light,” we offer a witness account of the practice that has given rise to

so much excitement about prospects for real help for the most vulnerable. The author of our witness piece recounts her involvement in GFM Ministries, a non-profit in South Asia offering “micro-loans” of \$100 to \$300. At this point, GFM Ministries has over \$4 million USD in circulation and is impacting the lives of over a quarter of a million people. Read to see how life-changing the gift of the very possibility of working, even employing others, can be.

Margaret Harper McCarthy is the US Editor of Humanum.

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Neither Cog, Nor Instrument: Work and the Dignity of Man

POPE SAINT JOHN PAUL II

One of Saint John Paul II's great contributions to Catholic social teaching is *Laborem exercens*, his encyclical on human work. It was promulgated in 1981 and is available in its entirety on the [Vatican website](#). The excerpts that follow (pars.6,7 and 15) emphasize the importance of man as the proper subject of work.

[H]owever true it may be that man is destined for work and called to it, in the first place work is “for man” and not man “for work.” Through this conclusion one rightly comes to recognize the pre-eminence of the subjective meaning of work over the objective one. Given this way of understanding things, and presupposing that different sorts of work that people do can have greater or lesser objective value, let us try nevertheless to show that each sort is judged above all by the measure of the dignity of the subject of work, that is to say the person, the individual who carries it out. On the other hand: independently of the work that every man does, and presupposing that this work constitutes a purpose—at times a very demanding one—of his activity, this purpose does not possess a definitive meaning in itself. In fact, in the final analysis it is always man who is the purpose of the work, whatever work it is that is done by man—even if the common scale of values rates it as the merest “service,” as the most monotonous, even the most alienating work.

It is precisely these fundamental affirmations about work that always emerged from the wealth of Christian truth, especially from the very message of the “Gospel of work,” thus creating the basis for a new way of thinking, judging and acting. In the modern period, from the beginning of the industrial age, the Christian truth about work had to oppose the various trends of materialistic and economic thought.

For certain supporters of such ideas, work was understood and treated as a sort of “merchandise” that the worker—especially the industrial worker—sells to the employer, who at the same time is the possessor of the capital, that is to say, of all the working tools and means that make production possible. This way of looking at work

was widespread especially in the first half of the nineteenth century. Since then, explicit expressions of this sort have almost disappeared, and have given way to more human ways of thinking about work and evaluating it. The interaction between the worker and the tools and means of production has given rise to the development of various forms of capitalism—parallel with various forms of collectivism—into which other socioeconomic elements have entered as a consequence of new concrete circumstances, of the activity of workers' associations and public authorities, and of the emergence of large transnational enterprises. Nevertheless, the danger of treating work as a special kind of “merchandise,” or as an impersonal “force” needed for production (the expression “workforce” is in fact in common use) always exists, especially when the whole way of looking at the question of economics is marked by the premises of materialistic economism.

A systematic opportunity for thinking and evaluating in this way, and in a certain sense a stimulus for doing so, is provided by the quickening process of the development of a one-sidedly materialistic civilization, which gives prime importance to the objective dimension of work, while the subjective dimension—everything in direct or indirect relationship with the subject of work—remains on a secondary level. In all cases of this sort, in every social situation of this type, there is a confusion or even a reversal of the order laid down from the beginning by the words of the Book of Genesis: man is treated as an instrument of production, whereas he—he alone, independently of the work he does—ought to be treated as the effective subject of work and its true maker and creator. Precisely this reversal of order, whatever the programme or name under which it occurs, should rightly be called “capitalism”—in the sense more fully explained below. Everybody knows that capitalism has a definite historical meaning as a system, an economic and social system, opposed to “socialism” or “communism.” But in the light of the analysis of the fundamental reality of the whole economic process—first and foremost of the production structure that work is—it should be recognized that the error of early capitalism can be repeated wherever man is in a way treated on the same level as the whole complex of the material means of production, as an instrument and not in accordance with the true dignity of his work—that is to say, where he is not treated as subject and maker, and for this very reason as the true purpose of the whole process of production.

This explains why the analysis of human work in the light of the words concerning man's “dominion” over the earth goes to the very heart of the ethical and social question. This concept should also find a central place in the whole sphere of social and economic policy, both within individual countries and in the wider field of

international and intercontinental relationships, particularly with reference to the tensions making themselves felt in the world not only between East and West but also between North and South. Both John XXIII in the Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* and Paul VI in the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* gave special attention to these dimensions of the modern ethical and social question.

...

Thus, the principle of the priority of labor over capital is a postulate of the order of social morality. It has key importance both in the system built on the principle of private ownership of the means of production and also in the system in which private ownership of these means has been limited even in a radical way. Labor is in a sense inseparable from capital; in no way does it accept the antinomy, that is to say, the separation and opposition with regard to the means of production that has weighed upon human life in recent centuries as a result of merely economic premises. When man works, using all the means of production, he also wishes the fruit of this work to be used by himself and others, and he wishes to be able to take part in the very work process as a sharer in responsibility and creativity at the workbench to which he applies himself.

From this spring certain specific rights of workers, corresponding to the obligation of work. They will be discussed later. But here it must be emphasized, in general terms, that the person who works desires not only due remuneration for his work; he also wishes that, within the production process, provision be made for him to be able to know that in his work, even on 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 Saint 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. Every effort must be made to ensure that in this kind of system also the human person can preserve his awareness of working “for himself.” If this is not done, incalculable damage is inevitably done throughout the economic process, not only economic damage but first and foremost damage to man.

Pope Saint John Paul II served as pope from 1978 to 2005. He was canonized in 2014.

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Bourgeois Sabotage of Dignified Work

CHARLES PÉGUY

Charles Péguy wrote *L'Argent*, an essay on money, for the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* (“Fortnightly Journals”) in 1913. *Communio: International Catholic Review* presented a selection from this longer piece (no. 36 [Fall 2009]: 534–564), translated by Michelle K. Borrás, and has given permission to *Humanum* to reprint the excerpt that follows (p. 536–543). Péguy’s ideas have accompanied us as we navigated the theme of work this year: we have featured Péguy’s thought on [finding eternal meaning in our daily work](#), on [children inspiring the work of their parents](#) and on [the surrender of sleep](#).

If we live long enough to reach the age of the Confessions, if the many enterprises launched on all sides leave us space to write down the world we knew, I will try to portray a little of that which was, around 1880, this admirable world of primary school instruction. More generally, I will try to portray what was then all that admirable world of workers and peasants, to sum it up in a word, all that admirable people.

It was rigorously the old France and the people of the old France. It was a world where, when this beautiful noun was applied to it, this beautiful word, “people,” received its full, its ancient application. When we speak of “the people” today, we play at literature, and at one of the lowest kinds: electoral, political, parliamentary literature. There is no people any more. Everybody is bourgeois. Because everybody reads his paper. The little that remained of the old aristocracy, or rather, of the old aristocracies, has become a petty bourgeoisie. The old aristocracy has become, like the others, a bourgeoisie of money. The old bourgeoisie has become a petty bourgeoisie, a bourgeoisie of money. As for the workers, they only have one idea now, and that is to become bourgeois. That’s even what they call becoming socialists. The peasants are about the only ones who have remained profoundly peasants.

We were brought up in a wholly other world. One can say, in the most rigorous sense of the words, that a child brought up in the city of Orléans between 1873 and 1880

literally touched the old France, the old people, the people as such, that it literally participated in the old France, in the people. One can even say that it participated in this entirely, for the old France was still everything, and intact. The debacle was accomplished, if I may say so, all in one piece, and in less than a few years.

We will try to express it: we knew, we touched the old France, and we knew it intact. We were children of it. We knew a people, we touched it, we were of the people, when there was one. The least worker of that time was a man of the old France, and today the most insufferable of Monsieur Maurras' [1] disciples is not by an atom a man of the old France.

We will try, if we can, to portray this. A most intelligent woman, advancing cheerfully toward her seventieth-plus year, said: the world changed less during my first sixty years than it has changed in the past ten years. We have to go further. We have to say with her, to say beyond her: the world changed less since Jesus Christ than it has changed in the past thirty years. There was the old (and biblical) age. There was the Christian age. There is the modern age. A farmhouse in the Beauce, even after the war, was infinitely closer to a Gallo-Roman farmhouse, or rather, to the same Gallo-Roman farmhouse, in its mores, in its status, in its seriousness, in its gravity, in its very structure and institution, in its dignity (and the same, at bottom, as a farmhouse of Xenophon), than it is like itself today. We will try to express it. We knew a time when, when a good woman said a word, it was her very race, her being, her people that was speaking. That was coming out. And when a worker lit his cigarette, what he was going to tell you was not what the newsman said in that morning's paper. The free-thinkers of that time were more Christian than our pious people today. An ordinary parish of that time was infinitely closer to a parish of the fifteenth century, or of the fourth century, let's say the fifth or the eighth, than a parish of today.

It's because of this that we risk being extremely unjust toward Michelet [2] and all those of his race, and what is even more serious, being extremely ununderstanding of Michelet and all those of his race. Of being unintelligent. When today we say, "the people," we are cutting a figure, even a rather sorry figure, and even a figure that is altogether vain, I mean to say a figure within which we can't place anything at all. And moreover a political figure, and a parliamentary figure. But when Michelet and those of his race spoke of the people, it was they who were in the reality itself, it was they who spoke of a being and who had known this being. Now, that being, that people, is the same one we also knew, it's the one in which we were brought up. It's the one that we knew still in its full functioning, in all of its life, in all of its race, in all its beautiful free play. And nothing could be foreseen; and it seemed that it would

never end. Ten years later, there was nothing left. The people set out with a vengeance to kill the people, almost instantaneously, to suppress the very being of the people, a little like how the family of Orléans, a little less instantaneously maybe, set out with a vengeance to kill the king. Everything we are suffering from, by the way, comes from Orléans: an Orléanism of religion; an Orléanism of the republic.

This is what we would have to show in the Confessions. And try to make visible. And try to make understood. All the more exactly, all the more preciously, and if we can all the more uniquely, because we will never see it again. There are innocences that cannot be recovered. There are ignorances that fall away absolutely. There are irreversibles in the lives of peoples as in the lives of men. Rome never returned to being straw huts. Not only, on the whole, everything is irreversible. But there are ages, irreversibles properly speaking.

Would you believe it, we were nurtured in a cheerful people. At that time, a workplace was a place on the earth where men were happy. Today a workplace is a place on the earth where men complain, hold grudges, beat one another, kill one another.

In my time, everybody sang. (Except me, but I was already unworthy to be of that time.) In most of the trade guilds, they sang. Today they grumble. At that time, one earned so to speak nothing. The salaries were of a level we can't imagine. And yet everybody ate. There was in the most humble houses a kind of ease we have lost the memory of. At bottom, one didn't count. And one didn't have anything to count. And one could raise children. And one raised them. There wasn't this kind of frightful economic strangulation we have now, that every year gives us another turn of the screw. One didn't earn anything; one didn't spend anything; and everybody lived.

There wasn't this economic strangulation of today, this scientific strangulation, cold, rectangular, proper, neat, flawless, implacable, wise, shared, constant, comfortable as a virtue, where there is nothing to say, and where the one who is strangled is so obviously at fault.

We will never know how far the decency and the exactitude [justesse] of soul of this people went; such a finesse, such a profound culture will not be found again. Nor such a finesse and care in speaking. Those people would have blushed at our best tone of today, which is the bourgeois tone. And today everybody is bourgeois.

Would you believe us, and this comes down to the same, we knew workers who wanted to work. They hadn't a thought but of working. We knew workers who in the

morning hadn't a thought but of working. They got up in the morning, and at what hour, and they sang at the idea that they were leaving for work. At eleven they sang going to supper. In brief, it's always Hugo; and it's always to Hugo that we have to return: they went, they sang. To work was their very joy, and the deep root of their being. And the reason of their being. There was an incredible honor of work, the most beautiful of all honors, the most Christian, maybe the only one that stands. This is, for example, why I say that a free-thinker of that time was more Christian than a pious person of our day. Because a pious person of our day is bound to be a bourgeois. And today everybody is bourgeois.

We knew an honor of work exactly the same as that which in the middle ages guided the hand and the heart. It was the same, preserved intact underneath. We knew this care pushed to the point of perfection, equally in the whole, equally in the tiniest detail. We knew this piety of the work well done pushed, maintained to the point of its most extreme demand. All during my childhood, I saw chairs being woven with exactly the same spirit and the same heart, and the same hand, with which the same people cut the stone for its cathedrals.

What is left today of all that? How did we make, of the most hard-working people of the earth, and maybe the only hard-working people of the earth, of the only people maybe who loved work for the sake of work, and honor for honor, and in order to work, this people of shoddy workers. How were we able to make of it this people that at the workplace directs all its attention to not lifting a finger. This will be one of the greatest victories in history, and no doubt the only one, of the bourgeois intellectual demagoguery. But we have to admit that it counts. This victory.

There was the Christian revolution. And there was the modern revolution. These are the two we have to count. An artisan of my time was an artisan of it didn't matter what Christian time. An artisan of today is no longer an artisan.

In this beautiful honor of the trade, all the most beautiful, all the most noble sentiments converged. A dignity. A pride. Never to ask anybody for anything, they said. See what ideas we were raised in. For to ask for work, wasn't to ask. It was the most normal, the most natural request in the world, not even a request. It was to put oneself in one's place in a workshop. It was, in a hard-working city, to put yourself quietly in the place of work that was waiting for you. A worker of that time didn't know what it was to beg. It's the bourgeoisie that begs. It's the bourgeoisie who, in making them bourgeois, taught them to beg. Today, in this very insolence and this brutality, in this sort of incoherence that they bring to their claims, it is very easy to

perceive this gnawing shame, to be forced to ask, to have been led, by the events of economic history, to beg. Oh yes they ask something of somebody, now. They even ask everything from everybody. To demand is still to ask. It's still to serve.

Those workers didn't serve. They worked. They had an honor, an absolute honor, as is proper for honor. A stick for a chair had to be well made. It was understood. It was the first thing. It didn't have to be well made for the salary or in return for the salary. It didn't have to be well made for the patron or for the experts or for the clients of the patron. It had to be well made itself, in itself, for itself, in its very being. A tradition, come, risen from the depths of the race, a history, an absolute, an honor demanded that this stick for a chair was well made. All the parts in the chair that were not seen were exactly just as perfectly made as the parts that were seen. This is the very principle of the cathedrals.

And still it's I who have thought about it so long, I the degenerate one. For them, in them, there wasn't the shadow of a reflection. One worked well.

Being seen or not being seen wasn't the point. It was the very being of the work that had to be well done.

And an incredibly deep sentiment of what today we call "a sporting man's honor," but which at that time was everywhere. Not only the idea of handing over the best, but the idea, in the best, in the good, of handing over the most. Not only to him who made the best, but to him who made the most of the best, it was a beautiful, continual sport of all hours, which penetrated life itself. Which was woven through it. A boundless disgust for work done badly. More than a lordly scorn for him who worked badly. But the idea never even occurred to them.

All honors converged on this honor. A decency, and a finesse of language. A respect for the home. A sense of respect, of all respects, of the very being of respect. A so to speak constant ceremony. Besides, the home was still very often the workshop and the honor of the home and the honor of the workshop were the same honor. It was the honor of the same place. It was the honor of the same hearth. What became of all that.

Everything after getting out of bed in the morning was a rhythm and a rite and a ceremony. Everything was an event; sacred. Everything was a tradition, a teaching, everything was handed down, everything was the most sacred routine. Everything was an elevation, interior, and a prayer, all the day long, sleep and waking, work and the little bit of rest, the bed and the table, the soup and the roast, the house and the garden, the door and the street, the yard and the doorstep, and the plates on the table.

They said laughing, and to annoy the priests, that work is prayer, and they didn't think to have expressed it so well.

So much was their work a prayer. And their workshop an oratory.

Everything was the long playing out of a beautiful rite. They would have been very surprised, these workers, and what would have been, not even their disgust, their incredulity, how they would have thought we were joking if we told them that a few years later, at the workplaces, the workers,—the craftsmen—, would officially propose doing as little work as possible; and that they would consider this to be a great victory. Such an idea, for them, supposing they could conceive of it, would have struck a direct blow at themselves, at their being, it would have meant questioning their capacity, since it would have meant supposing that they would not do as much as they could. It would be like supposing that a soldier would not be victorious.

They, too, lived in a perpetual victory, but what a different victory. How much the same and how different. A victory of all the hours of the day in all the days of a life. An honor equal to it didn't matter what military honor. The same sentiments as the imperial guard.

And consequently or together with these all the adjoining or connected beautiful sentiments, all the derived and filial beautiful sentiments. A respect for the elderly; for parents, for familial relations. An admirable respect for children. Naturally, a respect for women. (And we have to mention it, because today it's this that's so lacking, a respect for women on the part of women themselves.) A respect for the family, a respect for the home. And above all a proper taste and a respect for respect itself. A respect for the tool, for the hand, that supreme tool.—I'm losing my hand at work, the old men used to say. And that was the end of everything. The idea that one would be able to damage one's tools deliberately wouldn't even have seemed to them the ultimate of sacrileges. It wouldn't even have seemed to them the worst of follies. It wouldn't even have seemed monstrous to them. It would have seemed to them the most extravagant of suppositions. It would have been like talking to them about cutting off their hand. The tool was only a hand that was longer or harder (nails of steel), or assigned to a more particular task. A hand that was made for oneself, expressly for this or for that.

For a worker to damage a tool, for them, would have been, in that war, the conscript who cut off his thumb.

One earned nothing, one lived on nothing, and one was happy. There was no question

of handing oneself over, on top of all this, to the mathematicians of sociology. This is a fact, one of the rare facts that we are aware of, that we have been able to embrace, one of the rare facts we can testify to, one of the rare facts that are incontestable.

Note that today, at bottom, doing nothing at the workplaces doesn't amuse them. They would rather work. They are not of this hard-working race for nothing. They hear this call of the race. The hand that itches, that wants to work. The arm that gets bored doing nothing. The blood that flows in their veins. The mind that races ahead and that by a kind of anticipated covetousness, by a kind of preemption, by a genuine anticipation, takes hold in advance of the finished work. Like their fathers, they hear the silent call of the work that wants doing. And at bottom, they are disgusted with themselves, with damaging their tools. But see, the very fine gentlemen, the ones who know, the bourgeois explained that this was socialism, and that this was the revolution.

For we can't say it often enough. All evil came from the bourgeoisie. All aberration, all crime. It was the capitalist bourgeoisie that infected the people. And they infected it precisely with the bourgeois and capitalist spirit.

I use the term capitalist and gross bourgeoisie deliberately. The working-class bourgeoisie, to the contrary, the petite bourgeoisie has become the most unhappy class of all social classes, the only one today that really works, the only one that consequently preserved intact the worker's virtues, and for its recompense the only one that really lives in misery. It alone held out, we ask by what miracle, it alone still holds out, and if there is some sort of recovery, it's because this class will have preserved the statute.

Thus the workers did not at all keep the worker's virtues; and it is the petite bourgeoisie that kept them.

The capitalist bourgeoisie, on the other hand, infected everything. It infected itself and it infected the people, with the same infection. It infected the people doubly; both the bourgeoisie in itself remaining itself; and through the renegade portions of itself that it injected into the people.

It infected the people as antagonist; and as schoolmaster.

It itself infected the people, in itself and remaining itself. If the bourgeoisie remained not so much maybe what it was than what it had to be and could be, the economic arbiter of sale value, the working class asked only to remain that which it had always

been, the economic source of sale value.

We can't say it often enough, it's the bourgeoisie that began to sabotage things, and all sabotage had its birth in the bourgeoisie. It's because the bourgeoisie began to treat human work as stock value that the worker, too began to treat his own work as stock value. It's because the bourgeoisie began perpetually to trade stock with human work that the worker, too, by imitation, by collusion and compromise, and one could almost say by an understanding, began continually to trade stock with his own work. It's because the bourgeoisie began to practice perpetual blackmail on human work that we live under a regime of stock exchanges and the blackmail that are called strikes: thus disappeared the notion of the fair price, about which our bourgeois intellectuals talk themselves hoarse, but which had been no less for all that the enduring foundation of a whole world.

Charles Péguy (1873–1914) was a notable French poet, essayist and editor.

[1] Charles Maurras (1868–1952), director and co-founder of the royalist journal, *L'Action Française*, the mouthpiece of the radically integralist political movement of the same name.

[2] Jules Michelet (1798–1874), a French historian who published a work entitled *The People* (1845).

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It's Complicated: Parents, Work and Tax Reform

ERNIE TEDESCHI

President Trump signed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA), the most significant piece of tax legislation in more than a decade, just a few days shy of Christmas in 2017.

Although “working families” were often at the forefront of the debate surrounding the controversial proposal, their omnipresence in the political oratory was disproportionate to their centrality in the bill itself. The tax reform proposal went through several iterations over the last two years—one might argue its gestation period was even longer than that—but its guiding light was always reform of the business tax system and changes to individual income taxes, neither of which pay particular heed to parenthood. In early drafts, in fact, the TCJA’s greater generosity for parent-focused provisions simply offset more onerous proposed changes elsewhere.

The TCJA therefore was never first and foremost about parents specifically.

But parents still do see meaningful changes in the TCJA. In the end, most parents who work in wage jobs—at least while the TCJA is in effect—will see lower taxes and higher take-home income. On the broader question of the relationship between families and work, however, the era of the TCJA is more equivocal. Parents yearning to work more will find they now face greater rewards for doing so. But parents seeking more balance between work and family life will find that many of the riches of tax reform elude them.

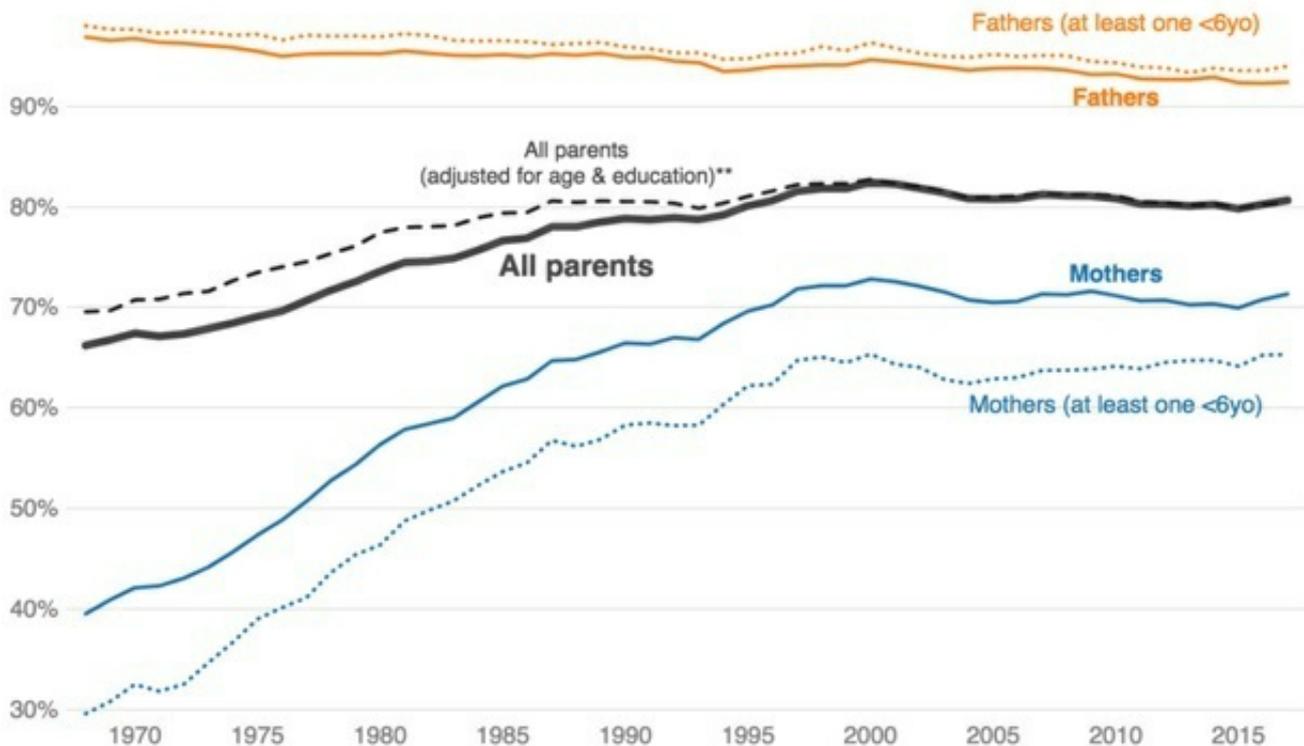
The State of Parents and the Labor Market

The tax reform bill passed in the context of near-historical highs in parental labor force participation. Fifty years ago, about two-thirds of parents with young children were in the labor force, meaning they either held a job outside the home or were actively seeking one. Today that number is around 80%. Though parental labor force

participation fell slightly in response to the Great Recession, it has been on the rise for the last couple of years and is gradually returning to its pre-2000 high.

Mothers have become more likely to be in the labor force; fathers less so.

Percent of parents participating in the labor force (holding an outside job or actively seeking one) as of March each year*



* Parents defined as adults living with at least one own-child under 18 years old. Parents with at least one child under 6 years old shown separately.

** Age & education held to 2013-17 proportions.

Source: Census, BLS, IPUMS CPS ASEC extract, author's analysis. • Created with Datawrapper

In economic discourse it is easy to talk about labor force participation as an unqualified positive, and to get lost in the discipline's often-dehumanizing terms of art: labor is a "factor" of production which, when combined with capital, the other factor, is what creates "output." Utilizing more labor is one way the economy grows, at least in the near-term. A growing economy is a more prosperous and successful one. Etc, etc. An economist's instinctive reaction to the rise in parental labor force participation, for example, might not be to marvel at its heights but to ask why it did not grow more after 2000!

Of course, there often is a legitimate and substantial upside from rising workforce participation, not just from income gains but also from intangible factors like

resistance to future recession, community cohesion, and basic dignity. For this reason, weak or stagnant US labor force participation in certain contexts—for example, **among men in their prime working years**—is a real concern that merits attention.

And for some parents who have proactively sought to work more, this rise in participation partially reflects positive trends, such as the erosion of employment barriers to women in certain occupations once open solely to men.

Finally, a portion of these gains are not due to changes in the economy itself, but rather due to changes in the characteristics of parents themselves. **Americans are having kids at an increasingly older age than prior generations**, which means today's parents tend to be further along in their careers, on average, and so have more labor force attachment. And like all Americans, modern parents are also more educated on average, further strengthening their labor force attachment. In fact, if all the parents of the last 50 years looked more like the parents of the last five years in terms of age and education, then labor force participation would have been higher back in the late 1960s, and thus the subsequent gains somewhat milder.

But rising participation should also prompt nuanced reflection. When children are involved, having both parents working outside the home inevitably involves serious trade-offs, particularly when parents feel compelled to do so just to scrape by a sufficient living. And rising parental participation in the labor market could be a signal of weak social support for parents.

Moreover, these trade-offs between work and family are becoming more consequential and more unequal. Work is not the automatic ticket to relative prosperity the way it used to be, and it is not just a figment of our grandparents' imaginations that one wage earner used to be sufficient for married parents to enjoy a comfortable lifestyle.

Up until 1980, only one wage earner was necessary for a typical married family with kids to roughly keep up with overall US median income. Then the double-dip recessions of 1980 and 1982 hit, and single-earner families have never recovered the ground they lost to dual-earner families. In 2017 single-earner families earned only 82% of the overall US median, a 50-year low.

In fact, the American economy today looks increasingly like one where both parents "have" to work to get ahead. Dual-earner income began pulling away in 1990; whereas once two working parents could expect to bring in about 25% more than the US median, in 2017 their income was 51% higher. As single-earner families lose

ground, dual-earner families keep increasing their lead.

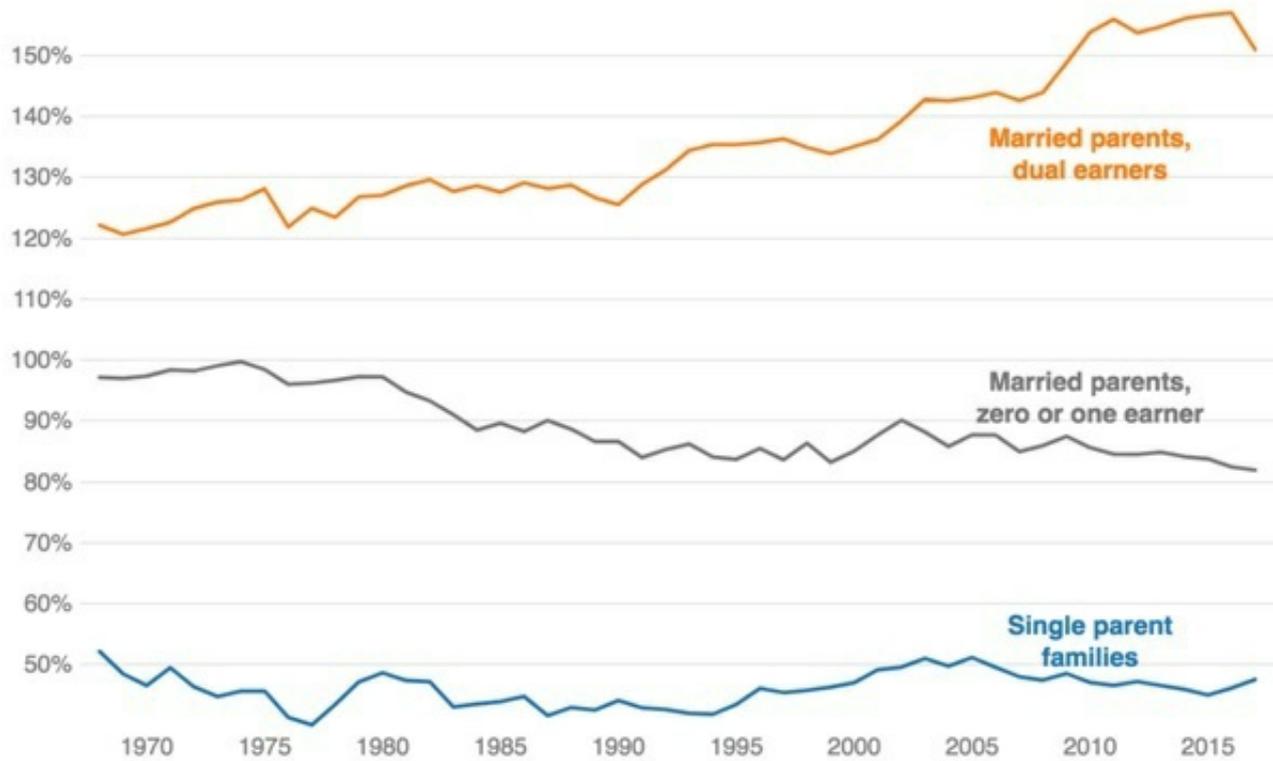
But even here, the struggles of dual-earner families to gain ground can be Sisyphean. Having both parents work incurs additional economic costs, of course—not to mention human costs—that counteract their wage gains. To illustrate but one, the growth in dual-earner income since the late 1960s has only just kept pace with the cost of child care.

Some other recent developments are undeniably positive: for example, **child poverty is at a record low in the United States**. This is partially thanks to absolute wage growth over the last 50 years. But the labor market alone cannot claim all the credit here: it also owes much to the introduction and expansion of targeted public programs like the Child Tax Credit, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and food stamps. And despite all of this, one in seven American children remain impoverished. These lessons are important to keep in mind as we continue working to lift the remaining one in seven children out of poverty.

All of these factors may in part explain, or be explained by, the far greater rarity of single-earner parental families today.

Only dual earner parents have made income gains relative to the overall median.

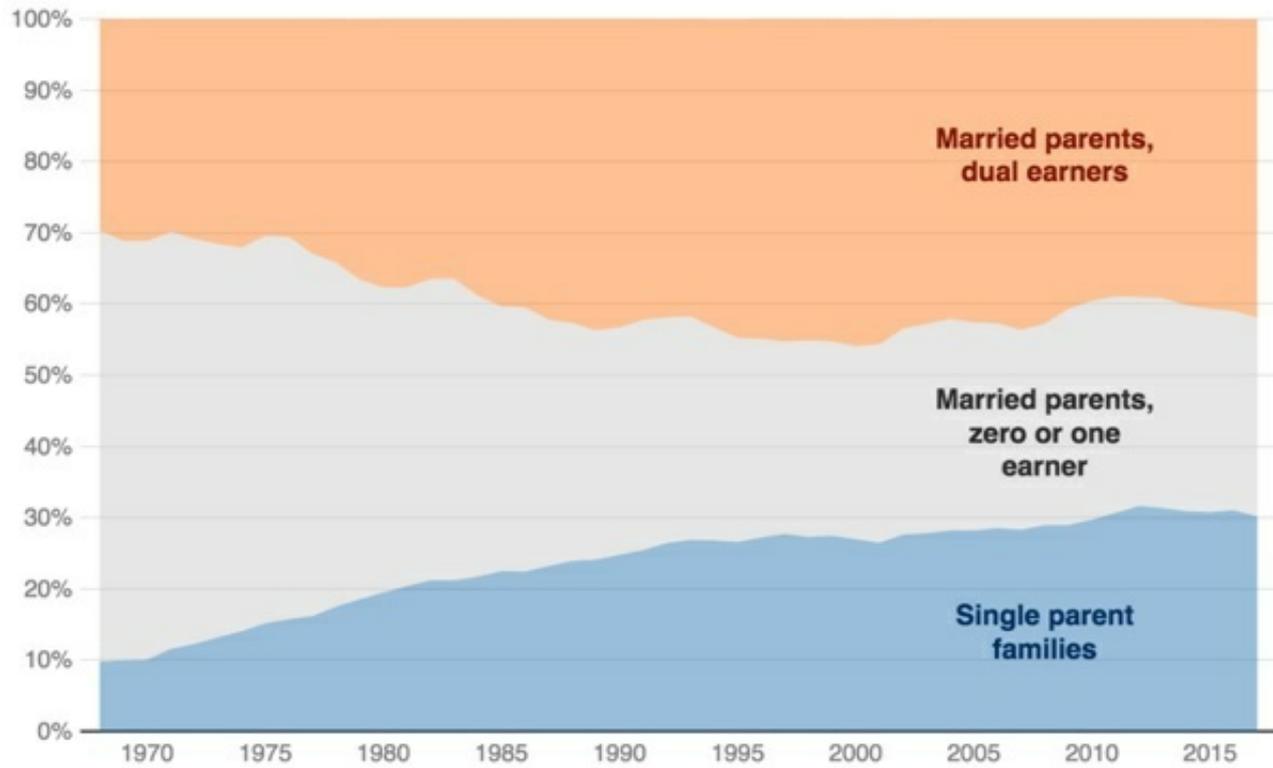
Median family income by parental family type, as a percent of overall median family income



Source: Census, BLS, IPUMS CPS ASEC extract, author's analysis. • Created with Datawrapper

Single-earner married parents are far less common than 50 years ago.

Percent of all families with children < 18 years old as of March each year



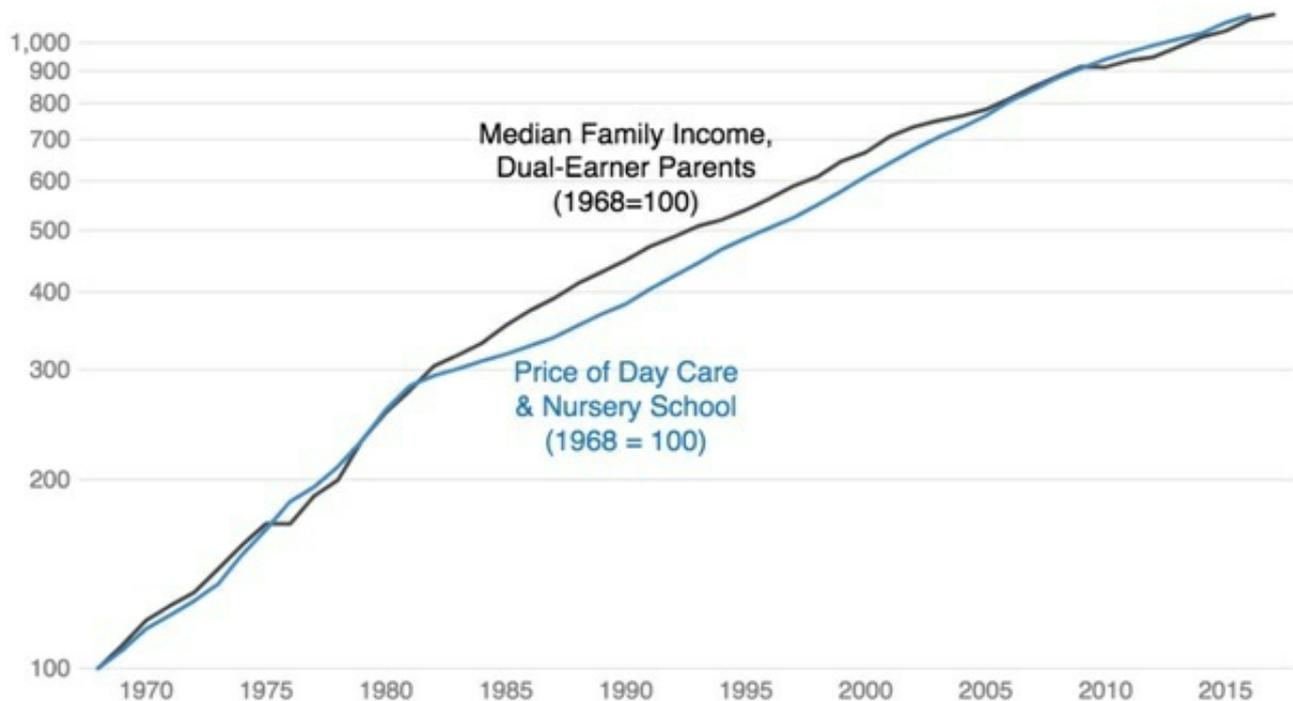
Source: Census, BLS, IPUMS CPS ASEC extract, author's analysis. • Created with Datawrapper

Dual-earner parents have only just kept up with the cost of child care.

Median family income of dual-earner parents (indexed, 1968 = 100)

Price index for day care & nursery school (indexed, 1968 = 100)

Logarithmic scale



Source: Census, BLS, IPUMS CPS ASEC extract, BEA, author's analysis. • Created with Datawrapper

What Did Tax Reform Change?

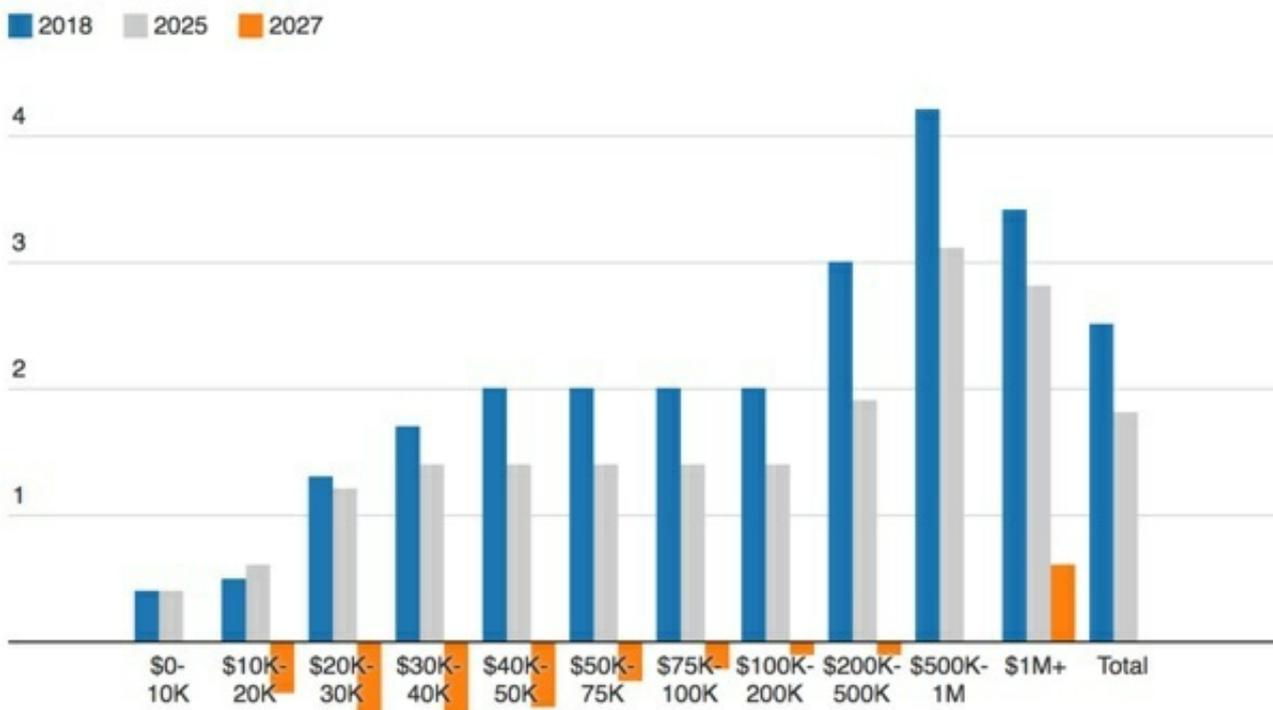
It is into this complex context that President Trump signed the TCJA last December.

For many families, the simple bottom line question is “Will we see lower taxes?” And broadly, the answer is “yes,” at least over the next seven years. All together, around 80% of parental filers should see a tax cut each year before 2026, with the average relief among all parents being roughly equivalent to a 2.5% raise.

This benefit, however positive though it may be for most families, is not evenly distributed. Higher-income filers, particularly those above \$200,000 in income, will see a larger percentage rise in their after-tax incomes. Whereas a parent making \$35,000 could expect to see a 1.7% jump, families making \$800,000 would see more than double that on average. As a consequence, the tax law will manage to both increase most incomes across the board but also make incomes more unequal than before.

Most parents will see a short-term benefit from the tax law, but also a long-term harm if it expires as scheduled.

Percent change in after-tax income from TCJA as passed among parental tax filers
By income group (in 2017\$)



Source: Tax Policy Center Tables T17-0311, T17-0313, & T17-0315. • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Crucially too, Congress wrote the TCJA so that tax relief for households expires in 2026; this lowered the official 10-year cost of the legislation to make it more palatable to legislators concerned about the deficit. If the law is not extended come 2026, more than half of all filers, including most middle-class families, will then see a tax hike. Advocates for the law insist that a future Congress is all but guaranteed to be politically constrained to extend these cuts, pointing to the extension of the 2001/3 tax cuts when they expired at the end of 2010 as precedent. However this is not a fait accompli, and Congress has in recent history allowed other middle-class tax cuts to expire, such as the Making Work Pay tax credit in 2010.

So in the near-term, most parents will see some benefit, though it will vary by income.

A different way of assessing the impact of the TCJA on families is whether the benefits are primarily geared to incentivize parents to work more or to support parents who stay at home.

Broadly, the law does a bit of both, though the full weight of the benefits lean towards

parents who work more. Most of the benefits to households come from changes that lower what economists call marginal tax rates. Think of the marginal tax rate as the added tax one would pay by working a little bit more. The lower the marginal tax rate, generally the more likely it is that someone will decide it is worthwhile to devote more time to wage labor rather than to time at home. The TCJA's cuts to the individual income tax brackets, for example, as well as its increase in the standard deduction, are designed to lower marginal tax rates for many families.

To be clear, lower marginal tax rates do not force people to work more, and in fact many households who do not change their work hours at all can still see some benefit. However, the policies are designed to nudge families toward more work, not less.

These policies play out differently across income groups and marriage statuses. While all types of families see a positive benefit on average in the early years, low- and middle-income single parents tend to see a greater benefit than married parents. Married one-earner households do however begin to see a small relative advantage from the tax law above \$75,000 in income, and then a significant one above \$200,000 in income.

Single parents tend to benefit more at lower incomes; married parents benefit more at higher incomes.

Percent change in after-tax income from TCJA as passed among parental tax filers in 2019
By family type and income group (in 2017\$)



Source: Tax-Calculator 0.14.1, author's calculations. - [Get the data](#) - Created with [Datawrapper](#)

The policy change that most breaks with the strategy of prioritizing work incentives is the law's expansion of the Child Tax Credit. Under the TCJA, up to \$2,000 per child can now be used to offset any federal tax income liability a family has (up from \$1,000 previously). Even if families have no income tax liability, up to \$1,400 per child may still be folded into their refunds.

The new Child Tax Credit rules are, without question, more generous than the prior parameters of the program, and a great deal of the benefit to families, especially low-income families, stems to this change.

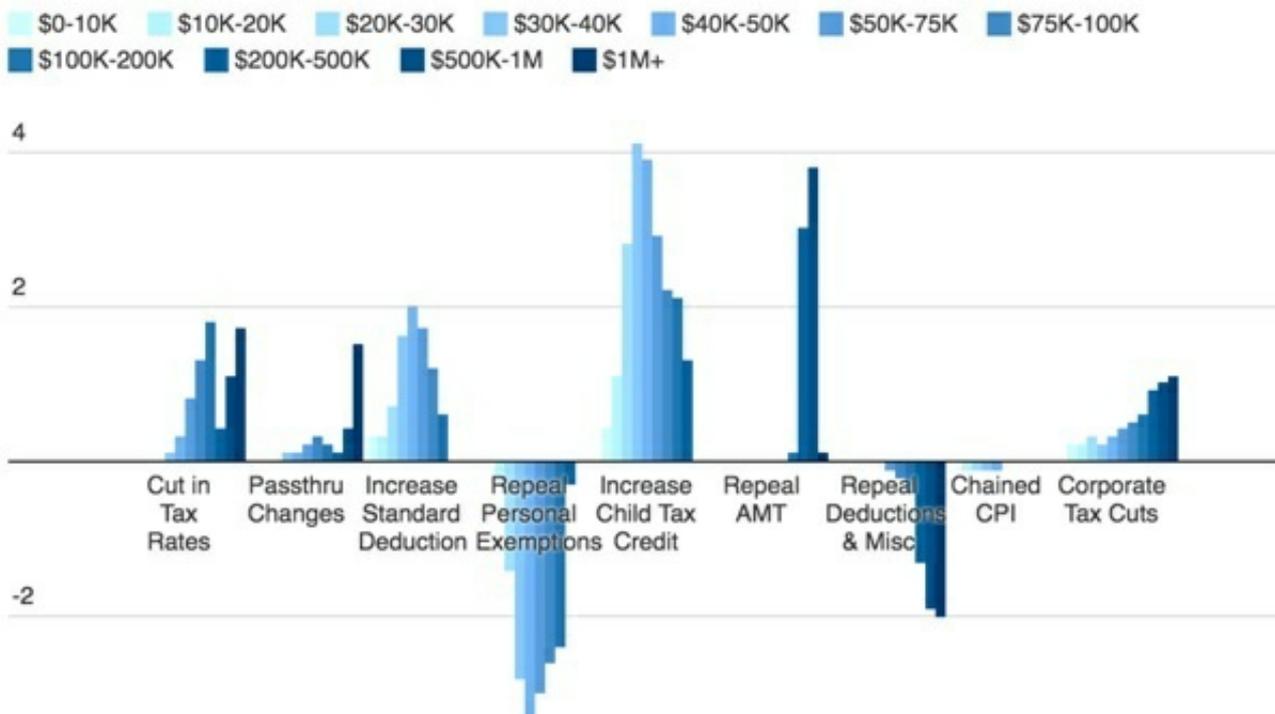
But even the Child Tax Credit has elements of work incentives. Part of it is "nonrefundable," meaning families need to have at least some federal income tax liability to enjoy the full benefit of the credit. And the refundable portion only phases in gradually with income. Both of these mechanics mean that for many working-class families, the Child Tax Credit still represents a cut in marginal tax rates that requires

more work to maximize its benefit. The upshot is that a married family with three children would have to earn around \$43,000 before they see the full amount of the Child Tax Credit. To its proponents, these work incentives are a feature, not a bug. But it may come as a surprise to some that the piece of the tax code most often touted as “pro-family” is more accurately described as “pro-working-parent” for many.

Another thing to keep in mind is that the expansion of the Child Tax Credit in the TCJA does not exist in a vacuum. The law scaled back or even repealed other provisions that benefited parents. So looked at holistically, a large part of the Child Tax Credit expansion just offsets these negative changes, and the bottom line gain to families ends up being much less. For example, families used to be able to exempt \$4,050 from their taxable income per family member, a benefit that quickly grew valuable for parents with young children. The TCJA repealed this exemption. The TCJA repealed this exemption.

The benefits of the child tax credit hike were large but mainly offset the loss of personal exemptions.

Percent increase in after-tax income from the TCJA in 2019 among families with children <18
By income group (in 2017\$)



Source: Tax-Calculator 0.14.1, author's calculations. • Created with Datawrapper

The final law also did not go nearly as far as proposals from both parties to strengthen the Child Tax Credit even further. A [proposal](#) from Senators Marco Rubio and Mike Lee

would have made the full \$2,000 per child credit refundable and allowed it to phase-in with the first dollar of wages (the final TCJA requires parents earn \$2,500 before the credit starts phasing in), which would have allowed more benefits to accrue to the parents most in need. An **even more ambitious proposal** from Senators Bennet and Brown would have made the child tax credit a true child allowance supporting both working and stay-at-home parents, with a \$3,000-per-child credit (\$3,600 for children under 6) fully refundable regardless of income. Among other things, researchers at Columbia University estimated that this plan would have **cut the child poverty rate in half**. These proposals were offered as amendments to the TCJA, but neither made it into the final law.

Conclusion

As America enters 2018 with a very different tax code than what we had in 2017, we will find that the new tax law makes some improvements and builds some new bridges between families and the labor market. Parents will for the most part enjoy a tax break in the law's first seven years, though the law's long-term durability is not yet certain. Should it expire, the tax code could make parents far worse off than today.

Moreover, the TCJA shows that as we grapple with real problems around labor force participation—many still left over from the 2001 recession—families are getting swept up in the notion that a rising workforce is an unqualified good, and that “pro-family” policies necessarily must encourage more work. In doing so, we are missing opportunities to reinforce support for parents even further in a way that fundamentally changes the trade-off between family and work.

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Keep reading! Click [here](#) to read our next article, *Distributism Rebooted*: John Médaille, Wendell Berry and Allan Carlson

Distributism Rebooted: John Médaille, Wendell Berry and Allan Carlson

RUSSELL SPARKES

A few years ago I pointed out that the obvious failure of current economic policies had led thinkers of both the political left, and the political right, to look around at forgotten alternatives, and in particular at the attempt by the “Distributist” Movement in the UK in the 1920s and 1930s to put Catholic Social Teaching into practice^[1]. It is certainly true to say that the main economic problem of the present day, the massive increase in economic inequality which has fuelled the rise in populist politics, would not have surprised the Distributists of the past, who identified these trends when they were in their youth almost one hundred years ago.

The reader may well be sceptical about whether such an obscure and long-forgotten idea can really explain the major political and economic issue of our time. I will therefore initially sketch the main ideas of the original Distributists and then show how they are being taken forward at the present time in the US.

What is Distributism?

“Distributism”, as the name suggests, was an economic and political philosophy which held that property should be as widely distributed, and business as local, as possible, and preferably family-owned. Led by writers G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc, Distributism flourished in the UK for about twenty-five years until the onset of World War II and was an attempt to propose a humane economic system based upon the principles set out in the first great encyclical on Catholic social teaching, *Rerum Novarum* (1891). This encyclical criticized then-current economic and social arrangements and demanded better treatment for working people. Its official subtitle, *On the Condition of Labour*, made its import clear:

There is general agreement, that some opportune remedy must be found quickly for the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class.....By degrees it has come to pass that Working Men have been given over, isolated and defenceless, to the callousness of employers and the greed of unrestrained competition. The evil has been increased by rapacious Usury...And to this must be added the custom of working by contract, and the concentration of so many branches of trade in the hands of a few individuals, so that a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the masses of the poor a yoke little better than slavery itself.[2]

However, while *Rerum Novarum* was highly critical of late-nineteenth-century free-market capitalism, it was equally negative about the Socialist or Communist remedies then being promoted. Indeed, the encyclical was particularly condemnatory of the Socialist plan to take over the running of the family. Distributists were particularly inspired by the following quotation from *Rerum Novarum*:

We have seen that this great labour question cannot be solved except by assuming as a principle that private ownership must be held sacred and inviolable. The law, therefore, should favour ownership, and its policy should be to induce as many people as possible to become owners.[3]

Distributism began shortly before the First World War, when books like Chesterton's *What's Wrong with the World* (1910) and Belloc's *The Servile State* (1912) observed closely the way the economic system worked in practice, including its political interconnections, and its impact on the politically powerless ordinary person. They warned of an "unholy alliance" between monopoly capital and the "progressive" advocates of greater State intervention.

The importance of a return to the land was also repeatedly stressed by Distributism's third intellectual leader, Fr Vincent McNabb OP. However, when Chesterton died in 1936, Distributism essentially died with him. His labours had funded both the campaign and the magazine which was its main source of publicity. Without him Distributism lost its inspirational force; it lingered on for a few years but was essentially finished when war came in 1939. Since then it has been more or less moribund in the UK, apart from a few writers like the late great Stratford Caldecott and myself, who have tried to keep its ideas alive.

However, before moving on, I would like to stress one point that Caldecott repeatedly

made but which is rarely considered elsewhere—the essential point of Christian anthropology in regard to Catholic Social Teaching. He articulated this idea with characteristic clarity in a 1990 piece in *Communio* which gave a theological underpinning to Distributism:

It is love, in the sense of self-gift, of sacrifice, that creates community. A theology of community, which will also be a theology of the distribution of property, starts from the fact that the three Persons of the Trinity each give themselves without reserve to the others. It is the possession of the one, undivided divine nature in three ways, as given, as shared, that constitutes God as three persons. The closest analogy on earth to this loving exchange is found in marriage... which becomes the foundation of human society in general...

In the case of marriage, one might argue, the vow by which the spouses give themselves to each other under God is what constitutes them as a community, and it gives them the right to own property sufficient to sustain themselves and their children. If these thoughts are correct, they provide conclusions quite similar to the “Distributism” proposed earlier this century by G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc. The earth is given to humanity, the land of Israel to the Chosen People, the covenant of marriage gives a family the right to what the Distributists called a small-holding. Defined as the minimum property (of whatever kind) on which a family can sustain itself, the small-holding is to the family what the common earth is to humanity.[\[4\]](#)

In my opinion many people who look at Catholic Social Teaching’s critique of current economic arrangements mistakenly try and assess these arrangements on the basis of standard economic theory; this is to totally and utterly misunderstand it. Economics is a child of the Enlightenment, its basic premise being that individual self-interest can work for the common good through the mystery of the market. Catholic Social Teaching is based upon a very different fundamental premise, namely, that human beings are persons defined in relation to one another, rather than individuals defined against one another. I was struck by what Pope Saint John Paul II said on this topic in his last book, *Memory and Identity*, published in 2005, the year of his death, about the need for authentic freedom and a true anthropology.[\[5\]](#)

Distributism in the United States

Yet if Distributist thinking is fairly moribund in the UK, fortunately it is alive and well across the Atlantic. The Chesterton Review, founded in 1974, and based at Seton Hall

University looks at aspects of Chesterton’s life and works, including his Distributist legacy. There is also the quite distinct American Chesterton Society (ACS), founded in 1996 and based in Edina, Minnesota which works to promote interest in the great social thinker, including his Distributist theories. There are now nearly seventy local Chesterton Societies in the US, and ACS President Dale Ahlquist presents *The Apostle of Common Sense*, a television series on EWTN. Finally, the US also hosts *The Distributist Review*, an online magazine with a wide range of articles.

American Distributist Thinkers

a. Allan C. Carlson

Perhaps what is most encouraging about the vigor of Distributist thinking in the US is the way in which a number of heavyweight thinkers are using it to critique our modern dystopia. Three examples come to mind. In a past issue of [Humanum](#) I discussed Allan C. Carlson’s book *Third Ways*, which examines a number of attempts at creating family-centred economies in the twentieth century—Distributism in action you might say. Carlson is a professor of history at Hillsdale College, Michigan, and president of the Howard Center for Family, Religion & Society. *Third Ways* repeatedly witnesses to his wide reading and deep scholarship. I can also commend Dr. Carlson’s earlier book, *From Cottage to Workstation: The Family’s Search for Social Harmony in the Industrial Age*.^[6] This might be characterised as a “Distributist social history” of America. As this book’s conclusion states:

[Society should] move toward a broadened distribution of land and other private property among citizens, with a strong preference for family-held and -operated enterprises. Hilaire Belloc, the Vanderbilt Agrarians, and Wendell Berry have, in different times and places, joined in with Chesterton and Zimmerman in offering a shared vision of the good society, reborn through a primary commitment to autonomous families rooted in communities of character.^[7]

b. Wendell Berry

The quotation from Carlson’s book above is a good place to mention my second important US Distributist thinker, the great Kentucky farmer, poet, essayist, and novelist Wendell Berry. I don’t think Berry has ever explicitly described himself as a “Distributist”, but his clear and urgent appeal to all of us to care for the land, and his distrust of conventional economics, is identical in spirit to those of the classic

Distributist thinkers of the 1930s. In 2003 ISI Books published a 500-page book edited by Doug Bandow and David L. Schindler entitled, *Wealth, Poverty, and Human Destiny*.^[8] Arguably, the most incisive part of that book was a brief essay by Wendell Berry called, “The Total Economy”. Its excoriating attack, couched in an utterly Distributist mode of analysis, upon the modern political gospel of globalisation reminds how colonial powers brought the market economy to Africa around one hundred years ago:

[People] gave up their local means of subsistence, and imposed the false standard of a foreign demand (“as many trees as possible”) upon their forests. They thus became helplessly dependent on an economy over which they had no control. Such was the fate of the native people under the African colonialism.... Such is, and can only be, the fate of everybody under the global colonialism of our time.... A total economy, for all practical purposes, is a total government. The “free trade” which from the standpoint of the corporate economy brings “unprecedented economic growth” from the standpoint of the land and its local populations, and ultimately from the standpoint of the cities, is destruction and slavery. Without prosperous local economies, the people have no power and the land no voice.^[9]

c. John Médaille

My third American Distributist thinker is John Médaille, a Texas businessman who is also an instructor in theology at the University of Dallas. Médaille is a regular contributor to the *Distributist Review*, but his main contribution to this area of thought is his book: *Towards a Truly Free Market: A Distributist Perspective on the Role of Government, Taxes, Healthcare, Deficits, and More*.^[10] As the subsidiary title illustrates, the book is an attempt to utilise the insights of the earlier Distributists to tackle contemporary problems. It is divided into roughly two halves: the first being a critique of economic thinking, whilst the second offers some potential solutions.

The book begins by making a clear distinction between political economy, the subject of the early economists such as Adam Smith and JS Mill, and the modern subject of economics:

The difference between the terms is that the political economists saw their science as a humane science firmly embedded in human institutions. The new economists, on the other hand, saw their discipline not as a humane science, but as something in the order of the physical sciences, which operate independently of human intentions.^[11]

This is an important and fundamental point; as the author notes, in the late nineteenth century, thinkers like Jevons, suffering from what has been termed “physics envy”, felt that to be a science, economics had to express itself in rigid deterministic laws like the physical sciences. The leading economist of that period, Alfred Marshall, deliberately left the equations out of his celebrated text book in case they gave an unjustified impression of certainty.^[12] However, in the twentieth century, best-selling economists like Paul Samuelson insisted that the subject must have a rigorous mathematical basis; indeed, his work was modelled on that of classical thermodynamics.

However, bearing in mind the complete failure of the economics profession to predict the financial crisis in 2008, and its inability to proffer policies to restore growth to major economies, Médaille is surely right to urge us to look back to the older method of analysis. Also highly enjoyable is his discussion of the “Economic Stork Theory” developed by another fine alternative economist, John Mueller^[13]:

Modern economics tends to ignore the role of the family completely to focus on the individual. However, the individual, by himself, is sterile and not a self-sustaining entity. Neoclassical economics thus has no way to explain how new workers come into the economy, and hence it has no way to explain growth... In the stork theory, workers arrive in the economy fully grown, fully trained, and fully socialized.^[14]

Whilst the author clearly has a good understanding of economic analysis, his theological skills also enable him to cast a searchlight on its underlying assumptions. For example, he points out that modern economics claims to be a positive science, based upon a clear distinction between facts and values. Yet he goes on to show that this distinction, so fundamental to modern thought, was originally invented as a heuristic device by medieval theologians; but with the Enlightenment “the distinction became a real one—an ontological distinction”.^[15] I also like the book’s assertion that markets are not natural phenomena, but are social organisms. (Anybody interested in this point ought to read Karl Polyani’s important book, *The Great Transformation*, which showed that the market-based economies we live in did not in fact arise naturally, but were imposed by national governments on top of older structures in the nineteenth century.^[16])

Yet *Towards a Truly Free Market* is not just a theoretical critique; it provides plenty of data showing how the Thatcher-Reagan “free-market revolution” of the 1980s did

nothing of the sort, but merely extended the growth of the big-business, big-government axis. The book also makes the good Distributist point, a point repeatedly made by Chesterton in the 1920s[17], that the distribution of incomes does matter. In Médaille's terms:

A few very wealthy men simply cannot spend as efficiently as a large mass of poorer men. The CEO may make five hundred times what the line worker makes, but he cannot wear five hundred times the pairs of shoes, eat five hundred times the amount of shoes, or live in a five hundred bed mansion.[18]

One of the main motifs of *Towards a Truly Free Market* is the need to integrate justice into economic analysis. I was pleased to see the author discuss Aristotle on this, not least on the centrality of the family, as opposed to that of the individual, and the importance of distributive justice. The theologian in Médaille also comes to the fore when he is talking about money:

The function of money is to serve as a medium of exchange. It is vitally important to understand that money is not wealth, and it is a grave mistake to confuse it with wealth. Wealth is the actual goods that we have and services we can command. Money is a claim on the circulating wealth, that is, the goods and services that are for sale at any one moment.[19]

The book's negative critique ends with a chapter entitled "The Fictitious Commodities: Land," examining the classical economist Ricardo's theory of rent, i.e., that in a fully competitive economy, all of the benefits of economic growth will be absorbed in rent. It is then a natural move to start the book's positive analysis with a chapter on "Property as Proper to Man". This discusses St Thomas Aquinas' defence of private property: that it leads to better stewardship of resources, makes economic organization simple, and reduces quarrels. Yet it also notes that Aquinas nevertheless stressed that property has two aspects: ownership and use; the first being a private aspect and the second communal. (Incidentally, although Médaille does not mention it, *Rerum Novarum* makes the same use of St Thomas.[20]) For Aquinas, the common claims on property mean that in case of need, even theft is allowed: "In cases of need all things are common property, so that there would seem to be no sin in taking another's property, for need has made it common." [21]

Towards a Truly Free Market then makes a welcome call for a revival of just wage theory:

We can judge that the just wage is fulfilled under the following conditions: one, that working families, as a rule, appear to live in the dignity appropriate for that society; two, that they can do so without putting wives and children to work; three, that they have security against periods of enforced unemployment such as sickness, lay-offs, and old age; and four, that these conditions are accomplished without undue reliance on welfare payments and usury.[22]

The author then goes back to the Ricardian theory of rent, and suggests the obvious answer to it; taxes should be focused upon ground rent, but not on property improvements, which reflect the work of capital and labour, and like other work, should not be taxed. In other words, land is unique among the factors of production in not being the work of human hands. This distinguishes it from labour, and also from capital which economically speaking is saved labour. So if I lease an apartment, my rent will consist of “ground rent”, a return to the landlord simply for owning the land, “building rent”, a return on the cost of constructing the building, and service charges to maintain it. Towards a Truly Free Market briefly mentions that this idea, of just one single tax on property, dates back to the nineteenth-century heterodox economist Henry George (1839–1897). George’s basic insight was well expressed by economic historian Robert Heilbroner:

His basic criticism of society is a moral and not a mechanistic one. Why, asks Henry George, should rent exist? Why should a man benefit merely from the fact of ownership, when he may render no services to the community in exchange? We may justify the rewards of an industrialist by describing his profits as the prize for his foresight and ingenuity, but where is the foresight of a man whose grandfather owned a pasture on which, two generations later, society saw fit to erect a skyscraper?[23]

Indeed, I feel that this section of the book would have benefited from a deeper analysis of George and his work, as George was a fascinating figure in his own right; an economist who never went to college, but served as a cabin-boy and gold prospector in the California goldrush, and who became a figure of national importance in the US populist movement.[24] George’s book *Progress and Poverty* (1879) explored the paradox of rising economic inequality at a time of rapid economic and technological progress and sold several million copies, an astonishing feat for an economics book. He is sometimes dismissed as a Socialist, but this is untrue, as he disagreed with

nationalization and warned that Marx's ideas would lead to dictatorship, although he did advocate a single land tax and also controls upon natural monopolies such as roads and utilities.

Land Reform: An Impossible Dream?

One of the last chapters in *Towards a Truly Free Market* is entitled "The Practice of Distributism". It describes successful cooperatives such as Spain's Mondragon, founded by a Jesuit priest in the Basque country in 1941, and directly inspired by *Rerum Novarum*. People interested in Catholic Social Teaching often turn to cooperatives as an attractive model, yet the historical record shows that few cooperatives of any size are successful longer term. There are a number of reasons for this, which include problems of management and control, as well as the inability to attract capital. Médaille notes that "Mondragon's unique form of industrial organization", with a governing General Assembly and a separate Social Council, is a key factor in its success.

There is also a fascinating section on land reform in Taiwan, where poor peasant tenant farmers were helped by the government to buy their land. This not only created much greater social harmony, but inspired the landlord class to invest their new capital into businesses, leading to Taiwan's remarkable growth story of the last seventy years. Again, I think that the book would have been stronger if this idea had been developed more.

Critics of property redistribution often claim that this is impossible, a crazy theoretical dream. Yet the glories of Classical Athens were based upon it! In the year 594 BC Solon, the archon or chief magistrate, founded Athens' democratic system. Solon also abolished debt slavery, and redistributed land under the slogan of "the shaking off of burdens".^[25] In their time the classical Distributists were well aware of Wyndham's land reforms in Ireland in 1903. For fifty years there had been huge resentment and social unrest in Ireland due to the land being owned by absentee landlords; the reforms enabled the tenants to buy their land on the basis of long-term government loans.

Why the United States Is Fertile Soil

Yet there is one big question left unanswered; why has the United States proved to be so much more fertile soil for Distributist ideas than the United Kingdom? This is such a big question that answering it would require a major article in itself. Yet I will set

out a few thoughts. First, the vast land-mass of the USA and the sense of “the frontier” in American history and popular culture make “self-reliance” a much more vibrant and realistic concept than in overcrowded Britain. Think of frontiersman Daniel Boone, or the crowds who still flock to Walden Pond. Second, and related to the first, the idea of the homestead, of the self-sufficient family farm is still a living one in America, whereas agriculture has been commercialized and big business in the UK since the 1700s.

Lastly, I would argue that right from the beginning of its existence as an independent nation, there has been a “distributist” strand in US political and economic thought. No other country that I am aware of has a concept of “State rights”—it is uniquely American. In a forthcoming paper I have set out how Thomas Jefferson is frequently described as “great” by G.K. Chesterton, an epithet he bestowed on few other politicians, on account of his battle with Alexander Hamilton for the soul of infant America.^[26] Should it have a strongly centralised central government with close links to the financial elite, as was the case in contemporary Britain and which was Hamilton’s policy and belief, or should things be much more locally based as Jefferson wished?

Jefferson was American ambassador at the court of Louis XVI just before the French Revolution. In post-colonial America over ninety per cent of the population worked on the land. He was acutely aware that whereas in France the land was owned by the aristocracy although tilled by starving peasants, in America the vast majority of farmers owned their own land. In his opinion the latter would not be inclined to undertake rash and foolish actions. In a prophetic note Jefferson observed how the extremes of wealth and power there, much more concentrated even than in England, made a violent political explosion likely. Let me end with a quotation from the third US President:

The property of this country (i.e. France) is absolutely concentrated in a very few hands.... I am conscious that an equal division of property is impracticable, but the consequences of this enormous inequality producing so much misery to the bulk of mankind, legislators cannot invent too many devices for subdividing property.... it is not too soon to provide by every possible means that as few as possible shall be without a little portion of land. The small landholders are the most precious part of a state.^[27]

Russell Sparkes has a long-standing interest in both Catholic Social Teaching, and G.K. Chesterton and the Distributist movement. A former Chairman of the Chesterton Institute, in 1995 together with Stratford Caldecott he founded the Sane Economy project of the Centre for Faith & Culture. His books include: *Prophet of Orthodoxy—the Wisdom of G.K. Chesterton* (Harper Collins, 1997), *Sound of Heaven—a Treasury of Catholic Verse* (St Pauls, 2001), and *Cardinal Manning and the Birth of Catholic Social Teaching* (CTS, 2012).

[1] Russell Sparkes, “Chesterton as Economist”, in *The Hound of Distributism*, The American Chesterton Society 2012.

[2] *Rerum Novarum: On the Condition of Labour*, 15 May 1891, par.2. Official translation by the Vatican Polyglot Press is included in *The Social Teachings of the Church*, ed. Anne Freemantle (Mentor-Orbis Books, 1963).

[3] *Ibid.*, 35.

[4] Stratford Caldecott, “To the Editor: On the Distribution of Property”, *Communio: International Catholic Review*, vol. 17.4 (Winter 1990).

[5] St. Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity* (London: Phoenix, 2005). In particular, see Chapter 7, “Towards a Just Use of Freedom”, and Chapter 18, “The Positive Fruits of the Enlightenment”.

[6] Allan C. Carlson, *From Cottage to Workstation: The Family’s Search for Social Harmony in the Industrial Age* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993).

[7] *Ibid.*, 170.

[8] Doug Bandow and David L. Schindler, eds., *Wealth, Poverty and Human Destiny* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003).

[9] Wendell Berry, “The Total Economy”, in *Wealth, Poverty and Human Destiny*, 415–30.

[10] John C. Médaille, *Towards a Truly Free Market: A Distributist Perspective on the Role of Government, Taxes, Healthcare, Deficits, and More* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2010).

[11] *Ibid.*, 203.

[12] William Barber, “Alfred Marshall”, in *A History of Economic Thought* (London: Penguin Books, 1967).

[13] John Mueller, *Redeeming Economics: Rediscovering the Missing Element* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2010).

[14] *Towards a Truly Free Market*, 39.

[15] *Ibid.*, 27.

- [16] Karl Polyani, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Books, 1944).
- [17] See my “Chesterton as Economist”.
- [18] *Towards a Truly Free Market*, 54.
- [19] *Ibid.*, 74–75.
- [20] *Rerum Novarum*, 19.
- [21] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Sec II-II, query 66 art 7.
- [22] *Towards a Truly Free Market*, 137–38.
- [23] Robert Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers*, 7th ed. (Simon & Schuster, 1999).
- [24] *Ibid.*
- [25] Oswyn Murray, *Early Greece*, 2nd ed. (London: Fontana, 1993).
- [26] Russell Sparkes, “Chesterton, Thomas Jefferson, and the Soul of America”, *The Chesterton Review* (forthcoming, 2018).
- [27] Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Bishop James Madison 1785, published in *Thomas Jefferson, Life and Letters* (Heritage Press, 1992).

Keep reading! Click [here](#) to read our next article, *Lights and Shadows of Modern Labour*.

Lights and Shadows of Modern Labour

EDWARD HADAS

Economists show remarkably little interest in any non-monetary dimension of economic activity. The professionals' laws of the market are not designed to deal with anything that cannot be assigned a price, so they can bring little insight into the distinct virtues and vices of modern labour. A much better starting point is the brilliant 1981 encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*. What follows is inspired by that document.

It might seem that modern work is always the same, so modern work is not essentially different from pre-modern work. After all, “work is a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth” (4).^[1] It is a way in which the “human family strives to make its life more human and to render the whole earth submissive to this goal” (27). None of that will change as long as we await the coming of a new heaven and a new earth. Until then, the human effort to dominate and humanise the earth will lose neither its glorious likeness to the Creator’s own work in the world nor the penalties of human sinfulness—toil, pride, greed and the rest.

However, the modern world is new and different in significant ways—“industrial development provides grounds for re-proposing in new ways the question of human work” (5). So much has changed. Our labour has more power over the world, thanks to numerous technological developments. Our lives of labour are mostly more organised, thanks to the developments of complex bureaucracies which divide, assign and coordinate work. We are more dependent on each other, as the long chains of production and trade and the sharing of knowledge and expertise create an increasingly global workforce. We are also more divided than in the past, as the difference between labour in the rich and the poor parts of the world has become more dramatic. We are more concerned with economic matters, as secularisation has dulled the popular appeal of more spiritual concerns. We are more likely to separate work from the rest of life, as impersonal organisations increasingly take on the economic roles once played by families and small communities.

What does all this mean for the dignity of work? Well, there are—as John Paul II used to say—light and shadows. I will start with the latter.

The Shadows

It is easy to tell the whole story of industrial development, including the changes in labour, as a tragedy. Technology—impersonal monster that spawns oppressive capitalism. Money and finance—debasing and destructive. Spiritual emptiness—everywhere. We moderns have abandoned the divine rest of the Sabbath, and just want to build ever-bigger barns. Modern labour fits right in—undignified in so many ways.

Modern labour dehumanises. In manufacturing jobs, “Man is...treated on the same level as the whole complex of the material means of production, as an instrument and not in accordance with the true dignity of his work...”(7). And these people working as ersatz machines are often poorly paid and badly treated.

Modern labour alienates in its bureaucratic excess. Many people, including highly paid skilled workers and senior executives, are deeply dissatisfied by their work. After all, “the person who works ... wishes ... to be able to know that in his work ... 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...” (15).

It deadens the spirit with its dullness. There are too many narrowly defined and monotonous tasks, bound by extensive and detailed rules.

Far too much of it is actually harmful to those who work or to those who consume the fruits of the work. Pornography feeds lust, as non-nutritious food exacerbates gluttony and many idle modern pleasures placate the spiritually slothful. All these socially harmful trades require many workers.

Far too much of it is at best only a little bit better than morally neutral in its effects. Marketing, finance and law, and the many businesses which support them, all thrive. They may do a little good, but there must be better ways to deploy most of their workers’ skills and energy. Electronic gadgets do some good, but they too often distract attention from more valuable activities. It takes many millions of people to produce them and their software.

Then there are the disordered social values shown by the pay and prestige of different

occupations. Even most defenders of the value of financial activity would agree that many professionals in that field are overpaid relative to their contribution to the common good. Conversely, the vast majority of people who work at taking care of other people do relatively badly. The social undervaluation of caring labour, both unpaid and paid, is particularly hard on women, who do most of it. Even in medical care—generally considered an extremely valuable activity in modern society—the work of taking basic care of the ill is generally very poorly paid.

On the dangers of denigrating motherhood, John Paul II was clear: “It will redound to the credit of society to make it possible for a mother ... to devote herself to taking care of her children ... 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” (19). Conversely, “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” (19). Here, the pope is speaking about paying fathers enough to support a family, not the state reimbursing mothers for their labours of love. In Europe today, more than a few years of full-time unpaid motherhood requires substantial economic sacrifice. In the United States, the economic pain usually starts after a few months or even weeks.

One bad aspect of modern labour is the decline of some good pre-modern labour. Craft work has dwindled away; few artists can support themselves by selling their works; farming work is denied to many who would like it. The economic logic for these choices may be compelling, but there is also a social choice, a distressing one, to let economic logic take precedence over all other considerations. When an artist is paid to monitor social media references to a particular brand of consumer product, a job which cannot serve the social good as much as even a mediocre artistic creation, something has gone badly wrong.

Then there is the failure to do work which could be welcomed in society. Much valuable labour is not performed—from keeping public spaces beautiful and roads in good repair to taking adequate care of the weak and needy. The problem is not a shortage of workers, since far too many people are still unemployed, underemployed or unwillingly and unnecessarily idle. Nor is the problem exactly a lack of money to pay people for this work. Much valuable unpaid work is also not done or not done well. There are problems with poor organisation of labour within the economy, and deeper problems of poor social judgements about what goods should be pursued.

And the trends are discouraging. The dignity of workers is increasingly sacrificed for

the convenience of employers. A renewal of the debilitating reliance of casual and unreliable paid labour is the most notable example. Also, the daily hours dedicated to paid work, which decreased for more than a century, have started to increase, particularly in some prestigious professions.

Finally, a subtle but important problem with labour in the modern economy is that people often expect too much from it. The modern turn to radical individualism and worldly concerns, hallmarks of the last four centuries, have left many people lonely and spiritually bereft. The life of labour is increasingly relied on as a principle source of personal connection and of transcendent meaning. And it is right that it be so. Labour has a real spiritual value because “man’s work is a participation in God’s activity” (25). The value is increased when jobs offer social and intellectual rewards, which many jobs today actually do. Still, work simply cannot offer the same spiritual opportunities as worship, beauty and love. Economic concerns are too worldly, economic communities are too shallow and, in this fallen world, toil and futility are inevitably too present for the life of labour to provide deep and lasting satisfaction. To ask labour to provide a substantial portion of the fullness and meaning of life is almost a sort of idolatry.

To the extent that work does provide meaning, it is often not the joyous self-actualisation craved by enthusiasts for career satisfaction. John Paul II’s understanding of the spiritual value of suffering (see his apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris*) influenced his appreciation of labour. The “glimmer of new life, of the new good” which shines out of work always comes “through toil—and never without it” (27). This wisdom is almost never recognised in the cult of meaning through labour, so its followers, including many Christians, often put too much effort into chasing after a job which will always make them “happy.”

The Lights

All these bad things are true, and John Paul II surely knew about most of them. Still, his discussion of the “immense development of technological means” starts by calling it “an advantageous and positive phenomenon” (10). The subsequent qualifications are not significant enough to undermine his basic positive judgment. Technology, money, bureaucracy and even affluence can, and mostly do, promote great goods.

Most importantly, these modern developments allow workers to produce ample quantities of all the basic economic goods. Our work feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, extends lifespans, spreads education and heals a large portion of the ill. The

work of only a small portion of the population is needed to reach all these once impossible goals. The rest of us are potentially left free to work on things that make society even better or make our own work lives more satisfactory.

The last is a modern speciality.

Of course, work always comes with sin and toil—we can never feel too good about it. However, modern work promotes our dignity better than pre-modern labour in several fairly important ways.

Perhaps the most profound innovation is a far greater social appreciation of the value of many kinds of work which were long considered undignified. Skilled factory workers, manual labourers, workers performing tasks traditionally considered impure—the status of all of these has been elevated. Even some traditional women’s jobs—nurses, teachers and office workers—now receive a bit more respect. The Catholic Church has endorsed the modern upgrade. The veneration of St Joseph the worker was followed by the Second Vatican Council’s declaration that, even “the most ordinary everyday activities” are a “participation in God’s activity” (*Gaudium et spes*, 34).

More tangibly, there is much less body-depleting toil, thanks to new technologies. In comparison to all pre-industrial economies, far fewer people die from labour accidents, suffer infirmities from overwork or are made ill by pollution. Overall, the effluents of industry are much less damaging to health than the smoke from poorly vented fires which most women used to inhale during their daily labour.

In these countries, there is also much less cruelty to workers, thanks to a new attitude articulated in a thick net of labour laws and regulations. There have been declines in working hours (despite their recent lengthening), increases in the years spent in the relative leisure of study and retirement, improvements in workplace safety and greater protection from bad air, inadequate hygiene and even uncomfortable desks. Bullying from bosses, once so standard as hardly to be noticed, is now usually considered poor practice. The shaming of sexual abusers of the last few months is a typical welcome modern development. Behaviour which was widely considered unattractive but unavoidable may soon be unacceptable.

Many jobs are more alienating than ever, but much new labour is actually more fulfilling. Certainly, too many workers still act as quasi-machines, but an increasing portion of work requires skill, flexibility and some psychological acuity. The move of most of the population from lifelong and isolated daily toil at subsistence agriculture to changing careers in organised enterprises, often in collaboration with a wide

variety of skilled fellow workers, has increased the portion of jobs which offer significant amounts of somewhat meaningful personal interactions with colleagues and customers. In the past, only a tiny number of priests, scholars and merchants worked at intellectual labour or enjoyed professional networks which extended past a small local community. Now many more jobs are set in global networks and require the highest intellectual skills. The extension of the average number of years spent in education and the expansion of scientific research allow far more people to make more use of their intellectual gifts. Some less intellectually complex work has also become more challenging in good, life-fulfilling ways. Workers who get bored can often change jobs or careers. Further education, a soul-livening process, is encouraged.

Even the shadow of social disrespect for maternal and other domestic labours hides some light. Parents frequently have more time to dedicate to the labour of caring for their children. They often have more knowledge about how to provide good care. The decline of domestic drudgery is an undoubted gain, even if much of the freed-up time is used poorly.

The life of labour cannot be separated completely from the life of consumption, so the rewards of work—the consumption of goods and services allocated in exchange for labour—have to be considered in thinking about the goodness of modern labour. Those rewards have increased so much that the typical pattern for the poor in every pre-modern society—desperate toil, barely enough consumption goods to survive—has all but disappeared. Instead, there is a rich mix of comforts, security and opportunity.

Finally, the life of labour also cannot be separated from the life of leisure. Leisure, the worldly extension of the divine Sabbath, is essential to human fulfilment. It is time that can be dedicated to the transcendental aspirations which daily labour can never satisfy. Both the time available for leisure and the richness of available leisure activities have increased greatly, thanks to the productivity of modern labour. There are weekends, holidays, school breaks and the possibility of gap years and sabbaticals. There are more opportunities for education, there is more access to the wide world of natural beauty and human accomplishment and there are more facilities to perfect the body and enlighten the soul. The possibilities of good leisure are often ignored, but rich societies are mostly free enough for any worker to take them up.

Lights and Shadows

It is not true that for every negative of the modern age there is an equal and corresponding positive. On the contrary, the gains and losses from our centuries-long experiment with new thinking are asymmetrical and generally incommensurate. Despite this caveat, I will still hazard a judgment about the changes in the economy. There are significant negatives—I have listed a fairly long list for labour and could provide similar enumerations for production, consumption, allocation and the environment. However, there are many and, in my judgment, probably more significant positives.

Some haters of the modern spirit might find this praise unpalatable. Such critics are certainly right to condemn all the dire effects of the empty modern promises: the separation of freedom from God-given truth, the idolisation of human power and the denigration of gratitude and spiritual sacrifice. Still, discernment is necessary. The modern spirit is misguided, but not without its virtues. In the culture, as in each person's heart and mind, the results of its triumph are always a mix of "lights and shadows", as John Paul II said in his discussion of the modern attitude towards the dignity of human life in *Evangelium Vitae* (28).

It should not be surprising if the light predominates in economic parts of life. After all, the modern spirit is nothing if not worldly, technical (even technocratic, to use a favourite word of Pope Francis) and universalist. The worldliness has led to ever greater attention to the work of human hands. The technical excellence has ensured that this work is ever more productive. And the universality—the vision of all people being essentially equal in this world and not only in the eyes of God—has encouraged a social revaluation of manual labour and a Christian-friendly appreciation of the striving for excellence in all sorts of labour.

The modern contribution to the economy, including the life of labour, were long in coming. The industrial revolution followed the intellectual, artistic and political revolutions (although it preceded the sexual revolution), and in the first few generations of industrialisation, the new labour was predominantly wretched. In retrospect, though, I think it is clear that the modern spirit is actually fairly well-suited for economic life, which is the most material and least spiritual of all human activities. The tendency of critics of modernity to focus only on economic harm—the genuine depredations of consumerism, profit-hunger and economically smothering governments—seems to me misguided. The modern economy, including the life of labour, still has many shadows, but there are far darker patches in many other parts of modern life.

Still, my praise is lukewarm, and comes with a crucial qualification. The shift of attention which has on balance made labour better has inevitably been accompanied by lesser respect for spiritual matters, including spiritual labours. The inevitable result has been a deterioration in those domains. Labours of love, labours of worship, labours of artistic creation—all seem either devalued or distorted by the modern spirit. Those losses are part of the curse of the modern turn from God, and they stain modern labour.

My conclusion for the long term is mixed. If societies ever turn again to favour more spiritual values, many substantial reforms of labour practices and attitudes will ensue. However, many current practices and attitudes could be carried almost unchanged into this putative better epoch. There is no reason to abandon the new-found excellences. The ability to use God-given human skills and knowledge to extract more of the potential flourishing of the divine gifts hidden in created nature has undoubtedly been encouraged and stained by the modern “Titanic” desire to take absolute power of nature, but the results—supporting far more God-loved and potentially God-loving human lives with more adequate nutrition, better health and far more education—suggest amidst the shadows of sin is the light of a worthy obedience of the divine command to till the earth. There is no reason to give up on such modern gains as more interesting and highly productive labour, the dignified treatment of all workers and the richer lives of labour for women.

Such dreaming of a spiritual renaissance may help frame the more urgent question of how work should be approached right now in developed economies. The question can be asked both politically and personally. For the moment, political reflection is unlikely to be fruitful. While the problems of labour identified in this article are broadly recognised, there seems to be almost no desire in society to endorse the sort of policies which might actually address them.

Personal decisions about labour are different. We have some freedom to make unpopular choices about our own labour. We can look for jobs that bring out the best in us, including our ability to toil for the sake of the good, and that promote goodness in the world. We can also recognise that objectively more valuable work may bring in less money (or none at all, for “stay-at-home” mothers) and less social prestige—and still make the necessary sacrifices to take the better part. We can look for labour that is meaningful, serving others or producing beautiful things. We can found, work at or consume the products of organisations which support the dignity of their workers. We can use our economic life to mitigate, rather than to amplify, the alienation which so much of the modern world promotes.

In short, we should be grateful for the many opportunities for fulfilling and helpful provided by the modern economy, but not blind to its many weaknesses.

Edward Hadas is a freelance journalist, former financial analyst and Research Fellow at Blackfriars Hall, Oxford. He is the author of *Human Goods, Economic Evils: A Moral Approach to the Dismal Science*.

[1] All references are to sections of *Laborem exercens*.

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Ground Level Initiatives: The Micro-Finance Experience

DR. AMIE SARKER

Can you imagine facing the dilemma of either selling your own child or watching her starve to death? What would you choose?

A story of restoration

That was the experience of one family we met through our involvement with micro-finance in South Asia. When we encountered this family, the father, Shohel, had recently injured his back and could no longer work to provide even the meager day laborer income they had previously benefited from. Without other economic opportunities in their remote village, they sold everything they owned—even two of their children—just to survive with basic food requirements.

When a human trafficking agent came to their community and offered them \$100 per child, they reluctantly agreed to the seemingly “lesser evil” of modern-day slavery for two of their children. Their youngest daughter and son were then sold to individuals in another district within their country, an alternative to witnessing their children starve before their very eyes.

We encountered this family just before they were about to send their eldest child, a daughter, into a sex-trafficking scheme pitched as a “good job” overseas. Even the mother was preparing to leave their village for the first time in her life in order to “work” in the Middle East, inevitably becoming yet another human trafficking victim.

However, through [GFM Ministries](#) (an NGO we had established in the region), we were able to offer medical assistance to the father, as well as a micro-loan to their family so they could purchase their first cow and begin earning income from the milk.

Fast forward a few short months. Quite astonishingly, this family was able to buy back their two children! You can imagine the rejoicing that took place at the restoration of their family. Now their eldest daughter is also protected against human trafficking.

The income from their micro-loan and further entrepreneurial activities has provided enough to not only keep them together as a family, but to flourish.

What's more, we established the first primer school in their village and hired the mother to work in the school. It brought me to tears hearing her tell of her hopes and dreams for her children. Not only are they safe from the dangers of human trafficking, but they are filled with hope for a better life. They now consistently eat three meals a day, have adequate shelter, clean water, three cows, and a small vegetable farm.

All it took was an opportunity.

Over and over again I've seen the truth of how "teaching a man to fish" feeds a family for much longer than a day; rather, a micro-loan helps feed them for a lifetime while giving them the chance to work hard and lift themselves from poverty.

What exactly is a micro-loan?

Before I answer that question, you're probably wondering how the daughter of a regular, middle-class family in mainstream America came to observe such transformations in the third world. My love for international people grew tremendously while I was a university student, as I developed friendships with several international students. It was at that time I first met Dr. Abraham. Native to the South Asian region and now a U.S. citizen, he is a dynamic social entrepreneur who is the brains behind this particular micro-finance program.

Upon witnessing the extreme poverty in South Asia during a few trips to the region, I became increasingly burdened to do something about it.

I then came alongside to help him establish the U.S.-based non-profit, [GFM Ministries](#), in 2002. This 501(c)(3) organization implements the micro-finance program I've described here in partnership with a local South Asian NGO we also established. Now over 4 million USD are circulating in the hands of the poor in South Asia through these efforts, impacting close to a quarter of a million people.

Micro-loans are small loans, such as \$100-300, given to families in poverty to help them start or develop a business. They use the loans to cultivate a crop, buy a sewing machine to start a sewing business, or develop some other trade. Once their loan is repaid, it goes to the next vulnerable family, and it benefits additional families, over and over again.

Eligible families in our program are those in extreme poverty, making less than \$2 per day, and many are oral communicators (unable to read or write). These are individuals without collateral, and without an opportunity to even open a regular bank account. The traditional banking system isn't interested in talking with them, let alone trusting them with any money.

About 98% of our loans go to women. In this particular South Asian context, we have found this to have the greatest societal impact. In many of these communities women and children are marginalized and in danger of human trafficking or child marriage due to poverty, but a micro-loan is empowering. The ladies in this context are the most responsible in both consistently repaying the loans, as well as using the income strategically to care for their families.

For example, one young newly-married woman came to us with an interest in helping to support her growing family. She started with a \$100 loan to buy some chickens. Now she has over 1,100 chickens laying 800+ eggs each day. She has also started training others in her village on how to start their own poultry businesses.

Another unlikely entrepreneur was a woman who was earning just a few cents a day helping her mother clean and repair clothing. With \$200 she bought a sewing machine to start her own tailoring business. Today she employs ten young women, helping them support their own families, also supplying goods to over fifteen clothing shops in her region.

Families become members of the local NGO and undergo a two-month training program where they learn how to engage in basic financial literacy and start or develop a business from capital. At the end of the two months, our loan officers help them draft a business plan and meet with them weekly in their own village to collect micro-loan payments and support them with additional training.

A lasting impact: Why micro-loans are so effective in alleviating poverty

Rather than a one-time charitable gift with an impact that stops there, micro-loan investments are ongoing and self-sustaining. These investments into poor communities are recycled many times over as loans are immediately given out again once repaid, along with a minimal fee to cover the cost of the loan officers.

It has been exciting to see so many lives transformed. Not only do micro-loan recipients improve the well-being of their families through meeting their basic needs, but so many of them are flourishing, experiencing the dignity and satisfaction of a

productive day's work. These families are eager to work hard to improve their lives, but they simply don't have the same opportunities as those in the developed world.

The vulnerable, such as children, are protected against human trafficking and child marriage, as parents are relieved of the nagging uncertainty as to how to feed their hungry children. What's more, young people are able to pursue an education rather than simply work in the fields to support the family income.

It has been an incredible privilege to see God's hand at work showing love to the vulnerable and marginalized through the micro-finance program. I'm reminded of this verse in Proverbs: "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done." – Proverbs 19:17

When we embarked on this journey to try to begin making a difference in the lives of those who felt forgotten by their Creator, I didn't realize the incredible way God would use these people to encourage and bless my own life in return.

While "the road less traveled" has included its own share of challenges common to any grassroots operation in a developing nation, the choice to travel this path has made all the difference. I never anticipated the reward I would have in return—true joy!

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Social Justice: Creating a New Trinitarian Culture

TONGXIN LU

Caldecott, Stratford, *Not as the World Gives: The Way of Creative Justice* (Second Spring Books, 2015).

Not As the World Gives is not your typical book on Catholic social teaching. We tend to consider the “social teaching” of the Church a separate body of writings to be applied to secular society. In this way, the Church’s teaching becomes functionalized, for the secular world is treated as the standard by which to judge everything else. The title *Not As the World Gives* is the author’s attempt to reverse our thinking of the secular order as primary and the Church as secondary. For Caldecott, Catholic social teaching is more than a means to solve social issues. The key premise of the book is that “[t]he primary human society is the Church herself.” Rooted in this theological principle, *Not As the World Gives* inspires us to put our hope for a just social order in God’s divine promise, not in human achievement alone.

The chapter “The Rise of Machines” attempts to combat the tyranny of mechanism which reduces all of nature, including human nature, into something merely mechanical. Caldecott insists, by contrast, that human nature has a spiritual dimension which transcends time and death. This spiritual dimension—a relation to the absolute—affords man a dignity that not only sets limits to both market and state, but also informs them from within. Caldecott inquires into the nature of human society and bases his argument on an understanding of human nature as metaphysical and spiritual rather than mechanical.

The book’s argument, furthermore, depends on an understanding of the Church as a communion between God and man. Caldecott believes that the Church makes human unity possible in the most complete sense. This does not mean that the Church is already perfect, or she is a perfect society. Nevertheless, the Church is mankind on the

way of being transformed into the City of God: “She is the only society that bridges the gap between the moment of our Redemption and the moment of Parousia (Second Coming), when the perfect society, the society of saints, will finally be revealed.” If this is true, it follows that the attempt to separate the Church from the secular order is the root cause of modern social issues.

A key principle of the book is that the social doctrine of the Church cannot or should not be separated from spirituality and the moral life, especially the Beatitudes. Therefore, a just social order lies less in programs and techniques than in the Beatitudes. [1] Caldecott believes that purity—blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matt 5:8)—is essential to the living of a Christian life and the creation of a Christian society. Thus, the purpose of the book is not so much an introduction of the Church’s social teaching, but rather, it is to help to initiate readers to a trinitarian way of life. It is the Trinity that shows us what it means to give not as the world gives, but as God gives. In the Trinity, it is the giving of the Self, the Person, not just the giving of “things,” that creates divine society. Furthermore, Mary is the “pure heart” at the center that enables the Church to see God. Therefore, for Caldecott, authentic human society can be created when the human person participates in the self-gift of the Son through the corporate person of the Church, the immaculate Bride of Christ.

Once we see social justice in its proper theological context—man’s vocation to bring the whole creation into trinitarian communion—we can understand better why Caldecott gives such prominence to the “Way of Creative Justice,” the subtitle of the book. For Caldecott, Creative justice is justice in its fullest sense. To be just is to be inventive: to create social forms and structures that make the good visible on earth.[2] But what exactly do we create? Echoing St. John Paul II and Pope Francis,[3] Caldecott’s answer is nothing short of creating a new culture, a new civilization. For Christians who worship a living God (again, social justice cannot be separated from spirituality), it is not enough to be fair, or to balance one person’s rights against another’s. Indeed, we need to recognize “moral action once again as a creative work, and to allow the living moral power to enter into it” (from the epigraph by Guardini). This way of understanding our engagement with the world reminds us that Christians are called to be a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). Caldecott suggests that our call to creative justice is to incarnate God’s divine love in social and cultural worlds.

How can we be creatively just in the way Caldecott proposes? I think the chapter entitled “The Way of Beauty” provides an essential key. Since we are not God, we do not create in the strict sense. Our creativity is the fruit of a freedom God has granted us out of love. To be creative is to cultivate the soil of our own human nature.

Drawing from Plato's Symposium, Caldecott suggests that "[o]nly when man looks at beauty in 'the way it can be seen' will he be able to give birth to virtue—and, along with virtue, all the glories of human civilization." For Caldecott, the most effective way is to gaze on the beauty of God in the liturgy, where we see God made visible to the human eyes in the incarnation of the Word. In fact, the liturgy and, more generally, prayer, is the school of freedom and creativity. For Caldecott, "it is this turning towards the Transcendent in faith and worship that orients our ascent within ourselves, and gives a direction to our search for beauty."

Not As the World Gives, the last book by Caldecott (d. 2014), presents the Church's perennial teaching on the Trinity while incorporating the most up-to-date content from the Church's social teaching, up to Pope Francis' Joy of the Gospel. In addition to a masterful command of trinitarian theology, the author's breadth of knowledge, ranging from early modern European history and art history to Islamic mysticism, shows how the Church's social teaching can engage in friendly dialogue with all branches of knowledge.[4] By embracing the One, the divine love shared between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Caldecott can enter into a myriad of social issues and show that the true form of social justice is rooted in Trinitarian love.

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[1] As Adrian Walker puts it in the Foreword, living the Beatitudes is the Church's characteristic way of being in the world precisely by not being of it (xvi).

[2] Christians are called to bring justice from heaven to earth: "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Our work for justice is necessarily a creative act, because our freedom is an image of God's freedom who creates everything out of nothing.

[3] Pope Francis says, "John Paul II had a very bold phrase: a faith that does not produce culture is not a true faith. He emphasized this: creating culture." This quote comes from the epigraph.

[4] See Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, nos. 76-78.

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Work For Its Own Sake

SOMER SALOMON

Muirhead, Russell, *Just Work* (Harvard University Press, 2004).

“Like their fathers, they hear the muffled call of work that wishes to be done.”

—Charles Péguy: “The Honor of Work”

In *Basic Verities*, a collection of elegant essays that deftly critiques elements of modern life, Charles Péguy decries the manner in which bourgeois industrialist society in the nineteenth century had begun dismantling laborers’ traditional relationship with their work. Work, from caning chairs to erecting cathedrals, was once done and loved for its own sake. Even in the midst of life’s difficulties, work was for these laborers a source of “joy itself and the reason of their being.” The bourgeois ethic, however, treated work as if it were a commodity on the stock exchange, a matter of material trade between owner and worker. This system, Péguy laments, corroded the worker’s joy in his task. It suppressed the desire to work by stifling the promise of its fulfillment.

The issues that Péguy raised have become only more complicated and entrenched in post-industrial countries. Yet, as Russell Muirhead notes in his thoughtful little book, *Just Work*, Americans still take work seriously. Even with all the problems associated with it, work still seems to promise fulfillment. We see our jobs as a means of personal expression, meaning, and satisfaction. We associate our achievements with dignity and pride. In this way, work invokes for us an ideal, a vision of the “the kinds of people we would like to be...and the sort of life we take ourselves to deserve.” *Just Work* aims to take this expectation of fulfilling work seriously.

Even as he engages the issue of fulfilling work in contemporary terms, Muirhead actually raises the age-old philosophical question of the good: in what way is work a human good? How does it satisfy man as he engages in it? How does it relate to human flourishing? One of the refreshing aspects of *Just Work* is the manner in which

Muirhead challenges the more facile notions of work's goodness held by modern society. Current economic discourse often presents work as a merely utilitarian activity by which we satisfy our needs or a pleasure hunt in which we indulge our desires. Muirhead, however, attempts to promote a more robust discussion of work as a human activity that is good in and of itself.

In this way, Muirhead implicitly engages with the *bonum honestum*—or true good—of the philosophical tradition. A genuine good is not something dependent on man's use or pleasure. It is rather desired for its own sake because its intrinsic goodness fulfills man as he attains it. We read a great work of literature, for example, not because it is simply useful for teaching or because it brings us pleasure (although it may do both), but because it is good in itself, and we become more human for knowing it. Work done for its intrinsic worth promotes man's development and expresses his dignity. It allows man to realize his full potential because it not only fulfills his nature but also properly relates him to others. The most important philosophical question in contemplating questions about labor, therefore, is what work is good for human beings to do. As Muirhead focuses on the activity of work itself, *Just Work* provides a valuable contribution to the contemporary discussion, even if Muirhead's limited metaphysical range prevents him from developing a fully adequate notion of work's intrinsic goodness and the way it fulfills man.

Just Work is at its strongest in its exploration of contemporary views that diminish the intrinsic goodness of work. For instance, Muirhead's most substantial chapters explain how the Protestant work ethic and its secularized offshoots have helped form the current American approach to work: both provided a reason to view work as fulfilling, yet neither took into account the actual work being done. The Protestant work ethic upheld work as worthy of devotion because a person could give glory to God through one's calling. As it did so, it actually "failed to locate anything in the activity of work itself connected to the transcendental purposes work was meant to express, thereby placing an enormous burden on faith." As faith disappeared, the Protestant ethic increasingly gave way to one in which material reward became the primary justification for work. Even within this secularized ethic, however, Americans still tried to find meaning in their work. Only now, they connected fulfillment to a working life of a particular sort. For instance, feminist Betty Friedan upheld white-collar careers as the means to realize life's highest purposes, although she often ignored the actual content of this type of work. Indeed, faced with evidence that the very executive careers that she espoused were often experienced as alienating or stifling, Friedan pivoted, ultimately naming any work freely chosen as the epitome of

good work.

Through these examples, Muirhead provides helpful insight into a current predicament. When we no longer see how the activity of work is good for us, then it is free choice which becomes the primary criterion for judging work. As Muirhead notes, the current trend in the discussion on work is to focus entirely on issues of personal freedom. In hopes of resisting this tendency, he insists that good work “cannot be molded exclusively after the liberal ideas of ‘freedom’ and ‘equality.’” That is, the goodness of work cannot be reduced to the willingness to enter into a contractual relationship. In our liberal economic system, we often let the willingness to freely enter a contract override considerations of the quality of the work itself, as Muirhead shows in a chapter on contracted domestic service. Liberalism’s insistence on freedom as the highest good in work manifests itself even more recently in contemporary proposals for a universal income. For proponents of a universal income, even the freedom to choose whether to work or not to work should be available to all. In this line of thought, work is not an intrinsic good for man. It is simply an expression of personal desire, and we need not consider either its necessity or content in relation to human development. Through these chapters, Muirhead offers a rebuttal to liberal democracy’s notion of the “unencumbered self” as the subject of work. He rightly insists that there is a goodness to work that shapes and engages man’s freedom and should be considered when society judges and promotes work.

How, then, should we consider work good? In the last section of his book, Muirhead offers one way forward: the theory of “practice.” Practice focuses on the “internal goods” of work, those goods that are linked to work’s actual activity and are distinct from external goods such as money or fame. Internal goods are “goods of character,” born of a persistent and respectful engagement with work. They alone provide true self-expression and fulfillment because they allow the worker to become a certain type of person, one who manifests a true and satisfying human dignity.

While Just Work’s evocation of practice provides a good starting point, Muirhead’s proposal only partially accounts for the full goodness of work. “Practice” grounds work’s goodness in the “subjective” dimension of man, in the internal goods of virtue. Like most contemporary treatments of work, however, Muirhead still has not fully considered the “objective” dimension of work; in other words, he does not adequately develop work as a meaningful engagement with an objective reality before us.

Truly fulfilling work, however, must be premised upon the worker’s fundamental openness to and relation with a reality that precedes him and his intentions. In work,

the worker engages with something objective, and the best work consists of ordering this thing to its proper end, its highest fulfillment, its deepest beauty. It is the difference between raising a chicken in a chicken mill or raising a chicken to thrive according to the requirements of its nature (even if its fully realized goodness eventually provides meat to eat). This type of work is satisfying because the worker brings himself and the object of his work into communion with a goodness that fulfills them both. In this careful attention to the good of the thing before him, man's labor actually becomes a work of love.

If we don't see work as a relation to an objective good outside of ourselves, we will find ourselves mired in inescapable conflicts. In *Just Work*, for example, Muirhead deems both individual fulfillment and the social good necessary conditions for fitting (or good) work, but he never successfully resolves the conflict between them. Work that is rooted in an objective good, however, is good both for the worker as an individual and good for the worker as he is a social being, for the radiation of this transcendent goodness promotes a harmony or common good between them. Likewise, as Muirhead rejects the idea of man's nature as an oppressive concept, he cannot claim work as a naturally objective good for man that shapes his freedom. Instead, he must root the necessity of work in the political order, writing that the "liberal political regime, which, if it maintains freedom, also asks certain things of its citizens. One of the requirements is work." Although Muirhead does critique liberalism in places, he does not have a notion of the good intrinsic to things themselves. Thus, the summum bonum in Muirhead's work becomes the liberal political order, which decides on what is good for society. A recent example of this in our time is marriage.

When the philosophy of work pays true attention to the objective goodness of reality, however, it opens us up to truths that have already been proffered by the Catholic Church in its meditations on work over the last century or so. The affirmation of the objective goodness of things refers to a transcendent source, a Creator who bestows an absolute goodness upon the reality man encounters, a reality that is never simply subject to man's intentions. At its heart, the purpose of work is found in man's being created in the image of a God whose activity brings the entire cosmos into existence and directs it to its highest end. In this way, as *Laudato Si'* maintains, it is man's highest service to know the good inscribed in all things and co-operate with God to "continue the work of creation" (par. 39). As man does so, he fulfills the wondrous possibilities found within those things upon which he works—and within himself.

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Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin on Work and Justice

COLIN MILLER

Day, Dorothy, Peter Maurin: Apostle to the World (Orbis Books, 2004).

The Catholic Worker Movement began in 1933 in New York City as an attempt to embody Leo XIII's call in *Rerum Novarum* to put the social principles of the Church into action in the bleak social conditions following the rise of industrialism. The movement had three practical components: hospitality houses for the poor and homeless, roundtable discussions for the clarification of thought, and farming communes. This vision, and its theological analysis of the social order, originated with Peter Maurin, who taught it to Dorothy Day, who in turn articulated its application extensively in her writings. It is difficult, indeed, to separate the work of these two saintly co-founders, vastly different though they were. Because of the close connection between their work, a particularly poignant sketch of their unique vision is found in Day's biography of Maurin, *Peter Maurin: Apostle to the World*.

The first thing we notice in this work is that the Catholic Worker vision must be grasped as a seamless whole that centers around Maurin's threefold synthesis of what he called cult, culture, and cultivation. By cult, he meant the Mass; by culture, the forms of human life built around it; and by cultivation, the necessary place of small-scale agriculture in any Catholic culture. "Cult, culture, and cultivation" is thus the Catholic Worker way of talking about a whole way of life that is derived from the Eucharist. Because Maurin and Day believed the center of the divine life in this world is the Mass, they also thought that an authentically Christian life—including work that is good and just—is never more or less than an extension of it. This is because, at the most basic level, the Mass requires bread, wine, and human beings for its celebration. Therefore wheat and grapes, as well as whatever food is necessary to sustain human life, will have to be cultivated around the altar. But so will culture: we will want a roof to shelter the celebration from the elements, and we will want the

celebration adorned with the beauty of flowers, candles, and icons.

Human work, then, as a part of cult and cultivation, is to be evaluated by how well it is integrally connected to the Eucharist. As such, the work that is a part of all human life—culture and cultivation—is good and just work to the extent that it “fits with” the *Opus Dei* (Work of God)—the Church’s liturgy. The problem with modern thinking about work, thought Day and Maurin, was that we do not have “a philosophy of work” (81)—we have no definition of what real work is. The industrial age defines work as bare “activity,” or as anything that receives remuneration, and so there is no way to sort out what is good work and what is not. But for Day and Maurin the Liturgy, as the revelation of all that is “right and just,” gives work moral criteria by its very performance. As such, work that is organically connected to the perpetuation of the Mass, such as that which directly supports human life, is better than work that is not. As Day put it, good work is the extension of the human hand, rather than the extension of a machine (since machines do not assist at Mass). Just work serves the Mass rather than perpetuates a further extension of the machine. Of course, in practice there will be many different shades of grey, but the basic thing that was lacking in a philosophy of labor—a *telos* for human work—is supplied by the most fundamental element of creation: the Creator’s Body and Blood itself.

Evaluated by this standard, Day and Maurin knew, industrial work failed. Their newspaper and movement thus took the name the Catholic Worker, because the most blatantly obvious way that industrial work fails the “Eucharist test” is that it has produced, in comparison with all previous epochs, unparalleled levels of unemployment, poverty, and destitution. The severing of cultivation and culture from cult produces dire human consequences. It was to those impoverished by industrialization that the Catholic Worker was to go directly, both to alleviate their immediate plight by offering free and no-strings-attached hospitality, and to cut to the root of the industrial problem by getting “back to the land.” Both of these activities, however, were designed to address the fundamental injustice of modern work due to its separation from the Church’s liturgical life. Houses of hospitality were not, in the first instance, designed to “meet needs,” as much as to enable the practice of the works of mercy at a personal sacrifice, for the goal of allowing the Church to practice the cultivation of the virtue of charity. Likewise, the humble work of farming communes was not, in the first instance, conceived as an immediate solution to America’s poverty problem (though, Maurin thought, it could actually be such), but as a way of connecting work to the direct sustenance of our bodies—more closely uniting work and worship. They often appealed to St. Benedict’s motto *ora et labora* in this regard.

Day thus stresses that in his synthesis Maurin had in fact developed a comprehensive and entirely Catholic alternative to the major political and social visions of organizing life available in the early 20th century, namely communism/socialism or liberal capitalism—the two major alternatives still with us today. Indeed, neither Maurin nor Day thought that they were involved in anything other than the natural extension of the Church into all areas of life: as Day recounted, “to reach the man in the street—that was Peter’s first step.” The goal here would be a decentralized society with widespread ownership of the means of production, a society where everyone holds very loosely to the notion of “property.” As models for the various forms of political society compatible with this vision, Day and Maurin offered the early Christian community described in Acts, the Benedictines, and the Franciscans.

It is against this ideal that all forms of “industrial” work were to be evaluated and from which were generated the Catholic Worker’s famous critiques of the degrading nature of factory labor and the inequitable, inhuman nature of modern technological labor in general. Indeed, this was not really “work” anymore. The Catholic Worker’s “activism”—participation in strikes, unions, protests—is then to be seen as the attempt to move such labor in the direction of authentically good work. These were attempts to “build a new society within the shell of the old, with the philosophy of the new, which is not a new philosophy but a very old philosophy, a philosophy so old that it looks like new.” This “Catholic philosophy” of the Worker—as indeed was the case with *Rerum Novarum* itself—was likely to be misunderstood, and indeed it was. It had a communitarian aspect that was labeled as communist, but it also had a place for property, which some called bourgeois. But, for Day, to be on the picket line and to insist on the right of private property went hand in hand. These were neither communist nor capitalist activities, but Catholic ones.

For these reasons, then, much of Day’s writing is devoted to critiquing unjust instances of post-industrial work in America. A living wage, safe working conditions, and job security are worth pursuing as a way of trying to reform present work to be more nearly just and good, precisely because the Church has a picture of what “just” and “good” means in its Eucharistic communities. Yet, as Maurin emphasized, finding good work to do did not in fact depend upon “reforming the system,” for even now there is no shortage of good work. One can perform the works of mercy at a personal sacrifice anywhere. The most radical thought of the Worker regarding work is that if in fact one would shun bad work and take up full-time the good work that is never lacking—providing hospitality for the poor and making your living directly from the soil—then God would provide in abundance and that justice would in fact spring forth

upon the earth.

Of course, turning one's back on the industrial-technological complex, today even more than ever, is likely to entail the voluntary poverty that has always been one of the Worker's hallmarks. Yet poverty, Maurin thought, was exactly what the saints loved, so why can't we—even families and laity—love it now? “Every house should have a Christ-room”—a place for the poor and homeless. Such radical Catholicism, of course, takes the perhaps unreasonable and certainly unpopular position that what we say at the Mass and what we read in the Sermon on the Mount is actually true. “Unless we are putting these social ideas into practice...we are using religion as an insurance policy.” This is not least because, at the end of the day, for Maurin and Day just work is in fact conditional, not upon having the proper governmental regulations and laws in place, or identifying “unjust power structures,” but on each Christian's personal responsibility to put into practice Jesus' words to love our neighbors as ourselves.

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Another Kind of Exchange: The Gift of Self

JEREMY SIENKIEWICZ

Hyde, Lewis, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* (Vintage, 2004. First ed. 1983).

An important part of a Thomistic metaphysics of creation is the idea of gift. All creatures, by the fact that none is the uncreated First Cause, are created *ex nihilo*. Created from nothing, they are not the source of their own existence; being does not flow forth from their essences. Thus, they receive this being as a gift from He Who Is. Standing before this momentous fact, the creature's proper response is adoration and a return of the gift. Responding with gratitude to God's gratuitous gift of life is the only way that man actually reaches happiness (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 24). Lewis Hyde in *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* makes the case that men are able to recognize and respond to gifts largely based on how their own society seeks unity through gift-giving. Hyde's main concern is that in modern Western capitalism the notion of gift, which brings men into true communion, has been eroded due to the universalization of market commodities (and, thus, the diminishing of a society of gift). "The spirit of the market destroys...gift."

Hyde spends the greater part of the text systematizing a philosophy of gift by means of anthropological studies of pre-capitalist societies that were largely gift-based: from the Pacific Islander community of the Massim who engage in the ceremonial Kula exchanges of practically useless but socially cohesive armbands, to the circulating copper plates of the North Pacific native American potlatches. The value of the gifts given was not as much in the items themselves as in the spirit of the community from which they came. With each new gifting, the reality of the community became stronger and greater, what Hyde calls the "increase" of the gift. Hyde even explains how the giving of daughters in marriage did not imply the idea of women as property (a concern which could only creep into the ceremonials after the widespread

commodification of a market economy) but rather as gifts from the gods which, when given again and to another, increased their initial worth and created a true unity amongst families and tribes. The bride, then, is not an item of the marketplace but rather the center of what might be called a new substance constituted by the families which she joins. She is the gift which makes communion possible. As Hyde himself puts it as a kind of precursor to John Paul II, “As gifts are agents of relationship, so brides become relations, literally.”

The cohesive nature of gifts comes forth solely through the cycle of their being given and then given again. Hyde explains the cycle of gift in the following manner: (1) a gift is given; (2) the gift is given from the recipient to a new recipient; (3) the giving continues until the gift returns ultimately, in some manner, to its original donor. And yet, even here, the gift is not to rest but to be given again. Within this cycle, the gift gains value each time it is given so that when it finally returns to the original donor it comes having multiplied a hundredfold in worth. Simultaneously, the real value of the gift is its social value. The cycle “offers equilibrium and coherence, a kind of anarchist stability.” The cycle not only increases the gifts themselves but creates and, it might be said, necessarily constitutes the community itself. Indeed, Hyde comments that the very existence of the community, that which survives the death of a particular member within it, “may be lost...when there is wholesale destruction of its vehicles.” These vehicles, these gifts which are given, are merely what art is. And while Hyde does not give a direct definition of what art is, one can be reconstructed from his work: Art is a received mysterious understanding of our being as gift which is given to others to both express the community’s own understanding of itself and to constitute the community itself. Hyde comments that “a work of art can survive without the market, but where there is no gift there is no art.”

Commodities, on the other hand, are associated with freedom, in the sense of separation from the group by alienation. The “free world” is the one in which every self is “atomized” and, thus, able to do what he pleases. Yet, the price for such “freedom” is disassociation from the life of the community and unhappiness, given the fact that man is made for communion. In societies dominated by the marketplace, man suffers the fate of being “commodity incarnate: free as a bird and lonesome.” As Hyde explains: “In a group that derives its cohesion from a circulation of gifts the conversion of gifts to commodities will have the effect of fragmenting the group, or even destroying it.” Hyde’s profound chapter on usury nicely explains the fact that while brotherhood was created and protected by gift cycles, “otherhood,” or foreigners to the community, could be charged usury without wrongdoing. The ultimate concern

is that, in a market economy, all become others or, as Hyde calls us, “cordial strangers.”

Hyde’s ultimate concern is the commoditization of art itself which ushers in the destruction of both art and a true community, which the giving of art creates. Art itself, according to Hyde, is a gift received by the artist. When Theodore Roethke was given the “gifted-state” and scrawled a masterpiece of poetry in less than an hour, sometimes after years of trying to “produce” one, he writes, “I walked around, and I wept; and I knelt down—I always do after I’ve written what I know is a good piece. But at the same time I had, as God is my witness, the actual sense of a Presence—as if Yeats himself were in that room.” Art is something that is received simultaneously from God and “the brotherhood,” that is, the community which is created by the art already gifted. Once received, according to the cycle of gift, the artist must give this gift to another. An oft-repeated mantra of Hyde’s is that “the gift must stay in motion.” It is this re-gifting of art to a third party that enables the self to enter into that “greater self” which is the true society of persons with whom one shares these mutual gifts. Hyde quotes Joseph Conrad explaining that it is in art that we can appeal to “our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives” and ultimately to a “fellowship with all creation—to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts...which binds together all humanity—the dead to the living and the living to the unborn.” It is in art that the distinction between the self and the group, the biological and the spiritual, breaks down. “Art draws each of its participants into a wider self.” It is here that we are made one.

When art becomes mass-produced for consumption, however, it loses its unifying power. While the artist might be able to live off the means brought in by his works of art, the solidarity of man is stripped not only from the power of the art itself but from society altogether. The spirit of the community is nourished “by disbursing our gifts, not by capitalizing upon them.” The fruits of solidarity coming forth from the gift cycle, which is intrinsically linked with the reception and giving of art as the very voice of the community, the “wider self,” do not come to us “where we have converted our arts to pure commercial enterprises.”

Although Hyde’s lengthy chapters on Walt Whitman and Ezra Pound attempt to convey his philosophy in concrete situations, they are often much less enlightening and convoluted, linking poetic motifs to the artists’ lives. The chapters on “The Commerce of the Creative Spirit” and the ultimate conclusion, however, nicely bring the truths drawn from historic gift cycles, as well as from folk tales, to the modern

realm and wrestle with the great question, “What now?” More specifically, the question concerning Hyde is “How, if art is essentially a gift, is the artist to survive in a society dominated by the market?” The underlying question, it seems, is more dire: How is society to survive by way of art when the market dominates? The question we must ask is that of the fulfillment of the human person in a community constituted by the gift of self. Such a community cannot survive, or even begin, if the persons who would make up that unity do not, themselves, understand what a gift is. Neither will they be able to come together to make this community in gift cycles when all is bought and sold. Love, that which merely is the gift of self, exists among brothers. If everyone, including my next door neighbor or, worse, my own siblings are treated as “others,” those subject to usury and marketing tactics, can we hope for society at all? Hyde finally concludes on a positive note indicating that he believes the dichotomy between the market and the gift cycle is not so irreconcilable. He explains that “within certain limits what has been given as a gift may be sold in the marketplace and what has been earned in the marketplace may be given as a gift.” As Hyde himself indicates, it is the definition of these “certain limits” which can make or break a unity among men. Certainly, “there is a degree of commercialization which destroys the community itself.” But the middle ground, “in which, sometimes, eros and logos coexist” must be discerned to ensure the existence and health of true human society. In a modern liberal capitalist economy like that of our own modern West, this task is, in many ways, at the heart of the New Evangelization. Without a resolution, man will be unfulfilled because the gift of God Himself in Christ will be excluded.

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The Injustice of Family Breakdown

BRIAN ROTTKAMP

Putnam, Robert, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (Simon and Schuster, 2015).

The American Dream. Rags to riches. A land of opportunity. Such ideas are tightly intertwined with American identity and, for generations, have served as a source of hope and optimism amid trying circumstances. This idea of improving one's station in life as a result of hard work and education predates the founding of our Republic. For the many who fled the class stasis and determinism of European society, the colonies represented a blank slate, a chance for upward social mobility. One's station at birth need not determine one's future station in life—this is ingrained within our national identity. And yet, the question inevitably arises: if the American Dream is still relevant or if it has stagnated to the point of parody. At this point, are we trading only in myth?

Within his 2015 bestseller, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, Robert Putnam addresses the central question of whether the rungs of the socioeconomic ladder can still be climbed in modern-day America. The author, a renowned Harvard social scientist, is best known for his groundbreaking work, *Bowling Alone* (1995), identifiable to many due to its influence upon the public policy discussions of the 1990s and its iconic cover artwork. In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam masterfully depicted a developing crisis in American society: a widespread decline in civic engagement. This decline was shown to permeate all aspects of social life from the most essential (voting participation, church attendance, volunteering/mentoring, etc.) to the more banal (participation in softball and bowling leagues). Hence the title. From a high point of civic engagement in postwar America, we have become significantly less connected to our fellow citizens, as engagement in traditional institutions has declined dramatically. The harm caused by this decline is manifold and felt by many within our society, but perhaps nowhere as profoundly as in the educational and economic

outcomes of our children.

Our Kids begins nostalgically with Putnam's childhood during the Eisenhower era in Port Clinton, Ohio, a relatively unremarkable town though remarkable perhaps in its ability to serve as a microcosm—demographically, politically, educationally—for American society at large. As Putnam describes, the socioeconomic barriers in the 1950s were extremely low as economic and educational expansion, civic engagement and social solidarity were all high while income inequality was low. These conditions created a myriad of opportunities for the children of the lower echelon to climb the socioeconomic ladder. To illustrate the pathways that were open at this time, Putnam traces the lives of four of his high school colleagues from the class of 1959 (two African-American, one poor white, and one affluent white). What emerges from these narratives is highly instructive:

The children of manual workers and of professionals came from similar homes and mixed unselfconsciously in schools and neighborhoods, in scout troops and church groups. The class contrasts that matter so much today—in economic security, family structure, parenting, schooling, neighborhoods, and so on—were minimal in that era. Virtually everyone in the PCHS class of 1959, whatever their background, lived with two parents, in homes their parents owned, and in neighborhoods where everyone knew everyone else's first name. Our parents, almost universally homemaker moms and breadwinner dads, were not especially well educated.

In this nurturing environment, the vast majority of his classmates climbed the economic ladder. Half of those raised by high school dropouts went to college. Upward mobility was commonplace and rapid. Informal mentors within the community, such as teachers or church leaders, often played a critical role in encouraging the educational attainment of children within the community. Moreover, low education costs and the availability of local scholarships lowered the barrier to a post-secondary education.

Unfortunately, life for many in today's Port Clinton (again symbolic of America at large) is a far cry from what Putnam and his classmates experienced in the 1950s. Manufacturing, which accounted for the majority of jobs in 1965, collapsed, triggering decades of factory closures and layoffs. Accordingly, incomes which were slightly above the national average in the late 1970s, plummeted to levels more than 25% below the national average. Single-parent households doubled between 1970 to 2010 and, during the same timeframe, the divorce rate quintupled. Only forty percent of children are now born in wedlock. All this makes for a sobering read.

And yet, on the shores of Lake Erie, a completely different picture of Port Clinton emerges. Developers have lined the shore with gated communities and mansions to house wealthy professionals who commute to white-collar jobs in larger Ohio cities. Over the past four decades, while the middle class has dwindled, the number of residents at both the top and bottom of the economic ladder has surged. Port Clinton's story is not unique; it has been played out across the country from inner cities to impoverished rural areas.

As the possible causes for increasing inequality in America continue to be debated in the public sphere, we are less and less likely to actually interact with those outside of our socioeconomic realm. As Putnam and others have shown, there are numerous reasons for this unfortunate circumstance. Residential sorting by income—facilitated by the growth of the suburbs, the highway system, and the availability of school test results—has led to a sharp increase in the uniformity of our neighborhoods. Compared to forty years ago, high-income and low-income students are much less likely to attend the same schools. Much of this is driven by the desire of high-income families to chase high-performing public schools. On this score, a Brookings Institution researcher recently showed that families, on average, pay a \$200,000 premium for a home near a high-performing school as compared to a similar home near a low-performing school. What exactly does one get for this substantial outlay?

Generally, what these parents are paying for is not greater spending per pupil or higher paid teachers. Numerous studies in education have shown these two factors to have minimal predictive relevance in school performance. Instead, positive peer pressure and parental engagement often drive achievement at high-performing schools. The aspirations and beliefs of students and parents alike matter greatly. On the other hand, the results of low-performance schools are often hampered by the effects of the cycle of poverty (hunger, gang violence, unstable housing) and are four times as likely as high-income classrooms to be disrupted by behavioral problems. Inevitably, teacher morale is lower and turnover far outpaces that of high-performing schools. As Putnam shows, at school, it's not only the classroom that is determinative of student performance; the fields, band room, and stage are also crucial. Putnam cites a number of studies showing the correlation between extracurricular activity involvement and positive outcomes, including higher grade-point averages, better work habits, greater self-esteem, lower dropout rates, and higher future wages. He references one fascinating survey showing long-time benefits of participation in extracurricular activities:

Students who attended high school in Cleveland, Ohio, in the 1940s even found neurological effects a half century later: students who participated in extracurricular activities were substantially less likely than those who hadn't to suffer from dementia at the turn of the century, even after adjusting for differences in IQ and educational attainment.

This is a major concern as the gap between extracurricular activity participation continues to widen between high and low-income students. Greater opportunities are afforded to children in more affluent schools. Opportunities, as Putnam illustrates, that can have lasting long-term benefits. However, these benefits still pale in comparison to those received by children raised in a loving, two-parent household.

In comparing life today to that of the 1950s, perhaps no change is as evident as in family structure. Shortly afterwards, the collapse of the traditional family began due, in part, to the decoupling of sex and marriage with the advent of the birth control pill, transformed sexual norms, female employment, and a creeping sense of narcissism. Now, what we see amidst the wreckage of the sexual revolution, is a two-tiered concept of marriage. As Putnam describes, the college-educated upper-third of American society has developed a "neo-traditional" marriage pattern. Often, both spouses work outside of the home, marriage and child-bearing are delayed, and domestic duties are divided more evenly. On the other hand, in the high-school-educated lower-third, childbearing has become disconnected from marriage and "multi-partner fertility" is often the norm. The common result is for children to reside in a single-parent household long after their biological parents have split up. The statistics are staggering. Whereas only 10% of children born to women with a bachelor's degree or higher are born out of wedlock, the same is true for over 60% of children born to women with a high-school degree or less. Ethnographers have shown that poor women value marriage as highly as their affluent counterparts, but believe economic well-being to be the cornerstone of a successful union.

Declining employment prospects and a dramatic spike in incarceration rates among young men are clearly two reasons why marriage is not as popular as it used to be. Putnam's analysis is direct on the impact this has upon our youth:

Children pay the cost of early childbearing and multi-partnered fertility in the form of diminished prospects for success in life. Children who grow up without their biological father perform worse on standardized tests, earn lower grades, and stay in school for fewer years, regardless of race and class. They are also more likely to demonstrate behavioral problems such as shyness, aggression, and

psychological problems such as increased anxiety and depression. Children who spend part of their childhood in a single-mother home are also more likely to have sex earlier and to become young, single parents, re-creating the cycle.

Our Kids is a sobering read as Putnam offers a unique perspective on how the lives of children are directly affected by economic inequality and the deterioration of the traditional family. Children from low-income families are falling further and further behind their high-income counterparts, as they are often unable to reap the innumerable benefits of a stable family structure and strong social institutions. As Putnam shows, for far too many, the steps up the socioeconomic ladder are proving too steep, too burdensome to ascend. Our kids deserve better.

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