

**ON THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN WORK:
A JOURNEY BACK TO THE HUMAN PERSON**
(Dangal-Kabuhayan and Dangal-Tao)

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Introduction

Without work, there will be no society. It is through work that humans produce the necessary things that sustain life. It creates bridges, roads, buildings and factories which makes it possible for people to meet the demands of this ever-expanding society. It also gives society the means towards attaining domestic and international growth. “Let human beings not work, and what does one have?”¹

Work is an activity, unique to humans alone. “It is one of the characteristics that distinguish man from the rest of creatures.”² Man works and knows that he works. “Animals do not hence cannot produce any innovation to what is imbibed in their distinctive nature.”³ Human beings stand on the apex of creation not only because they have knowledge of work but more importantly, they work not only for survival but as means towards perfection. Work is innately human, wherein humans produce something new and valuable. By working, man is able to transform nature into something that even transcends his very own self.

Through work, humans do not only recreate and innovate the Earth. It also forms one of the bases of social relations. A person’s work, ultimately, is intrinsically connected with that of other people. Today, more than ever, work becomes work with others and for others. “The fruits of work offer occasions for exchange, relationship and encounter.”⁴ Work, in a sense, calls people to solidarity and oneness.

“The human being develops the earth and produces progress.”⁵ The products made by human hands, the ideas conceived by human minds and the words spoken by human lips define society today. Without exaggeration, civilizations were built and empires were made because of work. Was it not through the sweat and blood of workers that grand

¹ Pedro V. Salgado, *Social Encyclicals: Commentary and Critique* (Manila, Philippines: Lucky Press, Inc., 1997), 337.

² Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2427.

³ Salgado, *Social Encyclicals: Commentary and Critique*, 337.

⁴ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (Vatican City, 2004), no. 273.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 337.

buildings and temples were created? Man, as *homo faber*, produces and recreates the Earth. Through work, man becomes God's co-creator, as it should be, for the perfection of the world. In essence and in reality, man continuously works for the production of what is beautiful, beneficial and noble in the world.

Work in Genesis

God shows the dignity of work in the very first pages of the Book of Genesis. After creating the first man and woman, God commanded them to work. "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it."⁶ "God told them to make the earth beautiful and great, to create progress, to work for the well-being and happiness of humanity."⁷ By saying, multiply, it doesn't literally mean to procreate but to take part in the creative process of work and *Fill* the earth with goods that will be beneficial to humanity. "The dominion exercised by man over other living creatures, however, is not to be despotic or reckless; on the contrary he is to "cultivate and care for" (*Gen* 2:15) the goods created by God."⁸ Humans are mandated to be caretakers of the Earth and God has placed under their bosom full responsibility with created reality.

The human being is made in "God's image and likeness,"⁹ not only through his intellect and will, but also because through work, he takes part in God's creative activity in the world. Work becomes a reflection of God's creative power through human hands. "With his intelligence, the human being pores deep into the nature of things, discovers its nature, and produces the technological inventions that astound and dazzle us today."¹⁰ Humans are indeed God's image and likeness for He let them participate in this creative process.

Human work proceeds directly from persons created in the image of God and called to prolong the work of creation by subduing the Earth, both with their own selves and with one another. Through human work, God continues to create and recreate the world. Work then becomes a duty. "If anyone will not work, let him not eat."¹¹ Work is quintessential to our nature. Hence those who do not work are less of a person. This is the reason why "work is a fundamental dimension of man's existence here on

⁶ Genesis 1:28

⁷ Salgado, *Social Encyclicals: Commentary and Critique*, 342.

⁸ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 255.

⁹ Genesis 1:27

¹⁰ Salgado, *Social Encyclicals: Commentary and Critique*, 342-343.

¹¹ 2Thessalonians 3:10

earth.¹²” As *Laborem Exercens* clearly puts it,

For when a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well. He learns much, he cultivates his resources, he goes outside of himself and beyond himself. Rightly understood, this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches which can be garnered... Hence, the norm of human activity is this: that in accord with the divine plan and will, it should harmonize with the genuine good of the human race, and allow people as individuals and as members of society to pursue their total vocation and fulfill it.¹³

Jesus the Worker

Ultimately, God revealed the dignity of work through his son, Jesus Christ. “He went about on Earth through humanity by becoming man and working as man for the good of man.”¹⁴ He spent six times as much of his life in the shop than he spent in his public ministry. Or put in another way, he was a worker with wood for eighteen years while he was a rabbi/teacher for only three brief years.

The Gospels portray Jesus as an ordinary man who lived and toiled for his family’s daily sustenance. He was the God who labored seeing an innate holiness in working. What’s amazing is that he seemed to have used images familiar to one who is a carpenter in describing the Kingdom of God. During his earthly ministry, he would often refer to himself as the *way* (John 14:6), the *door* (John 10:9). Jesus even said to Peter that he would give Peter the *keys* to the kingdom of heaven (Mt 16:19). When Jesus healed the paralytic in Capernaum, he instructed the people to let the sick enter through the *roof* since there were so many people (Mk. 2-12). In one of his teachings, he told the disciples that his *yoke* is easy and his burden light (Mt. 11:30). It could be surmised that the way Jesus saw reality was so much influenced by his work. In a way, we could say that ‘*I work therefore I am.*’

Christ, says *Laborem Exercens*, “belongs to the working world.”¹⁵ He sweats and toiled and worked hard as a carpenter. It was a lowly profession that his fellow Jews refuse to believe that He was the Messiah.

Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of
Josés and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?

¹² John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens: On Human Work*, no. 12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, no. 79.

¹⁴ Salgado, *Social Encyclicals: Commentary and Critique*, 338.

¹⁵ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens: On Human Work*, no.116.

And they took offense at him.¹⁶

Nevertheless, Jesus knew the importance of work. By his example, Jesus teaches that humans should appreciate the very idea of work. “He himself, having become like us in all things, devoted most of the years of his life on earth to manual work at the carpenter's bench in the workshop of Joseph (cf. Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3), to whom he was obedient (cf. Lk 2:51).”¹⁷ Through Jesus’ work, he sanctified work conferring sanctity on all human work. And it is through his work that he became much closer to his Abba. In conformity with God’s command to subdue the earth, the human being, modeled after Jesus himself, “participates in God’s power by changing, developing, ennobling, and beautifying the earth. The worker should thus feel himself one with God.”¹⁸ By working, Jesus showed us that work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God’s creation. The Christian teaching declares that work should be viewed not as a burden or solely a source of livelihood, but as a way of serving one's fellowmen. If Jesus, the God who became man worked, then why can't we?

Jesus, during his earthly ministry, emphasized the importance of work. In His teachings, Jesus Christ constantly refers to human work: that of the shepherd (Jn 10:1-16), the farmer (Mk 12:1-12), the doctor (Lk 4: 23), the sower (Mk 4:1-9), the householder (Mt. 13-52), the servant (Mt. 24:45; Lk. 12:42-48), the steward (Lk. 16:1-8), the fisherman (Mt. 13:47-50.), the merchant (Mt. 13:45-46.), the labourer (Mt. 20:1-16.). “Jesus also condemns the behavior of the useless servant, who hides his talent in the ground (cf. Mt 25:14-30) and praises the faithful and prudent servant whom the Master finds hard at work at the duties entrusted to him (cf. Mt 24:46).”¹⁹ “It can indeed be said that he looks with love upon human work and the different forms that it takes, seeing in each one of these forms a particular facet of man's likeness with God, the Creator and Father.”²⁰

Work: Subjective and Objective Aspects

The process of work has two aspects: the subject that works, and the object of work. Considered objectively, work is the product of human activity. *Laborem Exercens* underscores two kinds of products. First, the human being dominates the earth “by the very fact of domesticating

¹⁶ Mark 6:3

¹⁷ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 259.

¹⁸ Salgado, *Social Encyclicals: Commentary and Critique*, 364.

¹⁹ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 259.

²⁰ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens: On Human Work*, no. 26.

animals, rearing them and obtaining from them the food and clothing he needs, and by the fact of being able to extract various mineral resources from the earth and the seas.”²¹

The second kind of product is the “product of industry, wherein out of the raw materials which are the product of the first kind of work, the human person produces something higher and nobler.”²² Products with more ingenuity are produced through machineries with high level of sophistication and top-class competency. *Laborem Exercens* considers machines allies of the human being, “for through them human work becomes easier and less tedious, and because they enable the human being to make better and nobler things.”²³ Products of today that make life much easier and comfortable cannot be realized without these machineries.

Nevertheless, these very machineries become a threat to the human person by killing the dignity of his work. In most cases, workers are thrown out of their jobs and are replaced by these machines. “Depersonalized human values are the price tag for technology, because the latter tries to produce goods the cheapest way - which means exploiting man.”²⁴ These machineries endanger the person’s work, leaving him unemployed or killing his creativity by limiting his work to dull and prosaic chores. Today the machine works and the workers just supervise. *Laborem Exercens* writes,

It is also a fact that, in some instances, technology can cease to become man’s ally and become almost his enemy, as when mechanization of work supplants him, taking away all personal satisfaction and the incentive to creativity and responsibility, when it deprives many workers of their previous employment, or when, through exalting the machine, it reduces man to the status of its slave.²⁵

Considered subjectively, work pertains to the human person who works, the worker. Ideally, the subject who works takes precedence over the object of work. The person working should be prioritized and be seen as more valuable than the object he produces. The primary source for the value of work is man himself, who is the subject. “Work is for man, not man for work.”²⁶

²¹ Ibid., no. 16.

²² Salgado, *Social Encyclicals: Commentary and Critique*, 343.

²³ Ibid., 343.

²⁴ Leonardo Mercado S.V.D., *Philippine Studies: Notes on the Filipino Philosophy of Work and Leisure*, vol. 22, no. 1-2 (Ateneo de Manila University: 1974), p. 80.

²⁵ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens: On Human Work*, no. 19.

²⁶ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens: On Human Work*, no. 27

The value of the human person, the subject, cannot be determined by the object he produces. There is more to the worker than what he creates. The objects of work are seen as the tool towards progress not the other way around. “All economic systems must therefore aim that work achieves its purpose for which it exists, and this purpose is none other than the happiness and prosperity of each and every worker in the society.”²⁷

Economic Policy and Work

Though in itself noble, work can be abused. “When abused, work dehumanizes people.”²⁸ Work which bears a particular mark of man and humanity is reduced to mere income generation. One economic policy, Capitalism, champions this kind of idea.

In the Capitalist paradigm,

workers do not own any means of production, any means of keeping themselves alive, and because those means are all owned by the bosses, the workers must sell what Marx calls their “labor-power,” their ability to work and create new value. They must do this over and over all their lives. For the boss, hiring labor is like buying any commodity on the market. It is no different than buying a machine, iron ore, a hospital bed, or a computer. Workers have to sell their labor-power, their ability to work, to the capitalists just as a vendor would sell any other commodity. And once the workers’ labor-power is sold, the bosses get to use it the way they see fit—which always means to maximize profits. That’s what happens when a worker gets hired.²⁹

In capitalism, “work was reduced to a sort of merchandise, which the capitalist bought in the same manner that he bought raw materials and the machineries needed for production.”³⁰ Far worse, the capitalists take care of their machineries but take for granted their workers. Production becomes more important the people, profit takes precedence over work.

Workers are forced to labor for many hours, paid with subhuman wages, get sick and live in houses not even fit for animals. They don’t have access to health care, no clean water to drink and own nothing except the clothes they wear. “While few powerful individuals pile up property upon

²⁷ Salgado, *Social Encyclicals: Commentary and Critique*, 344.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 283.

²⁹ Fred Goldstein, *Low Wage Capitalism* (New York: World View Forum, 2008), pp. 111-112.

³⁰ Salgado, *Social Encyclicals: Commentary and Critique*, 345.

property, with the vast majority left with virtually nothing.³¹” As Karl Marx said,

Labor certainly produces marvels for the rich but it produces privation for the worker. It produces palaces but hovels for the worker. It produces beauty but deformity for the worker.³²

In capitalism, work as an essential part of human being is being desecrated and defiled. Work as man’s crowning glory becomes his beast of burden. Work becomes something external. He is alienated from his work. Marx writes,

What constitutes the alienation of labor? First, that the work is external to the worker, that it is not part of his nature, and that, consequently, he does not fulfill himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well-being, does not develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. The worker therefore, feels himself at home only during his leisure time, whereas at work he feels homeless.³³

In this arrangement, work ceases to bring man to his perfection. Instead, work condemns man and gives him unnecessary pains. Income then becomes the supreme end of work. The fulfillment gained from work becomes nothing but an elusive dream. In capitalism, the dignity of human labor is undervalued and violated. Marx adds,

The laborer who for twelve hours long weaves, spins, bores, turns, builds, shovels, breaks stone, carries hods, and so on—is the twelve hours’ weaving, spinning, boring, turning, building, shoveling, stone-breaking, regarded by him as a manifestation of life, as life? Quite the contrary, life for him begins where this activity ceases, at the table, at the tavern seat, in bed. The twelve hours’ work, on the other hand, has no meaning for him but only as earnings, which enable him to sit down at a table, to take his seat in the tavern and to lie down in a bed.³⁴

Work, in its truest sense, should uplift man. It should enable the human person to actualize himself and be in touch with his creative nature. Given

³¹ Ibid., 281.

³² Karl Marx, Early Writings, in Joseph Petulla, *Christian Political Theology: A Marxian Guide* (Maryknol, New York: Orbis Books, 1972), 44.

³³ Ibid., 44.

³⁴ Ibid., 38.

this paradigm, however, work is seen as a mundane duty which man should fulfill to survive. It explicates the notion that work is merely a means towards another end not an end in itself.

Biblically, work should enable man to reach his perfection and allow himself active participation in God's creative power. God intends that the products made by human hands be a reflection of man's need for communion with the divine. Work has dignity and this dignity directly flows from the inviolable and inalienable dignity of the human person gifted with intellect and will. Marx, however, clearly points out that the structures of society which should enforce man's dignity in relation to work are the same structures that hinder man from realizing this inherent worth. How can we now restore the dignity that is work? When can work become a means of *Kabubayan*, a source of *Buhay* and *Kaginhawahan*?

Work in the Filipino Context

Work is *hanap-buhay*. Following this translation, Filipinos see work not as something external to him rather imbued in his very nature. *Hanapbuhay*, in this context, is not only a symbolic projection of the link between work and life but an incarnation of the ontology of total participation. In the Filipino experience, the *tao* is not separate from work. In fact, the *tao* is the work. *Hanap-buhay* points to Filipino world-view of non-dualism or a philosophy of harmonizing opposites. In the experience of the *tao*, there is no dichotomy between life and work, rather life and work mutually and totally complement each other. "The Filipino wants to harmonize the object and the subject, while at the same time, holding each other as distinct."³⁵ Thus, Filipinos not only see the dignity of work but see its dignity in relation to his very own dignity.

However, present structures prevailing in the Philippine society today suggest the opposite. Unjust labor relations and unequal distribution of wealth become impediments for the human person to see work's dignity. Work is then reduced to mere *hanap-kita* suggesting that *tao* works just for the monetary compensation received from work. *Hanap-kita* promulgates the idea that work and the person who works are two separate identities, hence, a violation of work is not a violation to the person who works. This assumption is problematic since the dignity of works stems from the very idea that work is in the nature of the human person. Thus any violation of work becomes a direct violation of the human person who works.

In the Philippine context, for example, societal and economic structures tend to widen the gap between the rich and the poor. This

³⁵ Mercado S.V.D, *Philippine Studies: Notes on the Filipino Philosophy of Work and Leisure*, p. 71.

structure takes on a form of a pyramid where the few elite are on top, basking on the wealth of the nation, while the rest of the Filipinos are at the bottom suffering from hunger, oppression, and injustice. This structure places control of the nation's wealth and resources on the hands of a few people while others wallow in abject poverty.

Mercado writes,

The Philippine society is highly stratified and hierarchic. A big gap exists between the Big People and Small People. This stratification already existed in precolonial Philippines. In descending order they were the datu (the ruling class), the maharlika (the nobility), the timagua (the freemen or common class), and the alipin (the service, dependent class). The carry-over of this stratification is found today in the political and business datu on top and the alipin in the underpaid domestic help and tenants at the bottom of the social ladder. In this stratified framework, manual work is only for the lower class whereas the modern datu think it undignified to soil their hands with manual labor.³⁶

“God intended the earth and all that it contains for the use of every human being and people.”³⁷ The wealth of the world was made by God for all people and no one has the exclusive right to hoard more wealth and property when others are dying of hunger and poverty. “No one is justified in keeping for his exclusive use what he does not need, when others lack necessities.”³⁸ Admittedly, these structures devalue the dignity of the human person and by extension, the dignity of his work. It does not only promulgate unjust policies, which tend to alienate the person from his work but also attacks the very core of the human person. How can we now bring back the dignity of work? How can *hanap-kita* go back to being *hanap-buhay*?

³⁶ Ibid., 75.

³⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progression: On the Development of Peoples*, no. 22.

³⁸ Ibid., 23.

Recommendations

Many see the problem of work in the country from the lens of economics and society. However, these are just superficial causes of the issue of work. The real problem is the dissolution of man on the philosophical plane which is experienced in the form of the alienation, dehumanization, and depersonalization of the *tao*. The real dilemma springs from the notion that work is not innately human, hence, is detached from the human person himself.

This paper underscores then three recommendations which may bridge the gap between work and dignity, which has now become worlds apart.

1. The State as the Enforcer of Propriety

Laborem Exercens distinguishes two kinds of employers, the direct and the indirect. On one hand, the direct employer is the person or institution with whom the worker enters directly into a work contract in accordance with definite conditions. On the other hand, “an indirect employer includes both persons and institutions of various kinds, and also collective labor contracts and the principles of conduct which are laid down by these persons and institutions and which determine the whole socioeconomic system or are its result.”³⁹

Primary to these indirect forces is the State. It is the state that creates and formulates the principles and policies for production, employment, distribution and wage. Article XXIII No. III of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.”⁴⁰ In lieu of this, the State has the primary obligation to safeguard the rights of the workers and to ensure that the labor force gets just pay and works in an approving condition. It is the duty then of the State to ensure that the policies made are just and acceptable especially to the working class. Unjust policies lead to inhumane working conditions. If the state cannot defend its workers, then whom can the workers ask for help?

These lead us to two questions. First, how do we form economic policies that would be just to all? And second, what criterion should be used to determine whether the policies which will be made are beneficial to all not only to the chosen few?

John Rawls, an American political philosopher, points out that people

³⁹ Paul John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens: On Human Work*, nos. 76-77.

⁴⁰ Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

are born into different social positions and these social positions seem to be the basis of entitlements. However, he asserts that “the social positions we are born into are actually something that accrues to us through the accident of birth, through the luck in the natural lottery.”⁴¹ They are just contingencies, some circumstantial vagaries that people got. People cannot be said to deserve them insofar as it was given to them only through chance. It is then implausible to make economic policies based loosely on people’s social positions insofar as they have just been products of luck.

With this facticity at hand, Rawls suggests that people involved in formulating economic policies must go back to what he calls the ‘*Original Position*.’ “The point to keep in mind is that we must find some point of view that, removed from and not distorted by the particular features and circumstances of the all-encompassing background framework, from which a fair agreement between persons regarded as free and equal can be reached.”⁴²

For Rawls, the way to think about what would be just economic principles is to imagine what principles people would make if they are denied particular information about themselves. They are, in a way, put under the veil of ignorance. Natural infirmities are not relevant in this economic conception. They are set aside and bracketed so that selfish propensities and ulterior desires would be curbed out. “Specific contingencies are ignored in order for its effects to be nullified which put men at odds and tempt them to shape principles that will favor them. The idea here is to relate fairness to ignorance.”⁴³ If an individual doesn’t know which of the five pieces of the pizza that he is cutting is going to end up with him, he might as well cut the pieces fairly and equally. Similarly, if people do not know who they are going to be and what resources will be available to them, it makes sense to choose fair economic principles that would be beneficial to all.

The state admittedly faces a difficult challenge today in terms of laying out the tenets of a just economic policy. It must continuously define and redefine the principles formulated if it is up to the challenge of building a more humane society. Work has dignity that even the State cannot pollute.

2. Safeguarding the Priority of Labor Over Capital

“For Capitalism, profit, wealth, and money are the supreme goals of

⁴¹ Wai Chee Dimock, *Residues of Justice* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 103.

⁴² John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 23.

⁴³ Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 3.

economic-political activity; labor is just a means, tool, instrument, of capital for generating money.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, for work to be dignified in a capitalist society, there must be a priority of labor over capital. By God’s command ‘to subdue the earth,’ God has placed the visible world at man’s disposal. “Every human being is the real efficient subject in the production process, while the whole collection of instruments, no matter how perfect they may be in themselves, are only a mere instrument subordinate to human labor.”⁴⁵

Laborem Exercens writes,

Labor has an intrinsic priority over capital. This principle directly concerns the process of production: in this process labor is always a primary efficient cause, while capital, the whole collection of means of production, remains a mere instrument or instrumental cause. There must exist between work and capital a relationship of complementarities: the very logic inherent within the process of production shows that the two must mutually permeate one another and that there is an urgent need to create economic systems in which the opposition between capital and labour is overcome.⁴⁶

When labor takes priority over capital, workers’ needs are given and provided for. Workers should be seen as more important than the product they produce. Employers, if this will be the case, will care more about his workers, treating them with respect and dignity. For what sort of product can compete with the human person? Whatever product is there and how perfect they may seem to be cannot take over the human person gifted with intellect, will and inviolable dignity. “For what is man that you are mindful of him? You have made him a little less than angel and crowned him with glory and honor.”⁴⁷

Capital and profit are important. It is through these things that work finds its validity and utility. However, these should not be seen as the end goal of work itself. Work should start with the human person and should end with the human person. Capital and profit are just means towards that end. Hence labor takes priority over profit.

3. Upholding the Rights of Workers

⁴⁴Salgado, *Social Encyclicals: Commentary and Critique*, 350.

⁴⁵Paul John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens: On Human Work*, 56.

⁴⁶ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 277.

⁴⁷ Psalm 8:4-5

Man must work insofar as it was mandated by God. He also needs to work to maintain the Earth and bring about innovations. He must work out of regard for others especially his immediate family and the society where he belongs. Though work is seen as an obligation on the part of human beings, it is also a source of rights on the part of the worker. These rights are inviolable since no economic policy is conclusive enough to violate them. “The human rights that flow from work are part of the broader context of those fundamental rights of the person.”⁴⁸

a. The Right of Partnership

In the capitalist society, workers are seen as mere employees, subject to the capitalists’ will. They work and are given a wage that does not match the effort and energy that the workers exert. More often than not, they are deprived of some benefits and treated unjustly. It is rather obvious that with this kind of arrangement, the employees are exploited and their rights violated.

Tantamount to preserving the dignity of work is preserving the right of the worker. It becomes a different story when workers are treated as partners. Not only can they share ownership of the enterprise and receive more income, they can also cease to become puppets of the employers. They would be acting like true human beings, with intelligence and free will to decide on vital matters. They can bring into full play their capabilities as persons, and at the same time can defend their rights.⁴⁹

When employees are treated partners, they are given the remuneration due to them. “Remuneration or just wage is the legitimate fruit of work. Employers commit grave injustice when they refuse to pay a just wage or when they do not give it in due time and in proportion to the work done.”⁵⁰ Workers should be given a just monetary and social compensation in exchange for their ‘labor power’ in order for them and their families to live decent lives.

b. The Right of Associations

Workers should also be given the opportunity to create and be part of a union. Article XXIII, No. IV in the International Declaration of Human Rights states, “Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.”⁵¹ Workers should be encouraged to form and join labor unions which would serve as the employer’s check and

⁴⁸ Paul John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens: On Human Work*, p. 35.

⁴⁹ Salgado, *Social Encyclicals: Commentary and Critique*, 354.

⁵⁰ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 302.

⁵¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

balance. Its primary task is “to defend the existential interests of workers in all sectors in which their rights are concerned.”⁵²

c. The Right to Rest

After creating the Earth, God took time to rest. The Bible states that,

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.⁵³

After creating reality, God of course did not need to rest. He did not get tired when he fashioned the universe. So what does it mean to ‘rest’? How is rest related to work?

Man, inasmuch as he is bound to work, was also mandated by God to rest. Resting here is seen not as something external to work rather as part of work itself. It was deemed necessary by God that ‘rest’ becomes part of man’s duty to work. To work is God’s directive, so too is rest. ‘Resting’ is not tantamount to cease working. ‘Resting’, as seen by God, is a moment of pause. It is a moment to refresh, recollect, and renew the mind and body. It is a time to ponder on all the work done and all the work to be done. Rest is considered not a stumbling block to work but its stepping stone.

“The apex of biblical teaching on work is the commandment of the Sabbath rest.”⁵⁴ Through the Sabbath rest, man becomes closer to God as he is given the opportunity to take part in the sanctifying action of God. Therefore, workers should also be given a time to rest. Workers should not be forced to work beyond the time that was agreed upon by both parties. In addition, they must be given a just compensation commensurate to the time they spent working. Leaves and other benefits should be available to them regardless of what position they have or the number of years they have stayed in their own respective companies. Take away leaves, benefits and rest, what would be left of work?

Rest preserves the dignity of work. Work is dignified when the worker is able to break free from the contemporary definition of work. “The memory and the experience of the Sabbath constitute a barrier against becoming slaves to work, whether voluntarily or by force, and against every kind of exploitation, hidden or evident.”⁵⁵ Without rest, man is deemed made for work not work made for man.

⁵² Paul John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens: On Human Work*, p. 43.

⁵³ Exodus 20:11

⁵⁴ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 258.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 258.

Conclusion

The problem of work has continued to perplex human beings until today. All economic policies established since time immemorial prove futile in solving this problem. A wide variety of policies and strategies were already implemented but all to no avail. Many philosophers, sociologists and economists have made grand claims but the problem of work still exists.

This problem persists not merely because people are implementing erroneous policies but because they fail to identify the root cause of the problem. Economic policies (i.e., capitalism) and societal paradigms (i.e., pyramid structure) are just the tip of the iceberg. The problem of work is ever present because people fail to see work's inherent dignity. In order to solve the problem of work, we must go back to the human person himself. The human person, being created in God's image and likeness, possesses inviolable and inalienable dignity which no economic or societal structure could corrupt. Work possesses dignity insofar as the person who works not only works but is an embodiment of work itself.

The three recommendations cited do not only address the problem of work but also enforces the dignity of the human person who works. Work should never devalue the worker. It should be a stepping stone not a stumbling block towards perfection. Since work confers to humans a distinct mark, then its dignity must be preserved at all costs. Work's dignity is preserved when: (1) the state enforces propriety and fairness in policy-making; and (2) when employers prioritize labor over capital and if the rights of the workers are upheld.

Work is man's crowning glory. It is through work that man improves his human condition. He subjects created reality at his disposal and fabricates out of these something noble, useful and beautiful. It also reflects man's nature as God's co-creator. Through work, he takes part in the creative nature of God and fulfills his duty to fill the Earth with goodness and life.

Hanap-bubay, which is innately good, should enhance our *pagkatao* and our struggle for *pagpapakatao*. Therefore, the dignity of work should never be taken for granted. A direct violation of the dignity of work speaks of a direct violation on the dignity of the human person per se. Never in any circumstances can money and capital be more valuable than the person whose inherent dignity surpasses any means of production. *Pagbibigay Dangal sa Kabuhayan* enhances our dignity as we engage our potentials in building human lives. Our work is something we should enjoy, not something we want to get away from. To become human is to work. I work therefore I am. *Dangal-Kabuhayan* is *Dangal-Tao*.

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