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*The Priority of Labour. A Commentary on Laborem exercens, Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II, by Gregory Baum, New York/Ramsey, Paulist Press, 1982, 152 pp., ISBN 0-8091-2479-3.*

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**The Priority of Labour.** A Commentary on **Laborem exercens**, Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II, by Gregory Baum, New York/Ramsey, Paulist Press, 1982, 152 pp., ISBN 0-8091-2479-3.

According to G. Baum, the encyclical of John Paul II has risen the Church's social message to an unprecedented height, and this is partly due to the critical and creative dialogue of the Polish Church with Marxism practiced by the personalist group in Poland against the wishes of the conservative Catholics as well as orthodox Marxists. However the author acknowledges the fact that this encyclical follows the line of argumentation presented before by several previous popes.

The priority of labour over capital, the moral dignity of honest and useful work, man as bearer of the divine image having dominion over the earth, labour as the axis of human self-making, solidarity and justice achieved in a peaceful manner, moral condemnation of doctrines based on individualism and materialism, rejection of an omnipotent State, the insistence on the function of government to promote and protect common good without substituting the grass-root initiative, the primacy of duties over the rights, the treatment of the oppressed struggling for greater justice as the dynamic element of history — all these factors may be found also in the previous major social documents of the Catholic Church.

According to Baum, "the economic system proposed by **Laborem exercens** is a form of socialism, one in which the subject character of society is safeguarded" (p. 81). He mentions the following arguments in favour of his thesis: a) the emphasis in the encyclical on the moral community among people (people in solidarity struggling for their collective self-interest in the context of a wider consideration of justice for all); b) the liberationist orientation of the new teaching (the priority of labour over capital as the result of a collective effort); c) the cooperative spirit of the encyclical appealing for a self-governing society (the workers becoming co-owners and be co-

responsible for the policies of their industries; the interplay of many different institutions and local interests coordinated effectively within the framework of central planning); d) the world cooperative system treated as a condition of success in the individual countries; e) the advocacy of a major social reconstruction in the West as well as in the East; f) the personalist principle reconciled with the communal concern; g) treatment of history as open (ideologies fail to recognize that people are subjects, and that therefore history is not scientifically predictable).

The manifesto of the Church acting in solidarity with the liberationist movements searching for a genuine social justice has a major importance for all Catholics. It contains a concrete, historical social ideal based on the potentialities of the present, that breaks with the present order, generates new social policies, and summons forth energies to struggle for the as yet unrealized possibilities of the present (p. 86).

However, I do not see enough reason to call the message of the encyclical as 'socialist' as Baum understands it. Socialism generally is understood as a social system based on common ownership of the means of production and distribution (*The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, 1977, p. 585) and in this respect the encyclical is very far from any 'socialism'. It just claims the subordination of property to the right of common use. The universal designation of goods and the right to common use of them is very far from socialist collectivism oriented to an a priori elimination of private ownership of the means of production. "Merely converting the means of production into state property in the collectivist systems is by no means equivalent to 'socializing' that property" (LE 14). The ideal from this perspective would be such a state of affairs in which society would consist of "living communities both in form and in substance in the sense that the members of each body would be looked upon and treated as persons and encouraged to take an active part in the life of the body" (LE 14).

Of course, there are many socialists in the world who could be happy the new world be arranged in such a manner. However, the theory and practice of socialism has remained very far from the anarchistic dream of free communities consisting of liberated men. The conflict between the libertarian socialism represented by Bakunin and the State socialism represented by Marx, and even more by Lenin, has been won historically by the latter. The seizure of power and its preservation at any human and material cost is typical for present day victorious socialism, abstracting of social democratic governments and the relatively few 'socialist' communes which are mostly of a temporary nature.

Any major social reconstruction directed towards freedom and common well-being becomes practically excluded under the totalitarian rule ideologically based on the socialist phraseology.

It is paradoxical, that the liberal democracies based on the acceptance of human rights offer much more room for the spontaneous libertarian movements than any of the formally socialist systems. Even in the 'socialist' communes quite often the critical minority becomes effectively suppressed and conformism is wide spread.

The encyclical in my understanding does not offer a ready blueprint of a 'perfect' socio-economic system but suggests some basic moral rules which should be followed. Under any circumstances, the rights of workers are considered within the broad context of human rights. Human person should be able to preserve his/her awareness of working for himself/herself. The employment relationships should be considered within a broad framework (the concept of an indirect employer in addition to the direct employer). Rational planning and the proper organization of human labour should be designed in consideration to the inalienable human rights. A just wage is the concrete means of verifying the justice of the whole socio-economic system. The rights and needs of working women should be taken care of. Free

trade unions should be allowed as a mouth-piece for the struggle for social justice. It is characteristic of work that it first and foremost unites people and therefore "both those who work and those who manage the means of production and who own them must in some way be united in this community" (LE 20). All partners involved in joint work should liberate themselves from group egoism and take a view to the common good of the whole of society. A strike or a lock-out remain extreme means. It is necessary to proclaim and promote the dignity of work, of all work but especially of agricultural work (LE 21). The right of disabled people should be fostered. Everything possible should be done in order to bring benefit to the emigrant's personal, family and social life, both for the country to which he goes and the country which he leaves" (LE 23).

The basic principle of the whole encyclical is: **the hierarchy of values and the profound meaning of work itself require that capital should be at the service of labour and not labour at the service of capital.** The phenomenon of labour is understood in a very broad sense. "Man ought to imitate God, his Creator, in working, because man alone has the unique characteristic of likeness to God. Man ought to imitate God in working and also in resting, since God himself wished to present his own creative activity under the form of work and rest" (LE 25). People are expected to grow spiritually through work. They should understand this message themselves, and also the conditions should be provided in which 'the gospel of work' would be adequately implemented. "By enduring the toil of work in union with Christ crucified for us, man in a way collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity (...) The cross which his toil constitutes reveals a new good springing from work itself, from work understood in depth and in all its aspects and never apart from work" (LE 27).

The message of the encyclical is not 'socialist' because the kingdom of God can not be narrowed to any organizational recipe. "Earthly progress must be carefully distin-

guished from the growth of Christ's kingdom" (LE 27). The better ordering of human society may be achieved in a wide variety of ways foreshadowing the new age in which human dignity, brotherhood and freedom would increase substantially. The development of the kingdom of God must have a priority and no any 'socialist' scheme can promise a real spiritual progress. Work is a good thing for man as long as it is socially useful and corresponds to man's dignity. "Through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed in a sense becomes "more a human being" (LE 9).

I must emphasize a very good intention of G. Baum to show some common ground between the encyclical and the democratic socialists. Both assume that the present crisis in the societies of East and West is due to failures that are structural as well as moral (p. 57). Both emphasize the need of a major social reconstruction of justice in modern society.

Institutions originally created for the benefit of people become a source of oppression not being adequately controlled by those whom they are supposed to serve. The dehumanizing trends in society must be analyzed around the structures of human labour (p. 60). Technology must become again the ally of a spiritually liberated man. Worker's struggle "is possible only through a surrender to solidarity (which is spiritual), only if the collective self-interest is accompanied by a dedication to justice (which implies values), and only if the workers recognize that history is not subject to a fixed logic but remains open to human initiative (which affirms freedom)" (p. 69).

The perspective promoted by G. Baum is very far from any 'scientific' socialism, particularly vulgarized by Soviet communists. His argumentation shows a depth unknown to most of the socialist writings, for example, when he argues that we are all brothers and sisters only out of a faith in the unity of man,

or when he explains how the encyclical stresses spirituality as serving man laboring to become more fully subject of his/her history (p. 70). The author emphasizes the anti-idealist, non-dualistic and labour-oriented approach of the encyclical. "Eternal life here is not a realm that competes with earthly life for loyalty; it is rather the unfolding of the subject character of human life beyond death" (p. 72).

The teaching which is positively biased in favour of the people at the bottom and condemn the structure of oppression — such is definitely the teaching of the encyclical (Baum complains that in the encyclical the institutional injustices to which women are exposed in society are not adequately acknowledged) — should appeal to all people committed to social justice, including among them also democratic socialists. G. Baum has much achieved in his book by showing the common ground for those of good will to learn and appreciate truth wherever it may be found.

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**Le statut juridique du salarié - gréviste québécois**, par Gaston Nadeau, Québec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1981, 186 pp., ISBN 2-7637-6938-1.

Cette monographie sera d'un apport important pour la promotion de la théorie de la grève-suspension du contrat individuel de travail. Certes les professeurs Beaulieu, en 1955, et Gagnon, LeBel et Verge, en 1971, avaient déjà notifié leur détachement de l'approche de la grève-rupture. Mais l'absence d'une étude en profondeur demeurait. Monsieur Nadeau comble, et d'excellente façon, cette lacune.

L'étude est comparative: Québec, France. L'auteur a de toute évidence opté pour cette approche, de préférence à une comparaison avec le droit américain, parce que, d'une part, les législateurs québécois et français ont adopté des textes qui supportent