**Background notes for October 27, 2021 lecture**

**Developing a Post-pandemic Spirituality: Reimagining Work**

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Introduction

1. The Covid pandemic has disrupted most aspects of work life and has opened up opportunities for spiritual growth.
2. We are all on a spiritual journey involving work which includes various kinds of purposeful, planned activities designed to achieve something worthwhile.
3. Types of work: paid jobs; care of children and seniors; ministerial; artistic and volunteer.
4. Our society now has a great opportunity to reimagine work.

I. The current job situation

1. October 2021 Labor Dept report
2. The economy created only 194,000 jobs in September 2021, the smallest gain since December 2020 and down from 366,000 jobs added in August 2021.
3. The September unemployment rate fell to 4.8% from the August rate of 5.2% in part because many have dropped out of the labor force and are no longer looking for a job, some 1.6 million because of fear of Covid.
4. The average hourly wage is increasing. The October wage is up 0.6% over August and 4.6%. over October 2020.
5. Employers in most sectors are having trouble finding workers.
6. Enhanced jobless benefits have for the most part expired.
7. Supply chains cannot keep up with the demand for goods. Ships cannot unload their cargo, not enough dock workers, not enough truck drivers to transport goods around the country. Consumer demand increased as Covid threat lessened.
8. Around 10% of U.S. workers belong to unions. Thousands of union workers are currently on strike, for example, workers at a Kellogg plant in Michigan, school bus drivers in Annapolis, Md, janitors at Denver airport and 10,000 UAW members striking John Deere in 14 different locations.
9. We now have some 11 million job openings with 8 million unemployed.
10. Analysis
11. A Bankrate June, 2021 survey of 18 leading economists reported it will take till June of 2022 before we would recover completely from losing 22.2 million jobs during the pandemic and reaching an unemployment rate of 14.8%. Experts expect an unemployment rate of 4.49% with 412,000 jobs created on a monthly average.
12. Robert Reich, Secretary of Labor during Clinton administration makes these points in an October 2021 article: “American workers are now engaged in the equivalent of a general strike,” seeking better wages, hazard pay, child care, paid sick leave and health care.
13. We are in a major rethinking of work (one of the biggest since women entered the workforce during WWII) due to the pandemic. Workers are primarily looking for greater flexibility, more humane working conditions, finding more time for leisure, doing something meaningful.
14. Remote work (cf Pew Research Survey January 2021). Remote work during the pandemic has been an overwhelming success for both employers and employees. Common office space is here to stay because it promotes relationships and collaboration. Many companies are moving toward a hybrid model, a mix of days in the office and days at home; for example, going to the office one day a week.

II. Volunteer Work

1. History
2. Many Americans volunteered to raise funds and boycott British goods during the Revolutionary War.
3. Volunteerism increased during major events: Civil War, WWI, WWII, the Great Depression and the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.
4. In the 1950s corporations began offering incentives to their employees for doing volunteer work.
5. In the 1960s the Federal Government encouraged volunteers to join the Peace Corps.
6. After 9/11/01 the volunteer rate went up to historic highs in 2005 and then declined gradually until 2015.
7. Current
8. About 25% of Americans take time to volunteer to do unpaid work for or through an organization.
9. Volunteers tend to be married, white and female, (the number of men is growing) and better educated.
10. The biggest activity is collecting and distributing food.
11. Motives include good citizenship, satisfaction in helping others, feeling better about self (boosting self-esteem), establishing contacts.
12. During the pandemic two-in-three volunteers stopped or decreased their activities. For example, Meals on Wheels had to hire drivers.
13. Think of the many who do volunteer work for the Church. Many Catholic Church workers are underpaid and often under appreciated.
14. Faith-based non-profits
15. Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, Jewish Family and Children’s Services serve the nation’s sick, elderly and poor.
16. They run about 70% of the U.S. food programs, 27% of emergency shelters and halfway houses.
17. The Catholic Volunteer Network promotes volunteer service opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds and skills.

III. Pandemics

A. The Black Death, which between 1346 and 1353 wiped out a large portion of the European population: was commonly interpreted as a punishment by God; led to anti-Semitism blaming the Jews; spawned the Flagellant Movement (self-torture to appease an angry God); church sponsored festivals and pilgrimages that brought large crowds together; devotions to Saint Sebastian (d.c. 300) pierced with arrows thus saving others from the deadly plague; generated heroic acts of charity by vowed religious women, priests and dedicated lay Christians who provided compassionate care for the dying while risking their own lives.

B. Spanish Flu pandemic, which lasted from the spring of 1918 to the summer of 1919 killing an estimated 750,000 Americans, producing various effects: Churches closed for Sunday worship, and parishioners found ways to pray at home; a big increase in spiritualism and communications with the dead through seances and Ouija boards; blaming German spies as scapegoats; heroic acts of compassionate care by vowed religious women that won the admiration of the whole country for their “quiet determined selflessness” (Op/Ed *New York Times*).

C. Covid-19 pandemic began in the U.S. in February 2020, and is still raging, already killing more Americans than the Spanish flu. Loved ones died alone in hospitals and deceased were buried with family only ceremonies. Generous citizens came to the aid of the home- bound in simple ways, providing meals and transportation. Asian Americans were targeted as the group scapegoat. Medical science produced remarkably effective vaccines but many Americans refused to get vaccinated. Churches closed in compliance with civil law. Doctors and nurses worked overtime caring for the sick in hospitals.

IV. Pew Research Center Study

1. Conducted in August 2020 during the height of the Covid crisis surveying how the virus was impacting the daily lives of Americans.
2. The existential concerns which suggest the direction for our spiritual journey in the post-pandemic era.
3. Maintaining personal relationships – the single biggest concern.
4. Staying healthy.
5. Managing financially.
6. Making government work.
7. Balancing work and leisure.

V. Work During the Pandemic

1. Traditional patterns were changed.
2. Before WWII men typically worked 5 days a week 40 hours a week outside the home. Wives did not have a paying job outside of the home, but raised children and cared for the home, the most important kind of work.
3. During WWII women took jobs in factories.
4. Examples of change
5. Millions lost their jobs and more had their hours cut.
6. Essential workers felt compelled to work to keep their jobs.
7. Health care providers were exhausted by extra hours attending to the sick.
8. More people worked at home; some found this confining and causing greater strain on family relationships; others mostly college educated, well paid workers, liked teleworking which provided more time for family and leisure activities and less time commuting.
9. Employers are having trouble finding workers. Some restaurants turn away customers because they cannot find waitstaff. One study shows 44% of small business are having trouble filling positions.
10. Supply chains are not functioning effectively for lack of workers and large demands.
11. Many workers want more flexibility: four day work weeks; hybrid work, combining virtual and in person; more time for family and leisure; avoid commutes; use city offices for periodic group meetings.

VI. *Laborem Exercens*: (On Human Work)

1. Background
2. Encyclical by Pope John Paul II published in 1981 to commemorate 90th anniversary of first great encyclical of modern Catholic social teachings *Rerum* *Novarum* by Pope Leo XIII in 1891, the most significant papal document on work.
3. Commentary by Patricia Lamoureux in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching* ed. by Kenneth Himes (p389-414).
4. Content
5. Work is the key to dealing with the “social problem.”
6. Book of Genesis teaches that by labor we participate in God’s creative activity, shaping ourselves and our world.
7. The priority of the subjective over the objective dimensions of work. Emphasize the person doing the work over the kind of work being done. The human person is not an instrument of production or a commodity to be bought and sold.
8. Persons have rights: to work; to earn a just wage; and to form labor unions, which are an “indispensable element of social life” (20).
9. Care for the family is important work. Work cannot be confined to a paying job. Women have the right to labor outside the home and deserve equal treatment. However, the encyclical does not explicitly recognize the influence of sexism and unequal wages and says women are by nature primarily caretakes of children and the home (19).
10. A spirituality of work: By our daily work we participate in God’s creative activity; Christ “a man of work” teaches us that our work contributes to “earthly progress” and the spread of God’s reign in the world; through our toilsome work we participate in the cross of Christ and in the paschal mystery that transforms the suffering, burdens and fatigue of life into new energy and life thorough Christ’s death and resurrection.
11. Criticisms of LE: it defines women primarily as mothers rather than as persons who can find fulfillment and serve others in various ways; its optimistic view of work, which links toil with Christ obscures the power of social sin to dehumanize work and may glorify harsh toil.

VII. The 2021 Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America addressed the issue of work

A. *The Worker’s Paradise* by David Cloutier.

1. We should start by affirming the goodness of work and linking it with the Vatican II universal call to holiness and our vocation to give of ourselves to serve others.

2. We should seek better work not less work. We should seek not only just work (just wages, working conditions etc.) but also better work, “sacramental work,” suggesting that our most mundane work has a deeper significance, contributing to the unity of the human race, and overcoming the divisive results of sin.

3. The goal of an economic system should not be to produce more consumer goods but to provide more opportunities for rewarding work for all. As Pope Francis says the worst kind of poverty is “that which takes away work and the dignity of work.”

4. “Critical realism” calls for a fruitful interaction between workers as personal agents directing their own lives and specific local micro-economic structures and systems.

5. Cloutier thinks a federally mandated $15 an hour minimum wage is not a wise policy (could hurt small businesses and reduce jobs for young workers). It would be better to adjust a minimum wage according to local circumstances.

B. Response to *The Worker’s Paradise* by Kate Ward

1. CTS holds a broad meaning of work, not just a paying job but all creative, purposeful, self-transformative human activity including activities that transform persons, such as studying; caring for others, raising children, attending to the elderly; volunteering and forming communities.

2. We need public policies that reduce “survival dependence on wages/hours” and provide more opportunities for family care, community building and artistic creation (for example, maternity leave, shorter work weeks, childcare assistance, universal basic income, financial assistance for caring for vulnerable elderly).

1. *Theology and Dehumanizing Work in the Twenty-First Century* by Gemma Tulud Cruz
2. We must take seriously the plight of the “precariat,” a social class of workers who are typically underpaid, lacking in benefits and job security (the proletariat or working class that is in precarious circumstances).
3. Put more emphasis on the biblical notion of the Sabbath rest, which recognizes the need for rest and leisure for a fulfilled human life and for a healthy social order.
4. Also we need greater awareness of the ways the global economy adversely impedes women and minorities who suffer from “anthropological poverty” a form of social sin that attacks a healthy sense of self-worth.
5. We need greater “equity,” (not equality), which treats persons according to their needs as Jesus did by working miracles on the Sabbath. We need laws to meet the demands of justice but Christian love insists that justice be tempered by mercy which strives to alleviate the suffering of all, including the privileged.

VIII. Pope Francis on Work (cf Letter to International Conference November 2017)

1. The Nature of Work
2. Work is the “essential key” to the whole social question.
3. It is the key to spiritual development. It is not merely doing; it is a mission through which we collaborate in the creative work of God.
4. Through work we share in the redemptive mission of Jesus who devoted most of his life to his work as a carpenter.
5. “Every worker is the hands of Christ that continues to create and do good” (St. Ambrose).
6. Through our work we contribute to social development and the common good.
7. However, we must avoid the “mystique” of work which identifies us with our work. We are also family members, friends and inhabitants of the earth.
8. Imperatives
9. We must challenge economic systems that prioritize capital and profits over persons, that only benefits the elites; that damage the environment; that increases the number of unemployed, homeless or landless.
10. The “quintessential criterion” of justice is “the universal destination of goods,” the “first principle of the whole ethical and social order.”
11. The interdependence between work and the environment obliges us to rethink the kind of employment we need in the future; for example work that promotes renewable energy and sustainable development without harming current workers and their families.
12. We must challenge economic policies that harm persons and nature for the sake of immediate profits, serving “the god of money.”
13. We need a sincere dialogue among business, labor and government at all levels, stressing our common origins and humanity and destination which seeks economic policies that benefit marginalized persons and promotes integral human development.
14. Pope Francis advocates promoting solidarity that includes protecting the rights of those excluded from the economic system; guarding against corruption in government, business and trade unions; and educating people in a new global solidarity that challenges individualism, consumerism, unbridled markets and the “myth of indefinite material progress.”

IX. Toward a Theology and Spirituality of Work

1. The Role of theology
2. Retrieving, refocusing and reinterpreting traditional teaching on work.
3. Reading the signs of the times created by the pandemic.
4. Correlating tradition and current concerns.
5. Integrating work into our whole Christian life
6. We must respect the experience of actual workers trying to support a family.
7. Work is not something we just go through until we get to heaven but it has intrinsic value.
8. We need to celebrate work in the world and not just work in the church, for example honoring workers at Mass and not just liturgical ministers.
9. According to Rahner there is no merely natural world; no naturally good acts; all is graced; all is potentially revelatory. As Teilhard says, we can meet God, not just in church, but God present at the tip of the needle, and of the shovel, and of the pen.
10. Vatican II (GS) affirmed this, and so have subsequent popes.
11. Ideally, through our work, we actualize ourselves
12. Work includes all of our purposeful activity, including the work of mothers in the home, volunteers, and those who get paid. We cannot identify work with job.
13. Work draws us out of our indolence and laziness. Many days we are better off because we have work to do. Otherwise, we might just sit around and feel sorry for ourselves.
14. Work keeps us in touch with reality, it teaches us a sober realism; it puts us in touch with our bodies; a mother says she feels good about cleaning, proud of the way her house looks; some people feel good when they get their paycheck.
15. In Genesis, God is pictured as working and resting on the seventh day. God created us as workers. We would have worked even without original sin. The Bible recognizes the goodness of work. This is different from the Greeks, who despised manual labor, because they had a slave society. The Hebrews were agricultural people and shared a sense of the positive character of work.
16. Jesus was a carpenter (Mark 6:3). When he returns to Nazareth, they don’t accept him, because he was such an ordinary worker. He uses examples of workers all the time: farmers, fisherman, homemakers.
17. We can unite our toil and burdensome character of work with Christ, who carried the cross. As Teilhard says, we can divinize our passivities, offer up the boring side of our work.
18. We can also join our joys and victories with the resurrection of Christ.
19. The church is a community of people at work. Work reminds us of our need for solidarity to support one another in our struggles and successes. I think of the man who said he felt the support of his parish when he was out of work.
20. Another theological perspective is that through our work we help co-create the world and build the kingdom
21. The notion of co-creation suggests that through our work we contribute to the common good. Work creates capital to be invested to create more wealth. Work enables us to feed, clothe, and shelter people. In our country, work has built up a prosperous country. It has created a culture, art, architecture, the monuments in Washington, DC, the film industry, TV, newspapers, and built churches. It enables society to have corporations, small businesses, government. It enables technology and scientific advances, which can make life easier for people. For example, the rapid development of effective vaccines to combat the Covid virus.
22. Through our work, we are also spreading the kingdom – the community of love. This reveals the hidden effects of our work and the deeper purposes. We are creating the kingdom, working with God in the spreading of love and peace and justice. We all have a task that only we can do. (Recall Teilhard’s *Mass Upon the* *World*).
23. Through our work we are also completing the incarnation, building up the Body of Christ. The world is the divine milieu charged with creative energy and “infused with light by the incarnate word.” (Teilhard) Thus, work is not game playing but an effort to unleash matters’ spiritual potential.
24. We can thus relate liturgy and life. We are preparing the universal host.
25. Relating work to the kingdom brings out some of its negative factors especially social sin.
26. Some work harms the common good – building bombs for terrorists, teaching dictators torture techniques.
27. This also brings out the problem of unemployment and underemployment which diminishes the kingdom.
28. Slave labor, sex trafficking and dehumanizing toil.
29. The Christian obligation to work for justice, a constitutive element of living the Gospel.
30. Summary
31. We need theological perspectives to deal with the burdens and joys of our existence as workers.
32. It is crucial that we understand that work is tightly bound up with our spiritual life and our vocation as Christians. We must be more concerned with the things of the world because of our faith as Vatican II taught us.
33. Other essential points are that through our work, we actualize ourselves and both create the world and build the kingdom. (This distinction allows us to think about serving both the common good and the more hidden work of spreading the kingdom). Remember to stress the priority of the worker over the product, of the subjective over the objective, of labor over capital. This does mean putting the person as worker in the center, showing that self-fulfillment comes from spreading the kingdom.

X. Practical Applications

1. In general
2. This theology should help us find greater meaning in our work.
3. It should remind us of our dignity as workers based on the fact that work co-creates and links us with the work of Christ, who was a carpenter.
4. More specifically
5. We are reminded of our responsibility to help with the unemployment problem. It is a task not just of the state but of society; to be empathetic with those who have lost their jobs; forming partnerships to create jobs; improving the welfare system with an emphasis on expanding work opportunities. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development offers not a handout but a way out of poverty.
6. To those whose work is not satisfying, too toilsome, it might call for looking for another job. I think of the young man who rose in a corporation, did not find it satisfying, returned to school and became a counselor and is much happier now, though he makes one-third the money. One might think of Richard Bowles book, *What Color is Your Parachute?* – finding a job that matches one’s interests and talents.
7. Some who find their work burdensome, totally or in part, need to change attitudes – say a prayer in the morning, offering up one’s work. A waitress turned her toilsome job into an art form that served and pleased customers; join the toilsome part with the Cross of Christ.
8. For those whose jobs are not socially esteemed, they need to be more in touch with the good done and the way it spreads the kingdom. Despite the feminist movement, mothers must be assured of the great importance of raising the children and attending to the home. Parents should think about how they help produce good citizens, productive people, how they share habits of hard work, creativity, and cooperation; how they provide their children with the opportunity for education; the chance to give them a sense of public service; of sharing from their abundance; of delaying gratification. They can also think of ways in which they help spread the kingdom; teaching religious truths and values by way of their example; initiating their offspring into religious traditions; praying together; the conviction that their offspring carry the effects of honest effort despite appearances. Professional people, such as doctors, lawyers, clergy, teachers, nurses, are clearly oriented to the common good. For example, teachers should remember how they can affect students, give them self-confidence, develop critical skills, teach them to care for others. In terms of the kingdom, there might be ways that professionals help that are not immediately apparent. Lawyers might give good example by their ethical behavior. Teachers might be affecting children by their sense of dedication in a way they cannot even guess. Doctors might be helping someone die well or a family accept it, even if they do not cure the patient. Business people can think of ways they help create jobs and wealth, expanding the economic pie; by treating people properly, they can portray something about the kingdom of mutuality. Those in service jobs can concentrate on dealing well with people.
9. People who identify themselves with their work should remember that dignity in work comes from who we are and not what we do. Workaholics should face their fears of relationships and not use work as an escape. Hard drivers should try to structure in more leisure and make sure it is not just an extension of work.
10. Those in jobs that cause harm might have to think about getting out, since their activities do not spread the kingdom.
11. Those of us who enjoy satisfying and fulfilling work of any kind (paid jobs, volunteer work, care work with children and elderly, home making, etc.) should be grateful for this blessing and do what we can to help less fortunate workers.

XI. Additional Points

1. Labor unions
2. American influences on Leo XIII through Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore who convinced him to support labor unions so important to U.S. Catholics making it financially.
3. Consistent support for unions by American bishops.
4. Homemaker
5. Work about 100 hours a week.
6. Worth $178,000 as an annual salary.
7. About one in five U.S. adults are stay at home parents.
8. Activities: child care, driver, laundry, cook, shopping, paying bills, helping children with homework.
9. Forming the family as the domestic church.