

Article

The Role of the Catholic Church against Changes and Threats to the Value of Work

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Abstract: The purpose of the article is to present the role played by the Catholic Church in Western Europe against civilization's threats to the value of work in the context of Catholic social teaching. There are historical and contemporary changes and threats to the value of work. The importance of work was analyzed in terms of antiquity, the Middle Ages, during the nineteenth-century industrial revolution and in the era of contemporary IT changes. We present how the value of work was perceived, what role Christianity played and the position of the Catholic Church in relation to social changes and the progress of civilization. It was pointed out how socio-economic transformations and, above all, scientific and technical progress, influenced the threats regarding the personal dimension of work and the subjective role of a man. The evolution of the legal protection of the state against employees and employers, and the position taken by the Catholic Church in this matter were described. It has been shown that old and modern forms of work under the guise of facilities are a threat to the value of work and a human's subjectivity. The analysis of the positions and documents of Catholic social science allowed us to show a change in the role of the Church, which, from the attitude of real influence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, became directed in the 21st century to strengthen active attitudes in the work environment among Catholics. It expects the sensitivity of conscience and open brotherhood, and adopts an attitude of charity and committed action for the benefit of the economically excluded and people deprived of decent work.

Keywords: Catholic social science; work; value; civilizational changes



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1. Introduction

In Western Europe, the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries characterized the greatest industrial, economic, technological and IT transformations, as well as related threats to human work. Throughout European civilization, the Catholic Church's special care for the threats to work and the value of work can be seen.

Work is an ambiguous, universal and interdisciplinary concept. As a cognitive category, it can be defined in philosophical, theological, pedagogical, psychological, sociological and economic terms (Jung 2023; MacLean and Wilson 2009; Nowacki 2008). It is treated as a calling, a source of income and a chance for self-realization (Meister and Willyerd 2010; McCausland et al. 2005). In the article, work is understood as a deliberate human's action aimed at processing natural goods, objects and information. Its purpose is to meet, directly or indirectly, material and non-material needs (Jedynak 2013, p. 188). It performs subjective, subject and social functions. Work occupies an important place in the hierarchy of values for which a man lives and, thanks to this, can realize his potential (Bejma 2015). Work and work value have a personal and social dimension, and are a special subject of the research of Catholic social science. According to the teaching of John Paul II in the encyclical of 1981

Laborem exercens, the basic value of work concerns the man who is its perpetrator and addressee. The value of work is the work entity itself, i.e., the human person.

The article analyzes the transformations of work in Western Europe over ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary civilizations, as well as threats related to civilization changes (Manuel and Glatzer 2019).

At the beginning, the role of emerging Christianity as a precursor of work value was shown. The importance of work in terms of ancient Greek philosophers inter alia Homer, Hesiod, Plato and Aristotle, was analyzed (Gózdź 2015; Platon 2002). It was compared with the Christian dimension of work commanded in the Bible by the Creator and preached in the teaching of Saint Paul, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Augustine, and contained in the rule of Saint Benedict (Alves and Booth 2022; Dąbek 2004; Feser 2009; Gilson 2002; Szczur 2014; Turek 2018). Christianity in the medieval age introduced a new dimension to the value of work, in which a human's effort is inscribed. Work began to be an important educational, social and religious aspect.

Then, the threats to work of industrial development in the nineteenth century were indicated, inter alia the lack of safe working conditions, several dozen hours of a work day, low wages, the lack of social security, and the use of children for work (Humphries 2013; Hindle 2015). The role played by the Catholic Church in Western Europe in the industrial era through pro-labor and pro-social activities (von Ketteler 2022; Mumbauer 2019) and proclaimed Catholic social teaching (Leon XIII 1891, 1996; Pius XI 2021) was analyzed. Selected, analyzed content and activities of the Church relating to work, work value and social science were compared with the assumptions of Protestantism, Marxism and the emerging social protection of the state (Rothbard 2022; Sinnott-Armstrong 2019; Weber [1905] 2003; Frey 2008; Toryough 2010; Just 2017; Lafargue 2006; Marks and Engels 2007; Harvey 2003; Das 2017; Yates 2023; Humphries 2013; Hindle 2015; Davidov and Langille 2013; Wódka 2017; Zdun and Fel 2017).

The last part presents contemporary work transformations related to automation, digitization, computerization, globalization, cognitive technology, cloud processing and artificial intelligence (Alphonsus and Abdullah 2016; Xu and Newman 2006; Maddikunta et al. 2022; Pereira et al. 2020; Cascio and Montealegre 2016). The role of the Catholic Church was indicated (Benedykt XVI 2009; Franciszek 2015, 2020; Jan Paweł II 1981, 1991; Therrien 2020). Contemporary threats to the value of work have been shown, such as the following: continuous and ubiquitous control of the work environment, discrimination, segregation in access to economic goods and working in coworking spaces (Manheim and Kaplan 2019; Monea 2019; Ratti and Helbing 2019; Wang and Kosinski 2018; Youyou et al. 2015; Syifanie 2018). Reference is made to the socio-philosophical futurologists (Rifkin 2011; Harari 2017; Fukuyama 2019).

The role of the Catholic Church in defending the subjective approach to work and a human's dignity is shown during the difficult period of the postmodern society. It is noted that at present, the Church encourages proper religious formation and internal moral maturity, which will allow us to discern responsibilities and obligations towards dynamic changes in work, especially in the coworking and competitive dimension. It sets out the principles of mutual respect for employers and employees, as well as brotherhood towards other people in a situation of moral and social capital erosion. The urgent need to shape an employee guided by personal, moral and Christian values has been indicated. In addition, contemporary Catholic social science will sensitize the sphere of work on ecological issues, and thus also respect for the natural environment (Benedykt XVI 2009; Franciszek 2015, 2020; Jan Paweł II 1981, 1991).

The purpose of the article is to define the role of the Catholic Church in Western Europe against work changes and threats to the value of work in ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary times based mainly on the Bible and documents of Catholic social science. The research problem raised in the article concerned the question of what impact Christianity had on the development of the value of human work, and what role the Catholic Church played in relation to emerging changes and threats to the value of work.

The article uses scientific non-reactive research methods, desk research, including content analysis and in-depth historical comparative analysis (Roberts et al. 2020). An analysis of Catholic Church documents of varying importance was conducted (encyclicals, exhortations, bishops' statements) and presented in historical chronology.

Guided by the human's care, the Catholic Church recommends sound management of the labor market and business ventures, in line with the proper hierarchy of values, taking into account the social good and the subjective role of a man as the highest value of work. Catholic social teaching on human work and its values is global, universal, social and humanistic, and can form the basis for scientific analysis carried out in the article of the role of the Church against changes and threats to the value of work.

It has been shown that the position of the Church remains unchanged in defense of a human's dignity and subjectivity in the work environment that has changed negatively over the centuries, in evaluating increases in economic profit and social exploitation.

2. The Role of Christianity in Perceiving Work and Shaping the Value of Work

The perception of the value of work has changed over the centuries. In ancient times, in almost all Greek and Roman culture, work was assessed negatively; it was associated with nuisance, inability to develop freely and existential activities for slaves and lower social classes: farmers, merchants and craftsmen. Homer stated that physical, material and economic work dishonors a man. Hesiod (7th BC) expressed a different view in his 'Work and days' that 'work is not a disgrace, idleness is a shame' (Gózdź 2015, p. 25). His views in that era were isolated. In ancient philosophy, considerations of work focused on its value perceived in the category of virtue. Aristotle (Arystoteles 1982, p. 55) pointed to the ethos of work identified with the ethical advantage, i.e., the social virtue belonging to permanent human dispositions. Platon's approach to work (2002) corresponded to contemplative, mainly moral and axiological efforts that require adaptation to the objectively existing ideal of values, and took into account the main virtues, the so-called triad of values: goodness, beauty and truth.

It was only in the Middle Ages that the influence of Christianity caused every type of work to be assessed positively. Christianity recognized work as a factor of human progress and improvement in the physical, moral and spiritual fields, which had a positive effect on the individual, society and economy. However, physical work was still intended for the lower social classes. St. Jan Chrysostom (5th century) noted the then social problem, which was the attitude of contempt for physical work and people performing it, emphasized the difficult situation of peasants, craftsmen and merchants, and called for the attitude of landowners to the working people be humane. In his teaching, physical work is the cooperation with God in the effort of transforming the world. It is an element that ennoble a man, provides him with the necessary resources to sustain his life and enables him to take works of mercy (Szczur 2014, p. 180). Other representatives of Christian thought at the time exposed the original intention of God, the Creator, who wanted a man to study, conquer and control the Earth, with its treasures, energy and secrets (chp. 1, 26–28). St. Thomas Aquinas (12th century) analyzed work with a broad ontological and ethical approach (Gilson 2002; Feser 2009). He saw the important role of God's and human's nature in everything that concerns the order and hierarchy of life of human activities on the Earth (Alves and Booth 2022, p. 1070). Human work releases the right goods from the potential of nature and a man, thanks to which a man can meet his physical and spiritual needs. St. Thomas emphasized that, unlike animals, a man, through work, influences the development of higher forms of social life and its maturity. The activities and effects of human work are moral in character, and their source is God the Creator. God's providence introduces harmony and order, and is a source of social division of work that organizes it according to various professions and functions. The work carried out is to perform God's will and serve the community (Cavallera 1937; Jacher 1969). Moreover, according to St. Paul, work was not an insult to a man, but a noble occupation that provided maintenance. The Apostle pointed to the relationship between work and the proclamation of the Gospel,

and warned against the dangers arising from the abandonment of work (1Kor 4.12; 2Tes 3, 6; Dz18, 3; Dz 20, 34; [Stasiak 2014](#), p. 160). St. Augustine (5th century), following the example of Saint Paul, recognized the performance of physical work as an indispensable means for his maintenance, cooperation with the Creator and continuation of His creative achievements, and to balance the needs of the soul and body and achieve the eternal life reward ([Turek 2018](#), p. 181). In Western Europe, Saint Benedict (6th century) developed a rule of monastic life, which assumes the harmonious combination of joint prayer with physical and mental work, adopting the motto of *ora et labora* (pray and work) ([Dąbek 2004](#)). The redemptive dimension of work and endurance of its hardship (chp. 3, 14–19) in communication with the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, is emphasized.

The recognition of work by Greek philosophers in ancient times shows work as an unworthy activity of a man, and an unpleasant duty for people from the lower social classes. The emerging Christianity gives meaning to work in a spirit of solidarity with the fate of a man. The working man is granted with spiritual values, and his work is given a dimension of love. By virtue of the law of love (J 13, 34), people must oppose all egoism and make human efforts at work to be the object of the highest concern, which Christ also did. It introduces a new value of work in which human effort is inscribed. Successive eras brought significant changes in the perception of the importance of human work

3. The Catholic Church against Changes in the Value of Work in the Era of the IT Revolution

In modern times, along with the development of technique and technology, feudal society was transformed into industrial and capitalist societies. The industrial revolution concentrated work in factories, and the demand for well-qualified craftsmen and workers increased. Mass production developed in the industrial economy, production lines were created, including very tiring line production. A new social class of industrial workers emerged, the so called proletariat. In the 17th century, the creator of classical economics, Adam [Smith \(2007\)](#), argued that work is a source of values and wealth of nations, and in addition to its utilitarian value, it also has an interchangeable and overlapping value ([Rothbard 2022](#); [Sinnott-Armstrong 2019](#)). During this period, the Protestant approach to work described by sociologist Max [Weber \[1905\] 2003](#) observed that Protestant entrepreneurs were more active than Catholic, and achieved better economic results and higher profits. M. Weber claimed that Protestant, and especially Calvinist work ethics, had a decisive impact on the development of capitalism. He noticed the importance of the Calvinist theory of predestination, according to which the successes of a human's activity are a sign of God's grace. The most readable sign of God's grace is the success of professional work and the enrichment of the entrepreneur ([Weber \[1905\] 2003](#), pp. 163–70). According to the Calvinist doctrine, however, the effects of work do not serve consumption, but increase God's glory, obliging to asceticism, abstinence and moderation of consumption ([Frey 2008](#), p. 38). In the doctrine of Protestant Calvinism, work was a religious duty, not an economic necessity and multiplication of wealth. According to M. Weber ([Toryough 2010](#)), Protestant work ethics formed the basis for the entrepreneur's work ethics and the employee's work ethics. Daniel [Just \(2017\)](#), p. 437, while analyzing the texts of M. Weber, noted that Protestants introduced work as a virtue, while they treated the waste of time as a mortal sin. There was also a perception that human life is short, so it should be used well, i.e., in achieving economic success, which is a sign of God's blessing and a pass to the afterlife. In the context of the position of Protestant Calvinism, 'the hard work of workers and the asceticism of entrepreneurs were desirable manifestations of life, virtues to which all life efforts should be directed' ([Roubal 2020](#), p. 49). The act of work, as noted by M. [Weber \(\[1905\] 2003](#), pp. 163–70), was not to be an unpleasant duty or pleasure, it was to be a lifestyle for God's glory. Weber's thought identified that work is combined with values, ethics, economic development and prevention of unemployment ([Schilpzand and de Jong 2021](#), p. 2; [Schalteggera and Torglerb 2010](#), p. 100). Protestant work ethics draws attention to the importance of moral capital, which should be present in social, economic and religious life. The good

moral condition of the individual contributes to social and economic success. Individual virtues such as honesty, loyalty, responsibility and justice affect the morality of the whole society, in its social interactions. As a result, this prevents the commodification of human resources in the labor market (Wódka 2017, p. 73).

Soon, developing capitalism evolved into a liberal structure, changing the approach of the Protestant understanding of work. A new, secularized system of learning, upbringing and work was characterized by learning habits, reliability and obedience. The employee was obliged to work honestly, diligently, thoroughly and constantly for the employer. The employer had the right to become rich at the expense of employee exploitation in the worst sense, using even children (Humphries 2013, p. 395; Hindle 2015, p. 615) to work. The Catholic morality to date, in reference to economic issues (inter alia lending money for usury), began to be replaced by liberal Protestantism, which sought to free the economy from 'religious power'. There appeared the separation of the religious world from the material world (a spirit from the matter), losing the meaning of orders from the church and secular institutions. The nineteenth-century economic system built on the principles of Protestant liberalism resulted in extreme social exploitation and devaluation of the value of work. Exploitation, requirements and selection increased for employees. There were no legal regulations to ensure proper labor rights for workers.

In response to social exploitation, a downward Catholic labor movement was born in Germany, giving a rise to Catholic social teaching (Mumbauer 2019) and the Marxist labor movement. Marxists denied private ownership and a sense of work. Paul Lafargue (2006) in an essay from 1883, *The Right To Be Lazy*, despised work, referring to antiquity where work was an occupation unworthy of a free man. According to P. Lafargue, demanding the right to work meant waiving the right to freedom. The author claimed that 'The right to laziness is a thousand times more noble and more sacred than previous human rights, invented by metaphysical lawyers of the bourgeois revolution' (Lafargue 2006, p. 9). The Marxists' goal was to lead an uneducated, poor proletariat to an armed revolution that, according to the Communist Manifesto of 1848 (Marks and Engels 2007), would deprive people of private property. Thanks to this, Marxists would take over political and, above all, economic power (Das 2017, pp. 590–616; Harvey 2003). Through constant criticism, they gave a unique role to work as a carrier of the workforce, and its main value was the profit in capitalist production (Yates 2023, p. 493).

When Marxists called for a boycott of work, the abolition of private property, the Catholic Church created workers' elites, giving a rise to the Catholic workers' movement. The purpose of the movement was to defend employees' rights, not through strikes, but above all, to transform the proletariat into a workers' elite by raising its moral level, culture and education. The founders of the movement were Catholic intellectual environments, including Professor Franz Joseph von Buß (Petri 2007), who called for the organization of Catholic workers' unions, and the 'working-class' bishop Emmanuel Wilhelm von Ketteler (2022), a co-founder of the Catholic party Zentrum. His work from 1864 *Die Arbeiterfrage und das Christenthum* is groundbreaking for Catholic social science. In his study, the bishop von Ketteler (2022, pp. 107–33) presented practical ways to help workers that should be implemented by the Catholic Church. The most important aid measures introduced by the Church were establishing and running treatment facilities for workers unable to work, caring for a Christian family, appropriate education restoring employees' value and dignity, and supporting workers' interests. Bishop von Ketteler (2022) also supported producers' associations in which the worker became not only an employee but also an entrepreneur; furthermore, in addition to the working salary, a worker must also have his share in the actual profit of the enterprise. Thus, Bishop von Ketteler (2022) believed that this was the most appropriate form of solving the social issue, where the worker is both an employee and an owner of the plant.

The rapid development of the industrial economy of the 1850s caused the demand for labor in cities, employee turnover and a very low level of work culture. The huge labor supply led to low wages and very long work days. The organizing trade union movement

began to put pressure on employers through strike actions. By not wanting to allow a revolution, the state introduced a law protecting the interests of the proletariat. The first state security of employees' rights was accepted as an introduction in Germany in the 1880s of social insurance.

Replacing people's work with machinery and the new organization of work and production caused significant unemployment, as a result of which millions of employees in Europe and the United States remained unemployed and destitute. Social insurance, which was introduced in the event of job loss, was insufficient. Legal communities indicated the need for state intervention (Davidov and Langille 2013, p. 32). Individual countries began to create programs to support employees. Italy and Germany employed the unemployed in the implementation of public works, construction of highways and armaments. In turn, old-age pensions were introduced by the government in England. The loss of earnings due to illness and old age turned out to be the most felt need for help. The development of protective legislation was still insufficient in relation to the work of children, young people and women.

The industrialization of work brought with it fundamental changes in relations between work and family, in the division of labor between the sexes, in the approach to time, rest and material promotion, and in the definition of work itself. Changes caused by industrialization had the greatest impact on society then, and caused a response from representatives of the Catholic Church that defended employees' rights through charity and social activities, as well as through issued social documents. The first and most important was the encyclical of Pope Leon XIII (1891) from 1891, *Rerum Navarum*, in which the Catholic Church spoke on the side of the proletariat and employers, defended private property, and supported the social aspirations of workers. The encyclical condemned communism, socialism and liberalism as systems that threaten a human's freedom and the dignity of his work. Thus, the Catholic Church was the first to introduce a model of a sustainable market economy, emphasizing the balance between the social and market spheres. It expressed a clear position that building of economic systems should be based on Catholic social teaching, which is based on a human's dignity, freedom and social justice (Zdun and Fel 2017, pp. 148–49). By claiming the de-proletarianization of workers, the Church also brought charges of favoring socially subversive forces. An important role was played by American bishops, who in 1919 appeared in the famous manifesto Bishops program of social reconstruction (Zwoliński 2013) in defense of the world of work, demanding, among other things, minimum earnings, sickness or unemployment insurance, better working conditions and healthcare, and greater income share for companies or enterprises. At the time, these demands caused outrage from the president of the National Association of Manufacturers, Stephen Mason, who made an official protest against the 'socialist' propaganda of the Church (Zwoliński 2013, p. 3).

Workers' problems were also noticed by the authorities of other countries. Due to the urgent need to improve working conditions, in 1919 the International Labor Organization was established (Convention C001 (No. 1), *Hours of Work (Industry) 1919*), aiming to bring legal and social order and improve living and working conditions by establishing a comprehensive code of law and work practice.

The Catholic Church, in another encyclical from 1931 *Quadragesimo anno* (Pius XI 2021), expressed concern for the fate of people living from the work of their own hands. Pius XI confirmed that socialism could not be reconciled with true Christianity, because it implied an unfair distribution of the fruit of work. Excessive liberalism was also not fair, as it only led to capital accumulation without caring for people. In the encyclical, Pope Pius XI proposed the renewal of the socio-economic system through the Christian principle of subsidiarity and social solidarity. The QA encyclical document also provided bases for Christian corporatism, claiming that employees and owners have common interests and should strive for success together. The corporation should care for the common well-being of employers and employees, as well as for their social development. During the 1930s economic crisis, a soulless economy of development generated crowds of poor

people, including the unemployed. In Europe, people could count on temporary support, e.g., in Germany, the Minister of Labor, a Catholic priest Heinrich Brauns, introduced unemployment insurance (Zwoliński 2013, p. 49) in 1927. A man and his dignity should not be overshadowed while multiplying profit, according to representatives of the Catholic Church. They considered respect for the human person and his basic rights as being most important, and demanded an effort to reduce social and economic inequalities.

In the era of the industrial revolution, the Church carried out real pro-labor and pro-social activities in providing education and medical care. It supported workers' interests by creating the Catholic workers' movement. It sought to shape the morally strong and economically strong working elite. It opposed Protestant liberalism that sought extreme social exploitation and wealth at the expense of the poorest working people. It opposed Marxism, which through moral and intellectual depravity, discouraged workers from taking up work and encouraged armed revolution to seize power and achieve political and economic influence (RN, QA). The Catholic Church was a precursor of social science and activities for the benefit of working people.

4. The Catholic Church against Changes in the Value of Work in the Era of the IT Revolution

The second half of the 20th century was a period of the rapid development of high information technologies, automation and digitization of work (Alphonsus and Abdullah 2016; Xu and Newman 2006). Meeks (1989) showed the economic implications of these changes, and cautioned that the economy cannot deal primarily with livelihoods. Human dignity and community have priority in terms of value for economic organizations. The author identifies and criticizes the three main threats that he detects in his contemporary work ideologies, and describes them as work degradation, work exaltation and work redemption. His new work model underlines the importance of full employment, work service, community work and equality at work. However, these issues seem to be outdated due to the development in the 1990s of the so-called the fourth industrial era (Industry 4.0), called the Internet of People and Services. IT systems, networking and digital machine control via the Internet and information technologies are integrated. Development and change of work are based on innovation. The new socio-economic situation, based on the use of information technologies, outlines the list of new professional profiles using multimedia programming and the Internet network (Alessandrini 2002). In turn, the present fifth era of civilization (Industry 5.0) (Elliott 2019; Maddikunta et al. 2022; Romero 2019) improves the concept of Industry 4.0 (Pereira et al. 2020). The Internet of Things, Internet of Data, Industrial Internet of Things, cloud computing, cognitive technologies and artificial intelligence (Cascio and Montealegre 2016; Frey and Osborne 2017) are increasingly used. Virtual control of technological stations via the Internet (Kowalik and Rusyn 2017) is being implemented. The contemporary work environment is being dominated by machine algorithmizing, automation, digitization, artificial intelligence and cognitive technologies. There is an increased demand on the labor market for increasingly qualified employees performing difficult and complicated tasks, and possessing social competences and creativity.

The Catholic Church, observing the socio-economic transformations and significant social disparities in the second half of the 20th century, in the interests of working people, preached social science in its subsequent encyclicals, reminding us of principles, norms, rights and obligations of social coexistence, political and economic activity, the personal dimension of work and the subjective role of a man. Already in 1961, Jan XXIII in the Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (Jan XXIII 1961), indicates the importance of the 'common good of all nations', including future generations. Prosperity arising from work should also take into account the future. At the same time, the Pope maintains the position of his predecessors, Leon XIII and Pius XII, that human's work is both his duty and right, but emphasizes that it should be seen not only as a commodity, but as a specifically human activity for which a man should receive remuneration determined by the law of justice and

equity. Fair wages criteria must take into account reasons for social good, because wages that are too low and too high cause unemployment.

The Second Vatican Council in the *Gaudium et Spes* constitution of 1965 (Pawel VI 1965) emphasizes that all work, economic activity and production are aimed at meeting the needs of people, serving people and community, and they should not solely aim at multiplying profit or influence.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation (1986) stated that glaring injustices, inequalities and oppression of all kinds strike millions of men and women today, remaining in clear contradiction of the Gospel of Christ. In history, wage differences always caused a dangerous phenomenon of social division. Catholic social science approached the issue of pay for work in various ways. First, the need for mutual consent of the parties concerned was pointed out, a free arrangement between the employer and employee as to the amount of earnings; then, the liberalistic concept of 'Ricardo's labor law' (Bishop 2009, p. 277) was strongly criticized, according to which the wage was to fluctuate around the level that guaranteed a minimum of subsistence. As a result, the Church showed the growing injustice and dehumanization of the understanding of work (Zwoliński 2013).

In turn, John Paul II, in the encyclical from 1981 *Laborem exercens*, emphasized that work is to serve a man in development, including science, technology, culture, but the most important thing is that a human was not supposed to be pushed into the role of the subject. The Pope presented 'fundamental elements of *work spirituality* and thought about the future development of theologically strong *work spirituality*' (Therrien 2020). According to John Paul II, work has a special, personal, human and humanity mark, and this constitutes its nature. Therefore, the most important subject of work is a man himself, and the subjects of work are the techniques, means and tools of work. The Pope emphasized the personal dimension of work by writing about 'dignity and human rights' which are raped and stigmatized in some situations 'thus trying to influence the course of changes that should be made simultaneously with the real progress of a man and society' (LE No. 1). He also clearly formulated the principles of 'priority of work before capital' (LE, No. 12), which are the basis of Catholic social teaching, and remain the current protest against the error of economism and materialism destroying the man of work (LE, No. 13). John Paul II cited a 'personalistic argument': work is always the cause, causative force, and thus the primary value, and the capital as a set of means of production remains only an instrument. A person's priority over what is material should not be discussed. However, the problem is determining the ownership of the goods produced through work. Pope John Paul II, like John XXIII, emphasized that 'the case of fair payment for work performed' was 'the key problem of social ethics', as well as 'the justice test of the entire system' (LE, No. 19).

In the next encyclical, *Centesimus annus*, Jan Pawel II (1991) undertook an analysis of the complex structure of 'presence' of a man at work, which requires him to develop such features as reliability, diligence, prudence, bravery and loyalty in keeping the contract. Only a responsible employee contributes to the multiplication of property and, consequently, the common good of the whole society. God the Creator himself is to be a model of work for a Christian, both in relation to the organization of work and the use of rest. Building the world and working for others is fulfilling the Christian mission. A technique can be an ally of work, but poorly understood, it becomes an opponent of a man, leads to exploitation, making the employee a slave of work, and contributes to unemployment. The Catholic Church calls for respect for the dignity of working people and for foresight in looking at the goods created through human work that are to serve the good of all societies, including those in the future.

The second decade of the 21st century is characterized by the dynamic development of artificial intelligence, increased entrepreneurship, globalization of the economy and the labor market, dissemination of ecological awareness, consolidation of beliefs about superior humanitarian values including education and health care, and the growing role of high technology industries (Cascio and Montealegre 2016). There have been significant

developments of technology: super-processors, computer networks and infostradas, flexible production and management systems via the Internet (Internet of People, Things, Data, Services, Education), biotechnology and multimedia. A new place to work has appeared, the so-called coworking space that offers a different concept of the employee's functioning. Flexibility becomes a lifestyle in coworking spaces, in which the border between working time and free time is blurred. Information and communication technologies enable creative work without time limits (Syifanie 2018). The difference between free time, entertainment and work is blurred, which can basically be carried out without interruption. For now, the socio-philosophical concepts of Rifkin's (2011), Fukuyama's (2019) or Harari's (2017) futurologists have not worked, and that in the near future, human work will be completely replaced by machines, robots and computers. On the contrary, the age of computers has not freed employees from the oppression of mechanized life, has enveloped them in the utilitarian world, and has not intoxicated them with excessive freedom. The development of digitization in the human's work environment, beyond opportunities, has brought with it a number of threats, including depriving employees of privacy, permanent and ubiquitous control of the work environment and employee behavior, violating employees' fundamental rights (Manheim and Kaplan 2019). In addition, the problems of discrimination and racial segregation in access to economic goods (Monea 2019; Ratti and Helbing 2019; Wang and Kosinski 2018; Youyou et al. 2015) have increased significantly.

Contemporary changes in the nature of work indicate that the threats mentioned in the encyclical *Laborem exercen* of John Paul II (2021) have become current. The Pope noted that '[...] the danger of treating human work as a *sui generis* of goods or anonymous force needed for production (is even mentioned 'work force'), exists constantly, especially then, when the whole vision of economic issues is marked by the premises of materialistic economism' (LE, No. 7). This present dimension of work leads to treating a man as a part of production and the cheap work force. The error of economism here is the exclusive purposefulness of profit, while the error of materialism is associated with assigning capital higher value than a man and work spirituality (Liszczy 2015). These problems are taken up by the Catholic Church. In the encyclical, *Caritas in veritate*, Benedykt XVI (2009) emphasized that human rights were not respected when they were deprived of the transcendent foundation, transcendent dignity and the desire to 'be more'. The Pope reminded that according to the social teaching of the Catholic Church, 'the first capital to be saved and appreciated is a man, a person, in his integrity' (CV, No. 25). Benedict XVI listed numerous manifestations of violations of human dignity in the work environment. He indicated that economic decisions did not lead to an increase in differences in possessing wealth in an excessive and morally unacceptable manner, and that all people had access to work and the ability to maintain it (CV, No. 32). He criticized exclusion from work for a long period of time (unemployment), prolonged dependence on public or private care, as a threat to the freedom and creativity of a person, causing him suffering in the psychological and spiritual dimension (CV, No. 25). He pointed out that systemic increases in inequalities between people not only led to the destruction of social cohesion, but also had a negative impact on the sphere of economics due to the erosion of social capital, trust, credibility and respect for the rules that are necessary in every civil coexistence (CV, No. 32). A man could not be deprived of personal dignity and seen only as capital/human resource, or as a mode of production or financial machine.

Another contemporary threat arising from technological, civilization and urbanization processes are the problems of excessive consumption of raw materials that cause environmental pollution. Pope Francis in the encyclical *Laudato si* (2015) combines human activity with care for the natural environment, of which the most important part is a man. Human work cannot be combined with greed, consumption and a greedy attitude. He calls for an ecological attitude and commitment to the environment. He outlines general directions of dialogue and activities involving both everyone and international policy.

In the last encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti* of 2020, in the face of growing social inequalities, Pope Francis points out that there is no worse poverty than that which deprives a man

of work and the dignity of work. He stresses that ‘in a truly developed society, work is an indispensable dimension of social life, because it is not only a way of earning bread, but also a way of personal development, creating healthy relationships, and expressing yourself, sharing gifts, building a sense of shared responsibility for world development, and ultimately—living as a people’ (FT, No. 162). The Pope Francis in *L’Osservatore Romano* (Franciszek 2014, p. 46; 2019, p. 35) repeatedly opposes the economy of exclusion, youth unemployment, modern slavery of work, especially regarding children and emigrants, new idolatry of money, or subordination of human life to the logic of devices, which determine his value.

The role of the Church evolves from real actions for the benefit of working people by admonishing respect for other people’s rights and the rights of emigrants to work. The church sets out the principles of respect for working people and treating other people like brothers (Rybicki et al. 2023). Through social science, the Church sets the framework for dealing with ecology and the environment (Werner 2023). The Church expects a Christian/Catholic to have proper religious formation, his own moral judgment and internal maturity resulting from that which will allow him to discern his duties and responsibilities towards work. The Church points to a person’s responsibility in developing such features as reliability, diligence, prudence, bravery and loyalty in keeping the contract in the work environment. The Church points to the urgent need to shape an employee guided by personal, moral and Christian values.

5. Conclusions

The research problem addressed in this article concerned the questions, what impact has Christianity had on the development of the value of human work, and what role has the Catholic Church played in relation to emerging changes and threats to the value of work.

The presented content allowed us to formulate the conclusions and reflections presented below. First, it was shown that Christianity brought significant changes in the perception of the value of work. Work began to be assessed positively, and the dignity of a working man was recognized. A new value of work was introduced in which the effort of a man cooperating with God in the effort to transform the world is inscribed. The activities and effects of human work are moral in character, and their source is God the Creator. Performing work has been described as doing God’s will and serving the community. It was recognized as a factor of progress and improvement of a person in the physical, moral and spiritual fields, favorably affecting the individual, society and economy.

Secondly, the role of the Catholic Church over the centuries was demonstrated in relation to the ongoing socio-economic transformations affecting the work environment. Significant changes in the dimension of a human’s work were caused by the nineteenth-century economic system, built on the principles of Protestant liberalism, which led to extreme social exploitation and devaluation of the value of work. Exploitation, requirements and selection increased for employees. There were no state legal regulations yet providing workers with sound labor rights.

Observing the socio-economic transformations and huge social disparities that appeared since the 19th century, the Catholic Church began to play an important role. At a time when Marxists did not care about the education and morality of workers, and governments of states very slowly introduced social benefits protecting employees’ rights, it was one of the few institutions that cared about working people and work ethics. The church preached Catholic social teaching on an ongoing basis, reminding people about the principles, norms, rights and obligations of social coexistence, political and economic activity, the personal dimension of work and the subjective role of a man. It has been shown that the Catholic Church significantly contributed to the organization of workers’ unions, the defense of labor and social rights, and to raising the intellectual and moral level of employees.

Another important conclusion regarding the role of the Catholic Church was referred to the dynamic changes of the 20th and 21st centuries, including the intensive progress

of technology and digitization, and even the challenge of secularization. The research analysis showed that the position of the Catholic Church remains unchanged in defense of threats to the value of work and the dignity of a working man. It was pointed out that contemporary forms of work, under the guise of facilities, threaten human's autonomy and freedom. It opposes the idea of consumerism and objectification of an employee who is increasingly being reduced to the role of a production machine, with his value being measured by efficiency. The importance of fairness, but also justice in meeting the needs of the employee's pay is constantly emphasized. The Catholic Church opposes the degradation of moral and social capital of the work environment. There is a constant call for respect for the natural environment and ecological issues in the sphere of work.

The analysis of selected documents of the Church allows us to state that the content contained in them is always adequate to emerging changes and problems of the work environment. Initially, the content focused on protecting employees' rights and subjectivity as well as the dignity of a working man (e.g., *Rerum Novarum*, *Laborem exercen*, *Centesimus annus*). Then, it warned against inequalities in the labor market and treating a man only as a mode of production or as a financial machine (e.g., *Caritas in veritate*). In turn, contemporary changes in work in the post-modern digital society put the Church in the face of further challenges. In recent encyclicals (*Laudato si*; *Fratelli Tutti*), the Church explicitly asks for the establishment of new laws and principles that take into account the negative effects of globalization. Although its role seems to be weakened by secularization trends, it still remains important in caring for the safety of working people and the working environment. The Catholic Church is becoming even more a social church, calling for brotherhood and bending over an even wider group of economically excluded people.

To sum up, the role of the Church should be clearly marked; since ancient times, it has remained unchanged in defense of a human's dignity and subjectivity in a work environment that has changed over the centuries, evolving towards increasing economic profit and social exploitation. The Church's role is often underestimated, or even unnoticed, while it has a strong and unchanging foundation for the subjective dimension of the value of work and the dignity of a working man.

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