Work that "Favours the Family"[1]:

Recovering Integral Development in a Digital Age

In line with his relentless call to the world to cleanse itself of "indifference" by being attentive to "the excluded" (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* 54),[2] in his address to the General Confederation of Italian Industry (2016),[3] Pope Francis observed:

> In the complex world of business, 'working together' means investing in projects that are able to involve subjects that are often forgotten or overlooked. Among them are, first of all, families, the focal point of humanity — in which the experience of work, the sacrifice that feeds it and the fruits that derive from it — find meaning and value.

In this remarkable, albeit brief passage, three points stand out that are relevant to our conversation:

- First, the essential link between "human work" and the "family", that is, how we cannot consider human work without keeping in mind the immediate context in which the human being lives and therefore the relational milieu to which human effort should be oriented. Human beings are relational beings and their creativity and labour is naturally oriented to extending and strengthening *societas*, fellowship and community, primary of which, is the immediate relational context of the family.
- Second, notwithstanding the centrality of relationships in human life, we are living the anomaly where "business" and "the economy" appear to have become ends in themselves, divorced from the wider social and political aims that represent more authentic human desires and goods. The economy, intended to offer the necessary safety net or foundation upon which higher human aspirations can be integrated for a truly

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[1] The phrase is taken from Pope Francis' speech at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in January 2018: "In this context, it is vital to safeguard the dignity of the human person, in particular by offering to all people real opportunities for integral human development and by implementing economic policies that favour the family." https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/01/the-pope-s-announcement-to-wef18/

[2] https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

[3] https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/february/documents/papa-francesco_20160227_confindustria.html

holistic development, is often excluding rather than inclusive, privileging the few over the well-being of society as a whole. But when it "overlooks" or "forgets" the family that is "the focal point of humanity," then it can become positively dehumanizing. As the Pope evocatively put in *Evangelii Gaudium* 54, "the culture of prosperity deadens us."

- Third, the passage above highlights the right understanding of work in relation to the family, but also hints at the deeper dignity of human sociality and creativity in their transcending dimension. As Pope Francis specifies, properly "human" work not only finds its purpose and "meaning" in serving human relationships; it should also reflect the nature of such relationships. Like family life itself, work has a "sacrificial" aspect through which the person offers his or her very self through their effort and resourcefulness. This "sacrificial" aspect of work and family life echoes the properly *kenotic* ("self-emptying") revelation of God's own love for us that the church is called to witness.

Thus, Pope Francis seems to suggest that a manifestation of "original sinfulness" in our midst—a disconnect at a very fundamental anthropological level, where the ends of our creativity and personhood seem to diverge—is grounded in an inordinate desire for wealth, but that has taken global proportions through the invisible rule of the market economy. But to reclaim the necessary inter-connectedness between family and work, as well as our personal vocation for full participation in social life, then we must consider the specific reasons why "the economy" and the pursuit of "business" have become such important drives in our society, even to the extent of threatening integral development. Beyond personal greed and covetousness, something about our cultural context sustains and even encourages practices that are increasingly being revealed as dehumanizing. A "culture of indifference," a "throwaway culture," even a "culture of death" as well as Pope Francis' deep concern with political corruption that permeates every aspect of our lives, can all be traced to a "complex world of business" that "overlooks" the vulnerable.

I propose two steps for our reflection: first an analysis of the secular and increasingly digital cultural dynamic, in particular, the ways how they challenge past anthropological assumptions about the way we relate to one another and exercise our power and creativity. Second, I will bring to the fore the necessity of re-ordering work towards its transcendent dimension through retrieving the relation between "leisure" and "culture" in a digital age. In conclusion, I will briefly explore more concrete ways how this "new" lifestyle could be understood as an ongoing fulfilment of the missionary orientation of the Christian life in our times.

Work and family reflecting the ethos of a secular, digital culture

In his now classic *A Secular Age*,[4] the philosopher Charles Taylor notes how the disconnect between family and work has a long history in the making, and more specifically, a history intertwined with the "great disembedding"[5] that has characterized the shift from pre-modern to modern societies. This "great disembedding" is along three axes that are best

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[4] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007).
[5] Ibid., 146.

understood if we consider the triple "embeddedness" of pre-modern times; that is, the traditional assumption of how "human agents are embedded in society, society in the cosmos, and the cosmos incorporates the divine."[6] "Disenchantment,"[7] that is, how we start to live as if there were no transcending order, and therefore life becomes construed purely on the immanent level of "chronological" time, is what defines "secularity." But the loss of a horizon of meaning is also possible as the political order ceases to be understood as part of a hierarchical, transcending order of being and instead is reconfigured horizontally through an ethos of equality as uniformity in the "social contract." Thus, the transformation of our human relations becomes the most deep-rooted experience of the secular. "Individualism"[8]— the presupposition behind the social contract—that rests upon the now sacrosanct belief in the right to choose and develop oneself as one deems fit (what Taylor also calls, an "ethic of authenticity"[9]), becomes the new way of understanding the human, in distinction to being bound by stable social and conventional relations.

This new anthropology penetrates the world of work early on, in particular, in the Industrial Revolution and its aftermath, that severs "household" ties to remake "individuals" as the "workforce" of its productivist machinery. Eventually, however, along the "long march" of the rise of modernity, it also penetrates the (now) "privatized" realm of the family. Family ties become increasingly construed as being based on individual choice. But as *Amoris Laetitia*[10] notes, left unchecked, individualism can become antithetical to the properly "personal" bonds between spouses and their children:

> [E]xtreme individualism … weakens family bonds and ends up considering each member of the family as an isolated unit, leading in some cases to the idea that one's personality is shaped by his or her desires, which are considered absolute. The tensions created by an overly individualistic culture, caught up with possessions and pleasures, leads to intolerance and hostility in families (33).

The fact that individualism has permeated this most basic sphere of human relationality, contradicting the mutually self-offering ethos that sustains love relationships, implies its hold on contemporary culture. But the impoverishment of relational bonds goes deeper than individual goals that might come in tension with family needs. The impoverishment rests on a deeper fragmentation within the self where work itself, one's sense of creativity intrinsically ordered to being life-giving to others, is disconnected from one's labour and productivity. Feeling disempowered in the exercise of their creativity implies a disempowerment to relate creatively to others as well. This process of personal fragmentation can be traced back to the profound cultural shift that happens as we enter a post-Industrial, electric and even digital age where the economy and culture itself become global.

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[6] Ibid., 152.
[7] Ibid., 77-80.
[8] Ibid., 157.
[9] Ibid., 299.
[10] http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf

The Industrial Revolution recreated human labour as "employment" and "profession" in distinction to the pre-modern skillful work that was passed on from one generation to another in the home, or in artisans' guilds. As "production," and therefore the transformation of natural resources for human consumption, is taken outside the household and local community to the factory, families increasingly become "consumers," but no longer "makers" of goods. Indeed, family members will now individually exchange their time for money to have the means to buy mass-produced goods. The much-amplified efficiency generates massive wealth and a radical transformation of society through urbanization, new class stratifications and economic and political organization. However, there is also a deeper, and paradoxical, cost: an increased distanciation between one's "work" and one's "creative power" and therefore between self-sacrifice and a true expression of creativity and generativity.

In the modern world, even if work is a necessary means to make a living for oneself and one's family, it risks becoming, not the expression of skills appropriated through drudgery, but drudgery that deskills. While because of increased mechanization, we might think that we can afford to lose many skills precisely because the tasks themselves can now be done better, faster and cheaper through automation,[11] it is not always the case that we discover new creative pursuits through which we express with dignity our desire for communal participation through "the work of our hands." At the same time, as increased mechanization and automation bred even more sophisticated technologies, greater unchecked power could control and manipulate resources and the natural environment with disastrous consequences. In particular in these past fifty years of increased computational power and more sophisticated algorithms, the results have been an unparalleled power to reconfigure any matter, physical and biological.

But, as we have become more dependent on automated processes, including the invisible social processes of the global economy, so is the power of our technologies ever less in our control. We are profoundly aware—and perhaps even perturbed—by the fact that, the more powerful humanity becomes, the more helpless we feel. As technology becomes more all-encompassing, but human beings increasingly distant from the fruit of our creativity expressed in technological products, so we end up being mastered by the very ethos of the technology.

German theologian Romano Guardini is one of the first to reflect on the effects of increased technologization and automation on culture and anthropology. His work *The End of the Modern World*,[12] written in response to the Second World War, reflects on how power disconnected from human control and responsibility becomes "demonic."[13] The problem with increased automation, with technologies that take over—and not merely enhance—human capabilities, is that we, as the creators of technology, not only are effectively distant from the effects of our power, but distance ourselves from the responsibility of harnessing that power

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[11] This point is illustrated in a recent essay by zoologist Antone Martinho-Truswell, "To automate is human," *Aeon*, February 13, 2018, https://aeon.co/essays/the-offloading-ape-the-human-is-the-beast-that-automates.

[12] Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World* (Rev. Ed.) (Isi Books, 2001).

[13] Ibid., 83.

for truly "human" ends. Thus, anonymous and invisible structures that bind with their ironclad logic take hold instead. As Pope Francis puts it: "The idea of promoting a different cultural paradigm and employing technology as a mere instrument is nowadays inconceivable. The technological paradigm has become so dominant that it would be difficult to do without its resources and even more difficult to utilize them without being dominated by their internal logic" (LS, 108).

In his encyclical *Laudato Sì*,[14] Pope Francis presents this "dominant technocratic paradigm" as the key problematique of contemporary digital culture. In the entire third chapter dedicated to the theme, Francis contrasts digital culture's ethos of technocracy with a Christian view of "integral ecology" (chapter four). The heart of the encyclical is the recognition of the "root sin" that propels the ecological, but also human, crisis in our times, contrasted by a robust theo-anthropology that ponders humanity's proper role as stewards of creation.[15] At its core, the ecological crisis is revealed to be a relational crisis: a self hermetically sealed in the myth of individualism who forgets their irrefutable dependence on the earth, other human beings and the divine.

The current separation between family and work, between the economy and societal well-being, echoes a deeper collective shattering, where a holistic vision of creation being stewarded by man and woman through their wisdom and labour has given way to an idealism of *techne*. Indeed, this is why the very name "digital" (implying a view of reality as discrete "digits", bits and fragments that can be configured and reconfigured at will) is so fitting and telling about our culture.

The scientific and technological "paradigm" of breaking apart and building up again, has become so pervasive that its effects have now spilled over even into the very "make-up" of the family as basic unit of sociality. It is no longer simply the case that the household has been broken down into the "private" intimate realm and the "public" consumerist unit subservient to the global economy. It is no longer even the case that family members struggle between seeing themselves as individuals, with their own needs and desires, and members of one body. Now it is increasingly the case that the most fundamental creativity and generativity of the family itself—her birthing children—is becoming enslaved to the technocratic ethos. The entire industry of birth control—from contraception, to abortion, to assisted reproductive technologies—implies that the very becoming "parents" is slowly, but surely being given over to technology. As this process ensues, the fundamental relationships that have defined human sociality—motherhood, fatherhood, and marriage—become questioned, precisely because the human generative power that defined them is no longer experienced through our bodies, but given over to technique. As it is externalized, so we experience ourselves as disempowered, to the extent of questioning what makes a family,

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[14] http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

[15] Together, the core chapters capture the complexity of the God-human relationship lived in creation that is both marred by human sin but saved in Christ. Human sin has evident effects on the entire created realm maiming the beauty divinely ordered by God. But God's salvific action restores the promise for creation's final integration and fulfilment: the eschatological new creation.

even what makes us men and women, and therefore what value, if any, our natural gender complementarity might have in this brave new world.[16]

As *Laudato Sì* makes clear, ultimately the meaninglessness associated with the rise of the dominant technocratic paradigm rests on its false view of reality perpetuated through our new lifestyles:

> The specialization which belongs to technology makes it difficult to see the larger picture. The fragmentation of knowledge proves helpful for concrete applications, and yet it often leads to a loss of appreciation for the whole, for the relationships between things, and for the broader horizon, which then becomes irrelevant. This very fact makes it hard to find adequate ways of solving the more complex problems of today's world, particularly those regarding the environment and the poor; these problems cannot be dealt with from a single perspective or from a single set of interests. A science which would offer solutions to the great issues would necessarily have to take into account the data generated by other fields of knowledge, including philosophy and social ethics; but this is a difficult habit to acquire today. *Nor are there genuine ethical horizons to which one can appeal.* Life gradually becomes a surrender to situations conditioned by technology, itself viewed as the principal key to the meaning of existence. In the concrete situation confronting us, there are a number of symptoms which point to what is wrong, such as environmental degradation, anxiety, a loss of the purpose of life and of community living (110, my emphasis).

This implies that the antidote to the "idealism" of *techne* is the recovery of a mindset able to grasp the truth about human flourishing: "There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm" (LS, 111). That mindset would recover the intrinsic and necessary mutual mediation of family and work for personal integral development, but in doing so, it would also heal the culture as it sows seeds for a new ethos in the *polis*.

Recovering the mutuality of family and work in a digital context

This emphasis on a new "humanism" that can offer an "integrating vision" of development reflects not only the particular quandaries of the culture in which the two pillars of personal development, family and work, have become disconnected and intrinsically split from their natural *telos*, but also the distinctively Christian challenge in our times of healing and reconciling through a recovery of integral human formation.

The dominant technocratic paradigm rests on a secularist belief in progress that breeds radical immanentism. Unbound from a transcending horizon of meaning, *techne*

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[16] Nadia Delicata, "The Family and the Dominant Technocratic Paradigm: Challenges in a Digital Culture," 223-250. In Elzbieta Osewska (Ed.) *The Family and Education in the Struggle for the Future of Europe* (UKSW, 2017).

becomes all-dominant in the same way that after the Industrial Revolution, work that becomes inexorably bound to chronological "time," takes an all-encompassing importance. As Josef Pieper has argued in his post-World War II essay, "The Philosophical Act,"[17] it is profoundly ironic that, notwithstanding increased automation and efficiency, which should have led to a "leisure" society, in fact, we are increasingly tethered to the economic, productivist (and therefore consumerist) ethos of "the world of total work."[18] Nevertheless, in his view, even more problematic is that "leisure" itself has lost its meaning. Leisure, the contemplative dimension of life, the love of wisdom bound to the *cultus*, the public act of divine worship in *kairos* time,[19] when transcendence permeates immanence, has been reduced to "taking a break" from work. What, in its original sense transcended the human to the divine, guaranteeing our true freedom by ordering our desires rightly,[20] in particular, our desire for relationship and for participating fully in God's creative act, has been subsumed to a mechanized notion of "doing." As "total work" becomes all consuming—indeed, a distraction, a narcosis, from a "godless" everyday life—it also becomes solely oriented to wealth and success, and therefore to careerism and materialism.

Unsurprisingly, it also distracts from—indeed even "forgets"—family life. If unemployment destabilizes the family by taking away its necessary material well-being, so all-consuming work impoverishes human relationships through emptying them of their spiritual nourishment and true freedom for becoming. Thus, to subvert the technocratic ethos, we must recover the true ordering of work in relation to transcendence, which implies healing the most fundamental fragmentation between our creative expression and desire for relationships as lived in our relation to God and in the milieu of family life, and by extension, of all creation.

Recovering the transcendent dimension of work must start from a reminder of its distinctly Christian and eschatological meaning. As we pray during the Offertory in the Roman Catholic Mass of Pope Paul VI, the "work of human hands" is what God sanctifies and transfigures into Christ's Body and Blood that is given to all. In being offered to all, a new community, the Church as Body of Christ, is revealed. Thus, just like the family sanctified in the sacrament marriage that is called to be a "domestic church," understood theologically, the particular dignity of work is that it is a "call" or "vocation," a personal summoning from above—indeed from God himself—to fulfill the particular mission for others that one is entrusted with. It is in living authentically this missionary dimension of work that, just like in the marital relationship, men and women bear "fruits"—both human and divine, both natural as well as sacramental—for themselves and for the world. Through sacrificial labour that enables us to fulfill our vocation, men and women dignify and honour

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[17] Josef Pieper, "The Philosophical Act" in *Leisure The Basis of Culture* (Ignatius Press, 2009).
[18] Ibid., 79.
[19] Ibid., 15.
[20] "[Cult] is a notion which contemporary 'modern' man associates almost exclusively and unconsciously with uncivilized, primitive peoples and with classical antiquity. For that very reason it is of the first importance to see that the *cultus*, now as in the distant past, is the primary source of man's freedom, independence and immunity within society. Suppress that last sphere of freedom, and freedom itself, and all our liberties, will in the end vanish in thin air" (Pieper, 15).

one another, precisely because we offer something of ourselves that, like seeds, can flourish for the greater good and indeed, for the "new creation" being reborn in the Holy Spirit.

This unity between vocation and the relationships that it strengthens is captured in Pope Francis' reflection on business in the encyclical *Laudato Sì*, where he called for an "'economic ecology' capable of appealing to a broader vision of reality." He added, that we "urgently need a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge, including economics, in the service of a more integral and integrating vision" (141). "Ecology" and "economy" share the same root: *oikos*, the Greek word that connotes family, the family's property, and therefore the household as a whole. *Oikos* is the milieu of human flourishing in intimate relationships through the creative stewarding of the resources of the earth.

Thus, the very phrase "economic ecology" can inspire a new culture of work that "favours" all the human family in our digital context. We cannot simply turn back the clock in a nostalgic retrieval of an earlier, presumably "simpler" lifestyle. Rather, as Pope Francis reminded in *Evangelii Gaudium* (224) through the work of Romano Guardini, integral development in a digital culture, and therefore an anthropological integrity that embraces with no contradiction our personhood and creativity, must reflect the times: "The only measure for properly evaluating an age is to ask to what extent it fosters the development and attainment of a full and authentically meaningful human existence, *in accordance with the peculiar character and the capacities of that age*" (my emphasis).

Final pointers

What are crucial ways of self-offering through one's labour that would subvert the effects of technocracy and enhance authentic creativity in a digital context? Romano Guardini urges that to reclaim our power and responsibility to steward the earth, we must learn to exercise three virtues: earnestness, gravity and asceticism.

> Earnestness must will to know what is really at stake… it must face heroically the duties forced upon man by his new situation. … The virtue of gravity will be spiritual, a personal courage devoid of the pathetic, a courage opposed to the looming chaos. This gravity or courage … must restrain the chaos rising out of the very works of man. … The modern era rebelled against asceticism with every fibre of itself because it saw in asceticism the quintessence of all from which it wished to be free. … Man must learn again to be a true master by conquering and by humbling himself. In no other way will he achieve the lordship of his own power. Only the freedom won through self-mastery can address itself with earnestness and gravity to those decision which will affect all reality. …
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> These deep virtues could breed a spiritual art of government through which man could exercise power over power, through which he could distinguish right from wrong and ends from means. That government would truly measure human dignity and make

room even under the strain of labour and battle for man himself to live in dignity and joy.[21]

A renewed understanding of work as means ordered toward justice and our mutual well-being for the human end of integral development must emerge from the recovery of these good habits. In a digital context, our work must rely on a contemplative reading of the signs of the times; it must reflect the courage to be held accountable for the exercise of our power; and it must show self-restraint for the greater good. Put more directly, it must be the fruit of *discernment* to enhance the positive developments emerging from a digital context as well as limit the culture's ill-effects.

In view of digitality's emphasis on connectivity, participation and innovative experimentation, our work must: mirror the hope of greater fraternity among men and women across the globe; it must enhance direct personal participation in the global economy and political process; it most offer more possibilities for creative expressions of beauty and innovation.

Thus, in view of increased automation, and the possible loss of more traditional "jobs" and the risk of poverty, there will be the need for guaranteeing, not only dignified living conditions through more equitable distribution of wealth, but also for creating opportunities for creative entrepreneurship. While some countries are starting to experiment with "universal basic income", including the Canadian province of Ontario, Finland, Brazil, the Netherlands and others, initial small populations in India, Kenya and Uganda that were given monthly income showed an increase in general well-being and reported an increase in entrepreneurship.[22] This would cautiously suggest that when basic needs are adequately met, the human spirit can thrive and rediscover new ways of expressing creativity.

Likewise, to enable greater participation from all, there will be the need to incentivize small creative enterprise in guild-like associations, in particular when rooted in the family (small family businesses) and local communities. Such businesses could recover ancient forms of craftsmanship, but also experiment with novel ones that allow for the spirit of innovation to flourish precisely through the team-spirit and mentoring that can be sustained more richly in smaller entrepreneurial environments.

Nevertheless, to enable the discerning attitude to initiate these processes, as a society we must also heavily invest to strengthen our collective moral fibre, by recovering an education that focuses first and foremost on the personal formation of our future generations.

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[21] Guardini, 92-94.

[22] Among others: Christopher Blattman, Nathan Fiala and Sebastian Martinez, "Generating Skilled Self-Employment in Developing Countries: Experimental Evidence from Uganda" *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129.2 (2014): 697–752; Benjamin Fernandez, "Rupees in your pocket" *Le Monde diplomatique* (4 May 2013), https://mondediplo.com/2013/05/04income; Dylan Matthews, "This Kenyan village is a laboratory for the biggest basic income experiment ever" *Vox* (Mar 6, 2017), https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/3/6/14007230/kenya-basic-income-givedirectly-experiment-village.

Education can no longer be held captive to the "job market"—a market that we can no longer even predict. To rebuild a truly human culture, education must become the central human effort, oriented towards recovering wisdom and forming subsequent generations. We must recover the spirit of the "university" as a community of learning, imagination and creativity, that through philosophical reflection, can articulate a vision of authentic human flourishing in our times.

It is also urgent that education be reclaimed as the process that allows our children to grow in civic virtues, through training in the arts of conversation, public deliberation and contemplation in a common pursuit of truth. Such education must necessarily start in the home, where parenthood must reclaim its honoured place as the first teacher of virtue, prudence and decorum. It would educate for "the common good" through principles of solidarity and subsidiarity to steward an "integral ecological flourishing." Most crucially, it would strengthen affective bonds as the foundation of a new society. These affective bonds of family and friendship "naturally" teach appreciation for differences of gender, age, ability, race, religion and culture. Such an education would necessarily recover the wisdom of the humanities and, in so doing, help us reconnect to our past to be better prepared to confront the future.