
Theology of Work: New Perspectives

Teología del trabajo: nuevas perspectivas

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Gregorio GUITIÁN

University of Navarra. School of Theology
Pamplona, España
ID ORCID 0000-0002-2928-1366
gguitian@unav.es

Ana Marta GONZÁLEZ

University of Navarra. Department of Philosophy
Pamplona, España
ID ORCID 0000-0001-7055-8294
agonzalez@unav.es

Abstract: The recent evolution of human work seems to signal a change of epoch that presents a challenge for theology. We urgently need a theological reflection that contributes, together with the other sciences, to addressing the challenges of contemporary work from a fully human perspective. This article justifies and presents a research project on recent theology of work which constitutes a starting point for the task mentioned. The article begins with a description of the present labor situation in the world and future prospects. Then, in the second part, it presents a preliminary review of recent theological literature in the fields of dogmatic, biblical, moral, and spiritual (practical) theology, pointing out possible avenues for further exploration. Some theological categories that can help respond to current challenges are suggested.

Keywords: Work, Theology of Work, Meaning of Work, Human Action, Solidarity, Virtue.

Resumen: La evolución que está experimentando el trabajo humano en los últimos tiempos parece señalar un cambio de época y constituye una nueva llamada para la teología. Urge una reflexión teológica que pueda contribuir, junto con las demás ciencias, a abordar los desafíos del trabajo actual con una visión íntegramente humana. En este artículo se motiva y presenta un proyecto de investigación sobre la teología del trabajo reciente que constituye el punto de partida para esta tarea. En primer lugar se describe la situación actual del trabajo y las perspectivas de futuro. La segunda parte presenta una revisión preliminar de la bibliografía teológica reciente en los campos de la teología dogmática, bíblica, moral y espiritual, señalando posibles vías de profundización. Se sugieren algunas categorías teológicas que pueden ayudar a dar respuesta a los desafíos actuales.

Palabras clave: Trabajo, Teología del trabajo, Significado del trabajo, Acción humana, Solidaridad, Virtud.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In its 2017 report on the future of work, the International Labour Organization¹ anticipated a global labor landscape characterized by threats and opportunities: Less stable forms of work, higher rates of informality, more indirect employers, growing inequality, an increase in jobs requiring greater interpersonal skills and creativity, in contrast to the disappearance of jobs that are easier to automate; “fissured” workplaces due to the outsourcing of numerous services, often redirected to developing countries; greater complexity in ensuring the protection of workers on a global scale, etc. The ILO also stressed the importance of the subjective experience of work for today’s workers and its role in the fulfillment of individuals as a means of social integration and a source of psychological stability, freedom, and autonomy.

Some of what the ILO anticipates is already here in our society. The “financialization” of the economy that led to the 2008 crisis has been followed by the technological transformations introduced by the so-called fourth industrial revolution², along with supervening circumstances such as the global health emergency caused by Covid-19. These events have not only introduced new variants into the labor context, but modify the configuration and the very subjective experience of work. Related discourse over the last two decades is marked with concern about the precariousness of employment, the loss of jobs supposedly brought about by automation, and work-family balance. This has recently been supplemented by an unexpected and alarming increase in the number of people who, in the context of the pandemic, have decided to leave their jobs. This latter phenomenon is known as “the great resignation”³ and raises the question of how work is perceived. In any case, the precariousness and instability of jobs, as well as the disconnec-

¹ INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION, *The future of work we want. A global dialogue*, Geneva, 2017.

² Cfr. SCHWAB, K., *The Fourth industrial revolution: what it means, how to respond*, World Economic Forum, January, 14, 2016. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-what-it-means-and-how-to-respond/> (accessed on July 13, 2022).

³ Cfr. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/02/01/job-quits-resignations-december-2021/> (accessed on July 13, 2022). Regarding the reasons for abandonment, see: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/03/09/majority-of-workers-who-quit-a-job-in-2021-cite-low-pay-no-opportunities-for-advancement-feeling-disrespected/>.

tion between supply and demand in the labor market, are the order of the day.

At the same time, while there is greater appreciation for the “subjective experience of work”, there is also growing individualization of the expectations regarding work. In addition, a sense of the transcendent dimension of life is on the decline, which can be associated with a progressive departure from the spirit and practice of Christianity, at least in the West. Indeed, if Christianity invites us to consider work primarily in terms of service and as a way of fulfilling the original mandate of Genesis, an individualistic and primarily worldly view of work could be taken as an indication that belief in God has little practical relevance in shaping personal life and, ultimately, in shaping culture itself.

Faced with this situation, there arises a need to return to the theme of work with theological reflection that considers the cultural and social challenges of the present moment, just like, at the beginning of the 1950s, Marie-Dominique Chenu suggested the need for a theology of work engaging with the Marxist approach, which, at that time, shaped thought regarding work⁴. The ILO itself calls for further reflection on work in the current context, stating the need for “a new way of thinking about how we deal with work, what could be the new institutions or new categories of work”⁵. The ILO also advocates for a normative approach ranging from the development of “ethical conventions for artificial intelligence and its broader application”⁶, to an invitation to strive for a future of work inspired by the principles of humanity, social justice and peace, and to pay greater attention to social solidarity⁷.

However, the relationship between work and issues such as justice, peace, and solidarity allows for deeper philosophical and theological understanding that goes beyond a merely normative approach. Undoubtedly, as activity carried out to satisfy human needs in a concrete social context, work falls squarely within the sphere of social ethics and moral theology. However, the study of human work also leads us to a more extensive reflection that invol-

⁴ Cfr. CHENU, M.-D., «Pour une théologie du travail», *Spirit* 186 (1952) 1-12; ID., *Pour une théologie du travail*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1955.

⁵ INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION, *The future of work we want*, 22.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷ Cfr. *ibid.*, 21-22.

ves all the human and social sciences, and to which theology and philosophy can contribute by providing a perspective that is genuinely based on wisdom and that sheds light on the question of the meaning of work in the present context.

This requires first inquiring into the development of the theology of work in the second half of the twentieth and at the beginning of the twenty-first centuries, and assessing the extent to which it helps illuminate the present moment. Are there other aspects that should be considered now? What transformations should be considered? And what tools can theology now use to contribute? These questions constitute a challenge and an invitation to enter into this topic, not in a fragmentary way, but by trying to bring together the different perspectives of the theological endeavor.

This concern has resulted in the creation of the University of Navarra's Strategic Line PIUNA Research Project "El significado del trabajo en la teología reciente" ("The meaning of work in recent theology"), co-directed by the authors of this article and in which six other professors from the areas of Sacred Scripture, Dogmatic Theology, Moral and Spiritual (Practical) Theology, and Patristics from the University of Navarra's School of Theology take part as researchers. In addition, other professors from the aforementioned areas also participate and collaborate in the project, most of them also belonging to the same school. This article – which includes some contributions by the participants in the research project – presents the basis of the project and a preliminary contribution to address the issues mentioned from a theological perspective as part of a broader research on work. The first phase of the project is focused on theology whereas the second phase will involve contributions from other disciplines to establish an enriching dialogue between all of them in order to revise the current social and development model and offer principles for its improvement.

Thus, the present research, which this article outlines, offers an overview and critical analysis of the theological positions that have emerged recently regarding work, and seeks to identify the most appropriate theological concepts for a reflection on the distinctive features of human work in the current labor context.

Before going on, it is useful to anticipate a first theological understanding of work. The bibliography reviewed in this article shows that the task of defining work is a complex one. As a starting point, open to further nuances

or even corrections, we propose a theological definition of work as a type of human activity oriented to the support of one's own life (or also of others' life), which responds to God's call to the perfecting of the person and to collaborate in the development of creation, and which is carried out in a social context, that is, in service to the needs of the human community to which one belongs.

2. WORK IN A CHANGING WORLD

To achieve the goal of this project, theology must rely on the indispensable mediation of philosophy and social thought because it is impossible to define the Christian meaning of work without considering its human meaning and how it is enhanced or jeopardized by various cultural and social transformations. For some decades now, the debate regarding "the end of work"⁸ has taken on various forms and motives – the end of a utopia⁹, automation¹⁰, etc. –, including phenomena of "flexibilization", precariousness, or underemployment. This debate continues to illustrate some of the challenges of our time and requires a proper diagnosis and evaluation which includes three preliminary tasks, as follows:

- a) Clarifying the very concept of work.
- b) Examining what the notion of "profession" brings to the notion of work.
- c) Studying the correlation between personal and structural factors in the definition and exercise of work.

a) *Clarifying the concept of work*

The first task contains the well-known challenge of offering a non-reductive definition of work that considers all the human and social dimensions involved in this notion¹¹, while allowing for differentiation between the various forms of work that have emerged throughout history, as well as the

⁸ Cfr. RIFKIN, J., *The end of work. The decline of the global labor force and the dawn of the post-market era*, New York: Putnam Publishing Group, 1996.

⁹ Cfr. HABERMAS, J., «El fin de una utopía», *El País*, December 8, 1984. Available at: https://el-pais.com/diario/1984/12/09/opinion/471394806_850215.html.

¹⁰ Cfr. BENANAV, A., *Automation and the future of work*, London: Verso, 2020.

¹¹ Cfr. KWANT, R. C., *Philosophy of labor*: Pittsburgh: Duquesne University, 1960.

different evaluations of it in different cultures¹². The Greek and Latin words we use to speak of work – *ergaszai/ponos*; *opus/labor* – allude to two dimensions involved to different extent in the human experience of work, namely: creativity and suffering; freedom and necessity. It is possible that the different specific weight given to these dimensions may explain the very different valuations of work in different civilizations. In particular, it is interesting to understand the undervaluation of work in classical Greece, compared to activities such as philosophy or politics, in which the Greeks recognized singular manifestations of the human, since this vision has heavily influenced the shaping of Western culture. More generally, it is important to bear in mind the close relationship between work and the economy, and therefore between changes in the realm of work and changes in economic life: the action we call “work” always has to do with satisfying human needs and, in this sense, is part of the circulation of goods and services that we call “economy” – without prejudging the type of economy in question.

In this sense, human labor, whether paid or unpaid, formal or informal, productive or unproductive, is always more than the mere application of an undifferentiated “labor force”¹³. It is clear that, reduced to the mere application of an undifferentiated “labor force”, there would be little reason to distinguish human labor from a mechanical operation, and one might hope that all labor would ultimately be machine-replaceable. However, the first thing to note about human labor is that it constitutes a vital activity, not simply a biological but a practical one, and that, as such, it benefits the very person who performs it.

Indeed, with their work, man and woman do not limit themselves to transforming the external world but transform themselves regarding that which makes them human, that is, their condition as rational and free agents. This means that work, as an activity oriented toward achieving external ends, incorporates the dimension of instrumental rationality inherent in technology. However, as a human action, work is never reduced to mere technology and instead is always inserted in a praxis that man himself must consider meaningful, given that the ends of work lie in man himself.

¹² Cfr. FISCHBACH, F., MERKER, A. ET AL. (dirs.), *Histoire philosophique du travail*, Paris: Vrin, 2022.

¹³ Cfr. MARX, K., *Capital: A critique of political economy*, London: Penguin, (vol.1) 1992, (vol. 2, 3) 1993.

As human agents, workers do not limit themselves to making changes in the world according to a preconceived idea but do so in a relational context and with a purpose that always transcends mere effectiveness, insofar as it responds to their free will. Precisely for this reason, all work, as a human action, possesses a moral dimension. This dimension is perhaps particularly evident in professions that definitionally demand adherence to a certain code of ethics, but, in reality, it is a feature of all work. Insofar as it is performed voluntarily by a person who is in a relationship with other people, all work is subject not only to technical evaluation but also to ethical evaluation. As an activity, work is not only more or less artistic or more or less effective, but is also more or less just or more or less generous, etc. The ethical dimension of work – by which it is, to a greater or lesser degree, perfective of the man who performs it – extends to all forms of human work, both those requiring highly technical training and those that require less. While the former, above all, allows us to appreciate the technical rationality around which professional practices are articulated, as well as the ways in which these practices are transformed over time¹⁴, all work has in common the fact that it *serves* human needs in one way or another, and thus contributes to the tapestry of social life. This is equivalent to saying that work constructs social life from the point of view of the needs it serves, and, therefore, from an economic point of view. Indeed, the economy – and not just the market economy but, in general, all circulation of goods and services – whether governed by the principle of exchange of equivalents or by the principle of gift-giving, is ultimately concerned with the satisfaction of human needs. The fact that human needs are not fixed (and that the satisfaction of some needs can produce new needs) speaks of the connection between work, economics, and development. Likewise, highlighting the connection between work and need does not mean that human life and work are fully subject to the demands of need and, therefore, to the economic system. To the extent that man is capable of some free activity, which is in itself an end, not everything in man's life, work included, can be resolved in terms of economic needs and value. In fact, there are jobs that we perform to sustain life, and others that we perform to live life more fully. Studying, an activity through which we gain

¹⁴ Cfr. MACINTYRE, A., *After virtue: A study in moral theory*, London: Duckworth, 2007.

more and better understanding, is among the latter¹⁵. Following the above, some jobs would be part of an economic regime and others of a formative regime; although authentically human work should always include a formative dimension.

Indeed, according to Aristotle, there are two activities that possess an end in and of themselves: Knowledge – which he calls perfect praxis – and virtuous praxis, which Aristotle himself does not consider possible without a principle of leisure¹⁶. Also, for this reason, insofar as work itself is seen as inserted in a virtuous praxis, neither man nor his work constitute *only* a means for something other than themselves since they are part of his very way of being. Taking this into consideration opens up a fully human concept of work in which, alongside the productive dimension, there is room for man's creative and relational dimensions; but, above all, it allows for the recovery of the centrality of work, thus considered, in order to orient the question of development in a human sense. In fact, the normative potential implicit in fully human work is also implicit, albeit negatively, in the Marxist concept of "alienation". Salvaging a fully human concept of work and placing it at the center of social life should serve to reformulate our approach to development so that it may indeed constitute "integral development", that is, development of the whole person and of all people. The definition of work proposed by Weber as "economically oriented action"¹⁷ provides a useful guide for linking work and development, as long as we deepen the concept of economy, without restricting it to the capitalist market economy.

b) *Profession and work*

The relationship between work and profession appears in Luther's thought and is also taken up by Max Weber in his work on Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism¹⁸. Assuming the definition of work as an economi-

¹⁵ Cfr. GRIMALDI, N., *El trabajo. Comunión y excomunión*, Pamplona: Eunsa, 2000.

¹⁶ Cfr. ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, VIII, 2, 1337 b 15.

¹⁷ WEBER, M., *Economy and society. A new translation*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. 2019.

¹⁸ Cfr. WEBER, M., *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, London, New York: Taylor & Francis, 2005.

cally oriented action and, therefore, as a service, other aspects of the concept of profession were made explicit by Weber in *Economy and Society*, as he defined profession (“Beruf”, “occupation” in some English translations) as “that mode of specification, specialization and combination of the work done by a person that serves that person with ongoing *Chancen* for provision and acquisition (...) Typical occupations and typical *Chancen* for acquiring incomes are related one with another”¹⁹. Here we see a reference to the training required to perform certain socially necessary tasks. Dealing in the same work with the different motivations that lead to choose one profession rather than another, Weber includes the vocational dimension implicit in the first professions, of which the sense of professional duty in today’s capitalist civilization would be a “remain”. In *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber associates the vocational meaning of work that Protestantism emphasizes with the emergence of a specifically modern work ethic. However, he also suggests that the modern reduction of work to its productive dimension, typical of the utilitarian mentality, is anticipated by Calvinist asceticism, which concentrates on the transcendent meaning of work and sees enjoyment of the exercise of one’s task as worldly. In this utilitarian universe, the sense of professional duty, not guided by any utilitarian reason, appeared as strange and hard to understand. As is evident, Weber’s work opens up an interesting dialogue with theology, where the possibility of reversing the utilitarian mentality – a predatory view of the world – arises, with a different spirit that inspires another way of performing work. In this new way “professional duty” is no longer a sacred islet in a profane universe, but a continuation of the ethical attitude that informs all dimensions of human life. At the same time, Weber’s reflections on the vocational dimension of the professional life allow for the development of an idea deeply rooted in the modern mentality. Simmel duly addressed this idea in his *Sociology* as one of the “social a prioris” with which every human being comes into the world, namely, every individual assumes that he has something unique to contribute to the world, and that the world is organized to welcome this unique contribution²⁰. This social “a priori”, which Simmel himself associates with the so-

¹⁹ WEBER, M., *Economy and society. A new translation*, 248.

²⁰ SIMMEL, G., *Sociology. Inquiries into the construction of social forms*, vol. 1, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009, 50-51. However we can notice how far away this view is from the experience of so many people throughout the world who do not find work or whose work contrasts with Simmel’s view. We thank the reviewers of this article for this remark.

cial metaphysics implicit in Christianity, is especially made concrete through the idea of “profession” around which questions of identity understandably tend to be raised.

c) *The relationship between personal and structural factors in the definition and performance of work*

Given the close intertwining of work and social practice, however, a purely individualistic consideration of work must be excluded, which has a two-fold consequence. First, it would be impossible to speak of a “profession” if the original contribution that each individual is called upon to make does not resonate with society; and second, although each individual is the indisputable subject of his work, at the same time, he is a co-participant in the social practice in which this work is inserted and, insofar as the various professional practices are intertwined, he is a co-participant in the world that these practices constitute. This allows for the observation of how an adequate division of labor foreshadows a type of “solidarity” capable in principle of preventing some of the “diseases” that are characteristic of modern societies. It is important to consider one of Durkheim’s²¹ old ideas. In contrast with the Scottish Enlightenment – Hume and Smith – who had mainly emphasized the positive aspects of the division of labor, the nineteenth century authors such as Tocqueville or Marx bluntly warned against its alienating consequences. In this context, Durkheim, aware that the division of labor was the sign of modern times, wanted to provide an “ethical”, and not merely economic, justification for its development. Such justification came from the concept of solidarity. For Durkheim, in fact, division of labor is at the origin of a new form of solidarity²², which he called “organic solidarity” based on interdependence. However, it is important to note that Durkheim himself warned that mere functional interdependence is not enough to overcome the dysfunctions generated by a deficient division of labor. He associated some of these dysfunctions with anomie – the weakening of the common morality that is characteristic of these societies – which becomes especially visible in times of crisis. He attributed other dysfunctions to a forced division of labor – to the fact

²¹ Cfr. DURKHEIM, E., *The division of labour in society*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

²² Cfr. GONZÁLEZ, A. M., «Christianity and the principle of solidarity», in DOMINGO, R. and WITTE, J. (eds.), *Christianity and global law*, London-New York: Routledge, 287-302.

that, due to various social forces, some people occupy positions for which they are not qualified. Finally, he associated other dysfunctions with a lack of coordination, where the division of tasks is rampant. To remedy these drawbacks, Durkheim stressed the importance of “professional groups” as a source of alternative solidarity, responsible for maintaining professional morale. Presumably, within the context of a globalized economy, both his diagnosis of social dysfunctions and his idea to counteract them through the empowerment of professional groups acquire singular relevance. In any case, this is important within the framework of this research because we believe an integral consideration of human work requires bearing in mind its potential for generating social ties.

2. A PRELIMINARY APPROACH TO CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE THEOLOGY OF WORK

In this philosophical and social context, we begin by reviewing literature from the field of theology. This will provide an overview of the state of related research, the usefulness of its contributions to this work, and the lines along which it would be best to advance. We intend to study the theological works that have been published since the second half of the twentieth century in the realm of Christianity (Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox), in the areas of dogmatic, biblical, moral, and spiritual (practical) theology.

As noted, Marie-Dominique Chenu’s article – and later monograph – makes an important initial reference to the theology of work²³. Chenu stressed the need for a “theology of work” that he deemed non-existent at the time. Naturally, work had already been the subject of theological reflection²⁴. However, Chenu pointed out that a theology of work must con-

²³ Cfr. footnote 4. Note, however, that references to the theology of work can be found much earlier. See, for instance, MASURE, E., «La théologie du travail», *Le Supplément de la Vie Spirituelle* 52 (1937) 65-79.

²⁴ Cfr. FITTE, H., «Algunos estudios teológicos sobre el trabajo en la primera mitad del siglo XX. Elementos para contextualizar la doctrina del Beato J. Escrivá», in FARO, G. (ed.), *Lavoro e vita quotidiana*, Roma: Edizioni Università della Santa Croce, 2003, 39-57; ID., *Lavoro umano e redenzione. Riflessione teologica dalla Gaudium et spes alla Laborem et exercens*, Roma: Armando Editore, 1996.

sider the social circumstances of the time and, in particular, the fact that the enormous transformations to the world of work brought about by industrialization require a different theological approach. The French theologian echoed the criticism of the current labor situation and tried to respond to it from a Christian perspective²⁵.

Chenu's contribution is contextualized in a debate that has influenced more recent works on the theology of work, at least indirectly. This debate refers to the discussion maintained among the theological streams known as "eschatological" and "incarnationist"²⁶. The former relativizes the intrinsic value of temporal realities in the face of salvation and warns against naive optimism regarding development. On the other hand, the "incarnationist" movement points out the positive value of earthly realities in light of redemption²⁷. This debate was picked up and, to a certain extent, integrated into the carefully crafted lines of the Constitution "Gaudium et Spes" on human activity in the world (cfr. GS 33-39).

Publications of varying importance subsequently appeared²⁸. Overall, the bibliographical panorama can be divided into three groups according to the approach they adopt: Works that focus on work from a dogmatic point of view, publications that examine the biblical understanding of work, and, finally, those that deal with the moral-spiritual dimension of work²⁹. In terms of religious denomination, contributions from a Protestant perspective of different denominations predominate, but there are also

²⁵ A critique of Chenu's achievement can be found in ANGELINI, G., «Teologia cattolica e il lavoro», in CAPRIOLI, A. and VACCARO, L. (a cura di), *Il lavoro. II. Sociologia, Antropologia, Psicologia, Economia e Storia. Ricerca su problemi teorici e pratici del lavoro nella nostra società*, Brescia: Morcelliana, 1985, 148-149. Cfr. also MONDIN, G. B., *Teologia della prassi*, Brescia: Morcelliana, 1973, 36. Papers soon appeared that echoed Chenu's proposal: cfr., for example, RONDET, H., «Éléments pour une théologie du travail», *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 77/1 (1955) 27-48 or the monographic issue of the Journal *Lumière et Vie* (1956).

²⁶ Cfr. FITTE, H., «Algunos estudios teológicos», 46-53. The "eschatologists" include Bouyer and Danielou; and, among the "incarnationists," we find Thils, Teilhard de Chardin, and Chenu himself.

²⁷ Cfr. *ibid.*

²⁸ For example, KAISER, E. G., *Theology of work*, Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1966, 522 pp.; GOOSEN, G., *The theology of work*, Hales Corners, Wisconsin: Clergy Book Service, 1976, 83 pp.; KELLY, B., «Towards a theology of work», *The Irish Theological Quarterly* 36/4 (1969) 315-326, etc.

²⁹ Naturally, this division can be further nuanced since many of these works combine approaches from other branches of theology. The classification that we offer is intended to reflect the most prevalent approach therein.

numerous contributions from Catholic authors and, more recently, some references from Orthodox Christian³⁰ and Mormon³¹ perspectives. In what follows, we will sketch a panorama built from the most recent works, pointing out possible avenues that could be explored in the current context.

a) *The dogmatic theology approach*

An initial group of studies has adopted a dogmatic perspective. The contribution with the greatest impact in the academic sphere is Miroslav Volf's monograph³², a Protestant theologian who reviews the Lutheran understanding of work and recommends an interesting correction. Volf suggests moving from an understanding of work as a rather static vocation – Luther's original view that no longer seems as useful in a transforming world where people frequently change jobs and even professions – to a vision of work based on the idea of "charisma", thus drawing attention to the role of the Holy Spirit. Volf insists on human work's contribution in this life – under the action of the Holy Spirit – to the definitive transformation that will take place in eschatology. Understood as charisma, work is a gift of the Holy Spirit that each person receives throughout their life for their own benefit and for the benefit of others. It is a dynamic reality that accompanies the different work that a person may carry out throughout their life.

One recurring theme related to work is its dimension of cooperation with God. In this area, some authors emphasize cooperation with creation in light of the calling to dominion over the earth, while others point to the ultimate end of creation when all things will be renewed. Both perspecti-

³⁰ Cfr. NICOLAIDES, A., «Ethics and the dignity of work: An Orthodox Christian perspective», *Pharos Journal of Theology* 101 (2020) 1-15; CONSTAS, M., «*Work while it is still light*» (*John* 9:4). *Toward an Orthodox Christian theology of work*, 2019 (available at: <https://holyltrinitypgh.org/apc/APC-2019-National-Clergy-Retreat-Presentation-Father-Maximos-Constas.pdf>. Accessed on July 13, 2022).

³¹ Cfr. WRIGHT, W. A., «To dress it and to keep it: Toward a Mormon theology of work», *BYU Studies Quarterly* 55 (2016) 161-177.

³² Cfr. VOLF, M., *Work in the Spirit: toward a theology of work*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001 (Oxford University Press, 1991).

³³ Cfr. COSDEN, D., *A theology of work: work and the new creation*, Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004.

ves are compatible. Volf and Cosden³³ emphasize the eschatological aspect, while Sanz analyzes work from the perspectives of creation and redemption³⁴.

In his book *The End of Work*, Hughes³⁵ complains that both Chenu and Volf, who he considers the most relevant exponents of the theology of work to date, focused on labor problems typical of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, forgetting work itself and its impact on the more subjective dimensions of workers. In this regard, some authors³⁶ stress the intrinsic meaning of work as a reflection of God's work in creation and redemption. For Jensen, the life of the triune God is the fundamental form of sharing and giving that serves as a moral normative framework for judging human work. On her part, Reed understands work as a vocation and as an action rooted in worship, although she recognizes that work today, which often degrades human beings, is "accursed"³⁷.

In a rather contrasting position that could gain strength in light of phenomena such as "the great resignation", recent authors such as Weeks or Posadas challenge the intrinsic goodness of work, which, in reality, is considered an evil to be avoided³⁸. Work is seen as the necessary condition to keep the capitalist system afloat and Christianity is viewed as contributing to maintaining this *status quo* with its defense of work. These authors suggest a non-work or anti-work ethic, which should be coupled with public policies such as a universal minimum wage so that people would be free from working. Furthermore, according to Posadas, Christian theology has assumed, without sufficient foundation, that what God does in creation is work. This is a point that remains open to discussion, but it

³⁴ SANZ SÁNCHEZ, S., «Lavoro, creazione e redenzione», in LÓPEZ DÍAZ, J. and REQUENA, F. M. (a cura di), *Verso una spiritualità del lavoro professionale: teologia, antropologia e storia a 500 anni dalla Riforma*, Vol. 3, Rome: EDUSC, 2018, 17-69. However, redemption also includes the eschatological fulfillment of creation in the Spirit (cfr. 19-20).

³⁵ Cfr. HUGHES, J., *The end of work: theological critiques of capitalism*, Malden, MA-Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

³⁶ Cfr. JENSEN, D., *Responsive labor: a theology of work*, Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006; RAY, D. K., *Working*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2011.

³⁷ Cfr. REED, E. D., *Good work: Christian ethics in the workplace*, Waco (TX): Baylor University Press, 2010.

³⁸ Cfr. WEEKS, K., *The problem with work: feminism, marxism, antiwork politics, and postwork imaginaries*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2011; POSADAS, J., «The refusal of work in Christian ethics and theology. Interpreting work from an anti-work perspective», *Journal of religious studies* 45 (2017) 330-361.

should be noted that it is conditioned by a particular understanding of what is work.

In fact, some reflections on work reduce it largely to paid employment³⁹ or, ultimately, to a profession, making it clear that reflection on work should begin with a definition that is as inclusive as possible. Again, the issue of defining work is present here, some authors even proposing a definition of work totally dependent on their times: Work is “what men commonly regard as work”⁴⁰. Every discipline – including theology – defines work from its own perspective, pointing to one aspect or another. The need thus arises for a theological reflection on work that understands it broadly as a type of human action that only reaches its anthropological and social fullness in a theological context. In this sense, we can start from the definition proposed at the end of the introduction of this article.

In any case, if the current perception of work emphasizes its negative elements, then it is worth focusing on its connection with the individual and their transcendent dimension, that is, their significance in light of God’s plan for the whole of creation, which thus broadens the horizon of work. Thus, for example, the meaning of work can be explored from the perspective of divine providence⁴¹. In this regard, the Christian perspective helps us find a path – which takes grace into account – for integrating work’s different dimensions within a context that tends to strain them.

b) *The biblical approach*

The second group of studies analyzes work from a biblical perspective using exegetical tools. It is obvious that the theme of work – and the meaning of human action – can be found at the beginning of *Genesis*, but it is also somehow present in the book of *Ecclesiastes* and in other wisdom passages.

³⁹ Cfr. POSADAS, J., «The refusal of work».

⁴⁰ Cfr. KELLY, B., «Towards a theology of work», 321, 323. In this very sense, even John Paul II says at the beginning of *Laborem exercens* that work is “any human activity that can and must be recognized as work, amid all the many activities of which man is capable and to which he is predisposed by his very nature, by virtue of his own humanity» (JUAN PABLO II, Enc. *Laborem exercens*, Introduction).

⁴¹ Cfr. GAUTIER, Ch., *Collaborateurs de Dieu: providence et travail humain selon Thomas d’Aquin*, Paris: Cerf, 2015.

As far as *Genesis* is concerned, both the images and the vocabulary characteristic of its first three chapters have been noted to depict the world as a great sanctuary in which human beings worship God with their work⁴². In fact, in the biblical world, work and worship, which in Hebrew are expressed by the same word (*abodab*), are understood as two inseparable dimensions of the same reality rather than as two distinct realities. Therein, work expresses man's cooperation with God in the maintenance and development of creation while at the same time giving Him due worship. Personal work is an essential part of God's plan for every human being⁴³.

Along these lines, the description of the human vocation contained in the first pages of the Bible must be carefully considered, taking advantage of the depth achieved over the years by the disciplines that accompany its study. For example, we can review studies of the first Ancient Eastern writings⁴⁴ and, based on them, seek to better understand the continuity and, above all, discontinuity present in the biblical texts that convey Revelation.

In this regard, seeking to dig deeper into the relational dimension of work, which today seems to have more importance, it is worth studying the symbolic stories of the first chapters of *Genesis* from a biblical understanding of "Covenant". In it, human beings are called to "take care" of a "garden" in which there must be "peace and joy" (worship and rest) in their intimate relationship with the "marriage covenant" (family, relational dimension). Moreover, some authors have drawn attention to the sapiential meaning present in these narrative texts⁴⁵. Such a wisdom reading can help reinterpret these texts

⁴² SCHACHTER, L. B., «The Garden of Eden as God's first sanctuary», *JBQ* 41/2 (2013) 73-77; MORROW, J., *Liturgy and sacrament, mystagogy and martyrdom: essays in theological exegesis*, Eugene: Pickwick, 2020; BERGSMAN, J., «The creation narratives and the original unity of work and worship in the human vocation», in LOFTIN, R. K. and DIMSDALE, T. (eds.), *Work. Theological foundations and practical implications*, London: SCM Press, 2018, 11-29; CASTRO-LODEIRO, J. A., *Venid y trabajad. ¡Es tiempo de alabar! La vocación del hombre en los relatos de creación mesopotámicos y bíblicos*, Estella: Verbo Divino, 2020.

⁴³ Cfr. VARO, F., «Naturaleza, trabajo y dignidad del hombre. Gen 2,4b-6 y su inserción en el canon judío», in CASCIARO J. M. ET AL., *Esperanza del hombre y revelación bíblica*, Pamplona: Eunsa, 1996, 333-350.; ID., *Génesis*, Madrid: BAC, 2016.

⁴⁴ Cfr. PRITCHARD, J. B. (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern text relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton-New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963; LARA-PEINADO, F. (ed.), *Mitos sumerios y acadios*, Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1984; HALLO, W. W. and YOUNGER, K. L. (eds.), *The context of Scripture. Canonical compositions from the biblical world*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003.

⁴⁵ ALONSO-SCHÖKEL, L., «Motivos Sapienciales y de Alianza en Gn 2-3», *Biblica* 43 (1962) 295-316; GARCÍA LÓPEZ, F., «Los fundamentos de la antropología bíblica. Gn 1-3 a la luz de los

by manifesting their continual anthropological message through more advanced philological tools.

At the same time, the strong intertextual relationship between the accounts from the beginning of *Genesis* and the book of *Ecclesiastes* has recently been brought to light⁴⁶. The distance or tension between the original design for human activity and the concrete and historical difficulties that are found in all spaces and times are obvious in this relationship, which is of interest for our topic.

Many readers throughout history have perceived in *Ecclesiastes* a pessimistic and disenchanting view of human existence. In reality, the problem lies in the fact that the book has two voices, one pessimistic and the other more positive. For many exegetes (the majority), the book is seen as a scathing criticism of traditional wisdom in Israel. Only a few authors point to its positive approach in that it highlights the value of the work that is part of human activity (Mitchell, Gordis, Good, and Lohfink, against von Rad and others)⁴⁷. Almost all of them refer to how *Ecclesiastes* insists on the value of joy, gladness, and contemplation while carrying out human activity, and not so much on its conditions, outcome, or merit. Recently, some exegetes have become interested in this perspective⁴⁸. In this context, if it is true that the subjective dimension of the worker in today's work is given increasing value over other more conventional dimensions, such as remuneration or prestige, then it is worth reviewing the message of *Ecclesiastes* in depth.

Indeed, the complex and ambiguous nature of how human activity is judged in *Ecclesiastes* has given rise to various branches of interpretation that have

estudios exegeticos recientes», *Salmaniticensis* 58 (2011) 191-204; BEAUCHAMP, P., *El uno y el otro Testamento. Cumplir las Escrituras*, Madrid: BAC, 2015; ID., *La Ley de Dios. De una montaña a la otra*, Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2014; SCHMID, K., «The ambivalence of human wisdom: Genesis 2-3 as a sapiential text», in JONES, S. C. y YODER, Ch. R. (eds.), *When the Morning Stars Sang*, Berlin-Boston, Mass.: De Gruyter, 2018, 275-286.

⁴⁶ Cfr. SEUFERT, M., «The presence of Genesis in Ecclesiastes», *WTJ* 78 (2016) 75-92.

⁴⁷ Cfr. JOHNSTON, R. K., «Confessions of a workaholic: A reappraisal of Qohelet», *CBQ* 38 (1976) 14-28; GORDIS, R., *The wisdom of Ecclesiastes*, New York: Behrman House, 1945, 23, 54, 151; GOOD, E., *Irony in the Old Testament*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965, 173, 190, 192; LOHFINK, N., *The Christian meaning of the Old Testament*, Milwaukee: Bruce, 1968, 140, 152, 154, 155; RAD, G. VON, *Old Testament theology*, Vol. I, New York: Harper and Row, 1962, 420-421, 455; ID., *Wisdom in Israel*, New York: Abingdon, 1972, 227-228, 265, 316.

⁴⁸ Cfr. PERRY, T. A., *The book of Ecclesiastes and the path to joyous living*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015; ATKINSON, T., *Singing at the winepress. Ecclesiastes and the ethics of work*, London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015.

led to opposing approaches, one that is more focused on earthly action through its desacralization (Luther), and the other, more spiritualistic, that defends detachment from the world (Bonaventure). The first approach responds to the book's optimistic voice, which positively values human action in what are known as the "carpe diem" passages. The second directs its gaze farther on in a pessimistic attitude about historical events. It thereby silences the optimistic voice that is present and takes on the pessimistic tone with which the other voice judges worldly existence. Exploration of whether the book is in fact a call to integration is of interest since both voices are present in the structure of the book and perhaps are not so dichotomous in the mind of the work's composer.

When it comes to the New Testament, authors writing about the Bible commonly limit themselves to recognizing the Gospels' silence regarding the years when Jesus worked in Nazareth⁴⁹. Besides some sociological data and historical context, there are few contributions⁵⁰. Volf himself, who almost implicitly identifies work and profession, goes so far as to say that in no way can a "Gospel of work" be found in the New Testament, despite John Paul II's claims in "Laborem exercens" (no. 26), as Jesus himself abandoned his work at the beginning of his public life and took his disciples out of their occupations when he called them⁵¹. One might ask what "My Father is working still, and I am working" (Jn. 5:17) means. In any case, there is room for a theological reading based on the Christology that is implicit in the Gospel texts, which brings to light significant realities and implications of Jesus' years of hidden work in Nazareth.

As for Paul's writings, work is seen as a context for a relationship with God and with one another. On the one hand, man and woman, called to imitate God, in whose image and likeness they are made, work as collaborators in the perfection of creation, cooperating at the same time in the dignified life of all. Through his work, therefore, man fulfills his aspirations for communion and life. In the Pauline theological framework, this ultimately edifies the Church (cfr. Eph. 2:20-22; 4:15-16).

⁴⁹ Cfr. GNILKA, J., *Jesus of Nazareth: message and history*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994; PUIG, A., *Jesús. Una biografía*, Barcelona: Destino, 2005, 181.

⁵⁰ Cfr. LAGRANGE, M. J., *The gospel of Jesus Christ*, Newman Press, 1951; BORNKAMM, G., *Jesus of Nazareth*, Augsburg Fortress, 1995.

⁵¹ Cfr. VOLF, M., «Work as cooperation with God», in LOFTIN, R. K. and DIMSDALE, T. (eds.), *Work. Theological foundations and practical implications*, London: SCM Press, 2018, 83-109, 86-87.

Thus, through their action, man and woman contribute both to their own sustenance and to that of others; hence the importance of not living an idle life and of loving work (cfr. 1 Thes. 4:11,12; 5:12-13; 2 Thes. 3:10), which includes not only manual labor – Paul himself was a tentmaker – but also exercising governance of human community (Rom. 13:1-7) and the apostolic ministry (2 Cor. 5:18). To carry this out, man has received power and authority that must be used and exercised with love and wisdom, without taking pride in one's talents and abilities before others, and considering oneself a servant of others (Gal. 5:13). We must consider the disruption caused by sin and how the redemption brought about by Jesus Christ can redirect the use of power and the employment of talents, and abilities that are detached from the meaning given by the One who granted them. A Christian's whole existence and, therefore, their work, is seen as worship or service both to God and to men (cfr. Phil. 2:25,30). In any case, the Pauline writings insist that whoever works does so as a service, but, at the same time, deserves his or her wages (cfr. Rom. 4:4; 1 Tim. 5:18)⁵².

Within this framework, in order to review the Pauline theology of work⁵³, we need to take a close look at commentaries on Paul's letters and the related monographs, articles, and chapters in recent collective works. In this regard, one of the last great theologies of St. Paul dedicates not a single section to this topic⁵⁴. In contrast, the most recent document from the Pontifical

⁵² Cfr. CABALLERO, J. L., «Elementos para una teología paulina del trabajo. En torno al documento “¿Qué es el hombre?”», *Scripta Theologica* 53 (2021) 169-190.

⁵³ Cfr., for example, HAHN, H.-Ch. and THIELE, F., «Obra, trabajo», in COENEN, L., BEYREUTHER, E. and BIETENHARD, H., *Diccionario teológico del Nuevo Testamento*, III, Salamanca: Sígueme, 1993, 188-198; HESS, K. and COENEN, L., «Servicio», in COENEN, L., BEYREUTHER, E. and BIETENHARD, H., *Diccionario teológico del Nuevo Testamento*, III, Salamanca: Sígueme, 1994, 212-221; BARBAGLIO, G., *La teología di Paolo. Abbozzi in forma epistolare*, Bologna: EDB, 1999; ÁLVAREZ VERDES, L., *Caminar en el Espíritu. El pensamiento ético de S. Pablo*, Roma: Editiones Academiae Alphonsianae, 2000; SÁNCHEZ BOSCH, J., *Maestro de los pueblos. Una teología de Pablo, el Apóstol*, Estella: Verbo Divino, 2007; STEVENS, R. P., *Work matters. Lessons from Scripture*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012; ALETTI, J.-N., «Paul et les autorités politiques. A propos de Rom 13,1-7», in LUCIANI, D. and WÉNIN, A. (dirs.), *Le pouvoir. Enquêtes dans l'un et l'autre Testament*, Paris: Cerf, 2012, 263-288; SCHLIER, H., *Fundamentos de una teología paulina*, Madrid: BAC, 2016; TAYLOR, J., «Labour of love: The theology of work in First and Second Thessalonians», in LOFTIN, K. and DIMSDALE, T. (eds.), *Work: Theological foundations and practical implications*, London: SCM Press, 2018, 49-68.

⁵⁴ Cfr. DUNN, J. D. (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to St. Paul*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003; ID., *The theology of Paul the Apostle*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998.

Biblical Commission devotes a section to work as a duty. Some of the questions that merit attention are work as worship, the work-rest relationship, the laws on work, work as service, and apostolic work⁵⁵.

Finally, we turn to the studies of Patrology regarding work to identify authors and doctrines that can shed light on the current reflection. We begin with the age-old discussion between those who claim that the patriarchs introduced a more positive vision of work than that of the pagan world and those who object to this thesis⁵⁶. In this regard, it is important to study recent works to identify if we can obtain an overall view that brings together the successes of one or the other and allows us to better understand primitive Christianity's view of work.

c) *The moral and spiritual theology approach*

Third, we find literature that focuses on the moral and spiritual dimensions of work. In the Catholic sphere, the most frequent reference, which is often almost the only one analyzed by Protestant authors when they deal with the Catholic vision⁵⁷, is found in John Paul II's encyclical "Laborem exercens". However, Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is richer in content and scope when it comes to work and therefore deserves more attention. The capacity of CST's fundamental principles and of other categories contained therein, such as "service", to illuminate challenges like those pointed out by the ILO should be explored. For instance, there is need to address the structural injustice involved in (almost slavery) working conditions in developing countries (the so called "sweatshops", etc.)⁵⁸ as well as in developed coun-

⁵⁵ Cfr. PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *What Is Man? A Journey Through Biblical Anthropology*, London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2021; CABALLERO, J. L., «Elementos para una teología paulina del trabajo».

⁵⁶ HOLZAPFEL, H., *Die sittliche Wertung der körperlichen Arbeit im christlichen Altertum*, Würzburg: Verlag für katholisches Schrifttum, 1941; GEOGHEGAN, A. T., *The Attitude towards labor in early Christianity and ancient culture*, Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1945; REINHOLD, M., «The attitude towards labor in early Christianity and ancient culture by Arthur T. Geoghegan», *Classical Philology* 41 (1946) 181-183.

⁵⁷ According to Volf, «Laborem exercens» is «one of the most remarkable ecclesiastical documents on the question of work ever written» (VOLF, M., *Work in the Spirit*, 5).

⁵⁸ Cfr. TULUD CRUZ, G., «Theology and (de)humanizing work in the twenty-first century», *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 75 (2021) 1-17, forthcoming. (we are grateful to Christine Firer Hinze for pointing out this reference).

tries⁵⁹. Similarly, the theology of work from the Latin American experience should be explored as well.

Illanes' theological study on the sanctification of work from a spiritual-theological approach – which is frequently cited – is also an essential reference⁶⁰. More recently, numerous works from different confessions have addressed the problem of the divide between work and Christian life⁶¹. Here, the tensions generated by the current socio-economic model are evident, and the presence of practical initiatives that seek to resolve this divide is telling. For example, we find the “Center for Faith and Work” at various Protestant institutions, the “Theology of Work Project”, which focuses on the study of passages from Scripture regarding work, also from a Protestant perspective⁶², and, in the Catholic sphere, the project “The Gospel of Work”, at the Catholic University of America's Ciocca Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship⁶³.

⁵⁹ Cfr. FIRER HINZE, Ch., *Radical sufficiency: Work, livelihood, and a U.S. Catholic economic ethic*, Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021; HIRSCHFELD, M. L., «Rethinking economic inequality. A theological perspective», *Journal of Religious Ethics* 47/2 (2019), 259-282; CLOUTIER, D., «The worker's paradise: eternal life, economic eschatology, and good work as the keys to Social Ethics», *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 75 (2021) 37-55 (forthcoming); BOYLE, G., *Tattoos on the heart: The power of boundless compassion*, New York: Free Press, 2011.

⁶⁰ Cfr. ILLANES, J. L., *On the Theology of Work*, Dublin-Chicago: Scepter, 1968.

⁶¹ Cfr. NAUGHTON, M., *Getting work right. Labor and leisure in a fragmented world*, Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2019; SCHLAG, M. (ed.), *Hollines through work. Commemorating the Encyclical Laborem exercens*, South Bend: St. Augustine Press, 2022; LOFTIN, R. K. and DIMSDALE, T. (eds.), *Work. Theological foundations and practical implications*, London: SCM Press, 2018; LÓPEZ DÍAZ, J. and REQUENA, F. M. (a cura di), *Verso una spiritualità del lavoro professionale: teologia, antropologia e storia a 500 anni dalla Riforma: atti del Convegno «The Heart of Work»*, Pontificia Università della Santa Croce, Rome, 19-20 ottobre 2017, Rome: EDUSC, 2018; REED, E. D., *Good work*; CAPPS, D. and CARLIN, N., «Releasing life's potential: A pastoral theology of work», *Pastoral Psicology* 65/6 (2016) 863-883; RAE, S. B., «Work and sanctification», in LOFTIN, R. K. and DIMSDALE, T. (eds.), *Work. Theological foundations*, 2018, 127-143; COSDEN, D., *The heavenly good of earthly work*, Milton Keynes-Peabody, Paternoster Press-Hendrickson Publishers, 2006. NELSON, T., *Work matters: connecting Sunday worship to Monday work*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL 2011; MILLER, D., *God at work. The history and promise of the Faith at Work movement*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

⁶² See Theology of Work Project. (<https://www.theologyofwork.org/>) (Accessed on July 13, 2022).

⁶³ See <https://www.cioccacenter.com/> (Accessed on July 13, 2022).

Some authors study the contributions of saints like St. Augustine⁶⁴, the Benedictine tradition⁶⁵, St. Thomas Aquinas⁶⁶, St. Peter Damian⁶⁷, and more contemporary figures such as St. Josemaría Escrivá⁶⁸ or St. John Paul II⁶⁹. Finally, there are also contributions from the perspective of various types of figures⁷⁰. The reflections on work in this field might be interesting as long as they contain useful contributions to cope with the challenges mentioned above⁷¹.

At the same time, studies on work should be reviewed from a moral theological perspective⁷². “Laborem exercens” has stood out above all for its illuminating exposition on the relationship between the objective and subjective aspects of work, emphasizing the subjective dimension because work is first and foremost a personal act. Some authors see the hierarchization that this implies as problematic⁷³, while others have noted that the tension between the subjective and objective aspects runs through the history of reflection on work⁷⁴. At present, this tension calls for the pursuit of a more unified and integrated conception of work. This question could per-

⁶⁴ Cfr. THERRIEN, M., «Ama et labora: Augustine’s theology of work as a resource for Catholic Social Teaching», *The Catholic Social Science Review* 25 (2020) 69-85.

⁶⁵ Cfr. MALESIC, J., «“Nothing is to be preferred to the work of God”: Cultivating monastic detachment for a postindustrial work ethic», *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 35/1 (2015) 45-61.

⁶⁶ Cfr. GAUTIER, Ch., *Collaborateurs de Dieu*.

⁶⁷ Cfr. RANFT, P., *The theology of work. Peter Damian and the medieval religious renewal movement*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

⁶⁸ Cfr. ILLANES, J. L., *Ante Dios y ante el mundo: apuntes para una teología del trabajo*, Pamplona: Eunsa, 1997; LÓPEZ DÍAZ, J. (ed.), *San Josemaría e il pensiero teologico*, Roma: Edizioni Università della Santa Croce, 2015; BURKHART, E. and LÓPEZ DÍAZ, J., *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de san Josemaría: estudio de teología espiritual*, Madrid: Rialp, 2010-2013; BOROBIA, J. ET AL., *Trabajo y Espíritu: sobre el sentido del trabajo desde las enseñanzas de Josemaría Escrivá en el contexto del pensamiento contemporáneo*, Pamplona: Eunsa, 2004, etc.

⁶⁹ Cfr. MELÉ, D., *Valor humano y cristiano del trabajo: enseñanzas de S. Juan Pablo II*, Pamplona: Eunsa, 2020.

⁷⁰ Cfr. HARRISON, W. H., «Loving the creation, loving the Creator: Dorothy L. Sayers’s theology of work», *Anglican Theological Review* 86 (2004) 239-257; MALESIC, J., «A kenotic struggle for dignity. Booker T. Washington Theology of Work», *Journal of Religious Ethics* 44 (2016) 403-424.

⁷¹ In this regard, it may be useful to review the contributions on the meaning of work from the philosophical perspective of Business Ethics.

⁷² Cfr., for example, ANGELINI, G., «Teologia cattolica e il lavoro», *Teologia* 8 (1983/1) 3-30.

⁷³ Cfr. COSDEN, D., *A theology of work*, 26.

⁷⁴ Cfr. CHOZA, J., «Sentido objetivo y sentido subjetivo del trabajo», in FERNÁNDEZ, F. (coord.), *Estudios sobre la Encíclica Laborem exercens*, Madrid: BAC, 1987, 231-266.

haps be clarified by recent developments in fundamental moral theology regarding moral action, where this tension is also perceived⁷⁵. In this context, we would do well not to ignore the literature on the dynamism of the virtues in the act of working, since virtue, by its very nature, has the potential to integrate.

4. CONCLUSION

Evolution in the world of work today calls for a return to the theology of work. It is important to highlight the potential contribution of theological reflection to this important contemporary human reality. Thus, here, we have offered a preliminary presentation of a multi-stage research project that first aims to critically study recent theological contributions from the main Christian denominations (Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox), so as to detect and better understand the aspects of work that appear to be most pressing at present. We are interested in detecting theological perspectives and categories that help to better understand work in this moment. We have included in these pages suggestions for exploration that we hope to be able to carry out in the context of the aforementioned research project. Along with revisiting the concept of work itself, it is important to help integrate dimensions of work in which there is tension, and along these lines, to point out theological categories that can help in this task, such as covenant, virtue, service, solidarity, etc.

This task involves looking at the meaning of work from a theological perspective that is attentive to human beings' fundamental dimensions, namely, our individual (or subjective) and social dimensions, material and spiritual dimensions, the capacity to love, and the dynamism of the virtues that comes into play in work, etc. Achieving an integrative theological vision of work requires moving toward a second stage that addresses a multidisciplinary study on work (with contributions from theology, philosophy, sociology, law, economics, education and psychology, engineering, ecology, health sciences, etc.), pointing in three directions: The contemporary typology of work, the unique features of human work in light of ar-

⁷⁵ Cfr. SCHINDLER, D., «Conscience and the relation between truth and pastoral practice: Moral theology and the problem of modernity», *Communio* 46 (2019) 333-385.

tificial intelligence, and revisiting prevailing social and development models.

In his last social encyclical, Benedict XVI expressed his “conviction” regarding the importance of the issue of development for the contemporary era in a peculiar way. Recalling the enormous influence that Leo XIII’s great encyclical “*Rerum Novarum*” on the so-called “social question” has had in the history of CST, he noted, “I express my conviction that *Populorum Progressio* deserves to be considered ‘the *Rerum Novarum* of the present age’, shedding light upon humanity’s journey towards unity”⁷⁶. If we wish to give the issue of development the attention it deserves, then we must return to human work, which, as John Paul II pointed out with equal conviction, “is a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question” (LE 3).

⁷⁶ BENEDICTO XVI, Encyclical letter *Caritas in veritate*, June 29, 2009, n. 8.

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