

# Human Work, Inclusive jobs

(Walter Magnoni)

Can work risk losing its human traits over which there have been many battles in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? Leo XIII's Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* included among its themes the desire for work which was human, where working hours and jobs took into account age, sex and the need for a holiday from work. The Pope wrote this text to a society where women and children often worked up to 14 hours a day, seven days a week.

We must recognise that the path of the labour movement on the one hand and technological advances on the other, have enabled workers to have more rights and less work.

The so-called Industrial Revolution 4.0. has raised in the hearts of many, the fear of a falling-off in employment and especially the fear that machinery will replace man.

The Centesimus Annus Foundation has repeatedly discussed these issues trying to depict the opportunities and risks linked to current changes in the world of work.

I do not wish to repeat the reflections that have already been made but will simply refer you to the sound work done by the *Chapter* of our local groups. What I would rather try and do in this short time, is analyze three key challenges that need to be tackled so that work continues to be human and inclusive.

Mine are mere *suggestions* that would require more systematic study.

## 1. The role of memory in the time of Google

The first step that to me seems obvious, is not to compare man's memory with that of the "machine." These are two radically different memories. The machine stores information, can connect them, process them at high speed. I am thinking of the significant role played by Google today: when we have a question (such as which road should I take to get to that particular place? Or what was the date of that historical fact? Or who is this person I am now listening to?) we only have to ask Google and immediately it provides us with the fastest route and warns us also about traffic in real time, etc ...

If all this is important and we should be grateful to the people whose study created some systems, nevertheless we must recognise that the machine's memory and man's are substantially different. If my PC memory tells me that "the memory is almost full", then I can make room by starting to delete photos and documents that I no longer need. If these data are not saved elsewhere, then they will be erased forever.

It would be great to be able to erase from our memory those dramatic events that have caused pain or those ugly moments that we never wanted to experience. However, our memory stores everything that happens from the first moments of life. Indeed, specialists in the human psyche tell us that the early years of a child's life - those that he does not remember – are in fact critical to the child's growth. We are marked by everything that we live through. Of course, we cannot live every day having certain traumas before our eyes and therefore the human being applies the process of removal. Removal does not mean elimination but shifting certain things to the unconscious. With grief or mourning we speak of "working through bereavement". In short, the human memory retains everything, but selects memories that help us live well. But, we cannot live without memory.

Now that we have Google, the strategic role of memory is no less important. We need to recover memory, not forget our origins and what constitutes our commitment. Loss of memory can lead to nostalgia for totalitarian regimes that have caused great damage to our societies. Work requires people who know the historical processes and are aware of the historical connections. Man's memory will never be replaced by Google but it needs to be trained and well formed. We have a memory to be transmitted from generation to generation. The role of parents is also to transmit memory. Those who forget the past and think we are at year zero are always arrogant and shortsighted. I'll stop here at this first aspect, but you understand that we could continue.

## **2. The role of culture at the time of the web: to think and understand its meaning**

Culture is connected to memory. Thinking nourishes and sustains human and inclusive labour. We have a great need of people who know how to think. Apart from studying history, I see a crucial need of the other liberal and scientific subjects. How important today is the study of philosophy and mathematics. Behind every machine is a human mind that with the use of logic can create programmes. That is why engineers are nowadays returning to the study of philosophy.

The web world is able to provide much a great deal of information almost instantaneously. However, the problem is the risk of being like someone who is drowning in an ocean of too much news and "navigates" unceasingly from one site to another. Everything is read quickly: news, mail announcements. In this sea of information, it is no longer possible to distinguish what is essential from what is merely illusory. This reduces the ability to think. As Paul VI said and Benedict XVI reiterated: "The world suffers because of a lack of thinking. (Caritas in Veritate 53). In fact, today's working world rather more than yesterday's, favours people who are capable of thinking and interpreting reality. People who are capable of using the language of emotions and recognising the uniqueness of each worker with their own personal history and needs. A worker who feels recognised as a person and not reduced to a mere number will work better because he is sufficiently stimulated.

This task falls to us. I think what we need are managers who look people in the eye, who know how to read their stories and understand the thoughts of those facing them. But without proper cultural training, without any effort to think and without the effort to find solutions within complex situations, there is the risk of having a nation of disaffected workers, with little devotion to the firm they work for and little incentive to learn new ways of working.

I realise that this is not easy, but I think it is crucial nowadays. The time used to get to know who works in the company is never lost!

Thinking is tiring, but only those who know how to struggle capture the meaning of the effort involved and can give added value to society. Educating in the meaning of fatigue remains a timeless pedagogical challenge.

### **3.The role of spirituality at the time of Facebook and Instagram**

To conclude, I believe that in addition to memory and culture, a word should be said about spirituality. What does spirituality have to do with work, someone will ask? In point of fact, as spirituality is related to life and work is essential to life, it seems clear that we cannot ignore the link between spirituality and work. It would be enough to reread the history of the Benedictines to see how the element of labour lived within a decidedly spiritual framework offered a huge contribution to the whole of society. By "spirituality", I mean the ability of all of us to ask ourselves about the

fundamental questions of life: what is the meaning of my life? What are the really important things in my life? What do I think of dying?

Even the question about death should not be avoided as it allows one to get to very essence bottom of things. The great philosophers, scholars and theologians have also expounded ideas on death.

Reflecting on these issues frees us from so many idle thoughts. There are people who live superficially and never face these questions, or rather flee from them. This means one runs the risk of missing the meaning of life with the consequence than rather than living, one simply survives. A person's work changes perspective when the person is faced with certain questions and normally becomes more humane. Perhaps the person begins to show a keener interest in their own worth, for what remains when everything else passes and abandons superfluous things.

I have been close to people who ruined their lives and became obsessive because of something unintentional or casual that happened at work over which however they became pig-headed and stubborn.

Taking care of spirituality leads us to be kinder to people, to be less angry about trivial matters. At times we are a little absurd and ridiculous. Things happen that glimpsed with a thoughtful eye seem absurd, yet they happen. There are workers who deliberately show their colleagues in a bad light to reap some profit. They sow discord but gain little and are unable to look at things through an eschatological perspective that would enable the naked eye to see they are pandering to vanity.

Recent news informs us of parents who attack teachers for a vote given their child which they deemed incorrect. Or violent quarrels over a football game. All of this is a symptom of a loss of direction.

Facebook, Instagram and social media in general do not help. We have a "here and now", where we disclose what most interests us and the boundaries, which are often not mere frills, are omitted. As Pirandello wrote: "it is so, when you think so". Thus, appearance hides reality and the key questions of life can easily be avoided.

### **Memory, culture and spirituality as an aid to human work and inclusive employment**

These three aspects mainly demand personal work but I also believe they impact on society as a whole. Fr. Fabrizio Valletti, a Jesuit, published a book where he talks about his experience in Scampia, one of the most degraded suburbs in Italy and denounces "the absence of a culture of

work." The text compels one to reflect deeply, because it shows clearly that without schooling and with no handing on of the value of work, it becomes difficult to build a future.

Today in certain circles there is almost a kind of discouragement of study with the idea that there is no need to study as it won't help to find a job. Instead, statistical data, if read carefully, show us the exact opposite.

The future will be better if we do not lose the memory of our journey, if we do not get tired with facing the effort of thinking. Not so much abstract thinking but thinking anchored to reality that seeks new ways to make everyone live better. Finally, as already mentioned: Benedictines, Franciscans, Salesians and many other religious orders have given much vitality to work starting from a genuine spiritual quest. I am thinking of the technological innovations of the Benedictines, the invention of non-profit-making charitable institutions by Franciscans or vocational training conceived by Don Bosco. But these examples could be multiplied.

Memory, culture and spirituality protect work and make life more attractive. But only if we do not forget that man is made by God to be happy and only if we are aware of this, will we navigate this earth with watchful eyes to perceive the presence of the Absolute in minute things.