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THEOLOGY AND (DE)HUMANIZING WORK IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY[1]

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A little more than ten years ago the world was transfixed by the Arab Spring. Those who are familiar with the chain of events[2] would remember twenty-six-year-old Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian fruit and vegetable vendor who sparked the revolution by setting himself on fire in front of the provincial government building out of sheer anger and despair. The governor's refusal to see him as he sought to lodge a complaint for the confiscation by police of his weighing scale was the final straw for his self-immolation. Bouazizi's father worked in Libya but died of heart failure when Bouazizi was just three years old, forcing him to work at an early age to support his mother and six siblings.

> Every day, he took his cart to the wholesale market at midnight to buy fruit and vegetables, which he would sell from early the next morning until evening. He would then go home to sleep a few hours, and then repeat that same routine over and over again. … Because he worked illegally, they [police] demanded bribes from him. Either he had to give them money, part with everything he had earned that day, or they would confiscate his scales or his merchandise.[3]

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[2] The term is used to refer to the pro-democracy protests and uprisings that occurred in the Middle East and North Africa starting in 2010 and 2011, which began with the "Jasmine Revolution" in Tunisia triggered by Bouazizi's self-immolation and spread to Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, Syria and, to a lesser extent, other countries in the Middle East and North Africa, such as Algeria, Jordan, and Morocco. The uprisings, which became the symbol of the interconnected struggle for democracy, push to end corruption, and improve citizens' quality of life across the region, saw a number of political leaders resign or overthrown. For a concise discussion of the history, causes, effects, and legacies, including the second Arab Spring in 2019-2020, see The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Arab Spring: pro-democracy protests," *Britannica*, accessed May 16, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/event/Arab-Spring.

[3] The police confiscated his weighing scale because he was allegedly working as a street vendor without a permit. Thessa Lageman, "Remembering Mohamed Bouazizi: the man who

Bouazizi was always occupied with work and paying back his debts until that fateful day in December 2010. It is said that all revolutions seem impossible until they are inevitable. The Arab Spring was lit by an impoverished worker, yoked by unrelenting multiple challenges rooted in systemic injustice. Bouazizi is not alone. He is part of a new social class eking out a living who embody dehumanizing work in the twenty-first century, that is, the precariat.

DEHUMANIZING WORK: THE PRECARIAT AND VULNERABLE WORK TODAY

After the Industrial Revolution gainful employment became the main way of providing for sustenance for the majority of the population.[4] Hence, it came to occupy a central place in the lives of individuals and families. Work became such an essential feature of human life and identity that, in some cultures, family names reflected peoples' occupations, such as Baker, Fisher, Butcher, and Farmer. Imagine if we apply this practice with jobs that we have today. We would have people like Gemma Analyzer (for a data analyst), Christine Algorithmer (for someone who works on algorithms), Pilar Coder (for someone who does coding), Edmund Shopper (for the personal shopper), or Hosffman Influencer. Seriously though, while there are more of these generally positive developments in the transformation of work in the past few decades, these gains generally come on the backs of the precariat, who are "the bargain basement" of globalization.

In *The Making of the English Working Class*, Edward Thompson argues that the impact of industrial capitalism on work and workers involved much more than simply wages, hours, and living conditions. What needs to be stressed, Thompson says, was the catastrophic changes among workers, such as the imposition of a harsh and foreign work discipline, which shattered their customary rounds of social and family life and imbued industrialization with an element of misery that cannot be deduced from workers' material conditions alone.[5] Today, the global exploitative features and tendencies of the market, post-industrial, and digital economy, combined with social narratives that reinforce an unhealthy idealization of labor, have dramatically altered the workplace, as well as workers' jobs and prospects. In *Responsive Labor: A Theology of Work*, David Jensen speaks of "the hell we have made of work."[6] British economist Guy Standing contends that the construction of a global market system has given rise to a global class structure that is quite unlike what prevailed for most of the twentieth century.[7] At the top of this global class structure at 0.001 percent, Standing

sparked the Arab Spring," *Al Jazeera*, December 17, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/12/17/remembering-mohamed-bouazizi-his-death-triggered-the-arab.

[4] It is said that the phenomenon of the male breadwinner could be attributed to the rise of industrial capitalism as the very distinctions that took shape between production and consumption, work and home, or public and private life were themselves largely by-products of the Industrial Revolution. Steven Vallas et al., *The Sociology of Work: Structures and Inequalities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 75.

[5] See Edward Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964).

[6] David Jensen, *Responsive Labor: A Theology of Work* (Louisville: WJK Press, 2006), 30.

[7] Guy Standing, "The Precariat," *Contexts*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (2014): 10-12.

writes, are the plutocrats and oligarchs who stride the world with their billions—global citizens without responsibilities to any nation state. They are followed by a larger elite that possesses millions. Next to them are the old salaried class which has splintered into two groups: first, the salariat, with strong employment security and an array of non-wage forms of remuneration and, second, a small but rapidly growing group of proficians, which consists of workers who are project-oriented, entrepreneurial, and multi-skilled. Traditionally, the next income group has been the proletariat but old norms and notions of this mass working class, such as a lifetime of stable full-time labor in which a range of entitlements called "labor rights" was built up alongside negotiated wages, have been shattered. As the proletariat shrinks with the exponential expansion of what sociologists like Zygmunt Bauman[8] regards as runaway globalization, a new class has emerged—the precariat.

To be sure, work-related systemic and structural injustices are not limited to the precariat.[9] The ongoing debate surrounding work-life balance and gender among medium and high-income workers indicates this. It must be pointed out, too, that not everyone who belongs to the precariat engage in insecure work involuntarily or due to lack of alternatives. Some who work in the gig economy, for example, simply do not want long-term boring jobs and are seeking work and leisure in new ways.

So who, exactly, are the precariat? Precariat is a portmanteau merging precarious with proletariat. It is a neologism for a social class that has three defining characteristics.[10] The first is a distinctive work pattern: a life of unstable and insecure labor in jobs that are typically below their education or qualifications and not counted in official statistics or political rhetoric, which, if not done, can be costly, such as low-skilled service or care work or seasonal farm work.[11] They are in so-called "flexible" labor contracts—temporary jobs, casuals, part-timers, including those facilitated and managed by labor brokers or employment agencies. The precariat often lack an occupational and organizational identity or narrative to give to their lives and have low mobility upwards. They have to retrain and network constantly and apply for new and multiple jobs regularly, not just to be literally employed and/or have sufficient income

[8] See Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

[9] For a sense of how this plays out in higher paid jobs see Carrie Lane, *A Company of One: Insecurity, Independence and the New World of White-Collar Unemployment* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2011).

[10] See Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. Reprint Edition. (London: Bloomsbury, 2016) and Standing, "The Precariat," 10-11. An expanded discussion on contemporary class structure and inequality is offered by Standing in *Work after Globalization* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2009), 102-117. For additional and multi-perspectival approach on the precariat see Matthew Johnson, ed., *The Precariat: Labour, Work and Politics* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016); and Tom Zaniello, *The Cinema of the Precariat: The Exploited, Underemployed, and Temp Workers of the World* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020).

[11] For a critique of the seasonal and/or guest worker program from a Catholic perspective see Patricia Zamudio, "Migrant Abuses and Migrant Worker Programs in the Context of Catholic Teaching," in *On 'Strangers No Longer': Perspectives on the Historic U.S.-Mexican Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Migration*, eds. Todd Scribner and Kevin Appleby (New York: Paulist, 2013), 115.

but also to meet the "mutual obligation" for unemployment benefits.[12] They are exploited outside the workplace as well as in it, and outside paid hours as well as in them. All these create frustration, insecurity, and stress.

The first characteristic is the reality of the "contingent" workforce, a term which refers to a segment of workers who are not working regular full-time jobs, such as those employed part-time (voluntary or involuntary) in temporary jobs or working on a contractual basis. This is particularly true for low-wage workers on hourly jobs in the service sector, who are on non-standard employment arrangements—including both non-standard contracts and non-standard schedules—and are often forced to work on evenings, nights, and/or weekends. Such employment arrangements have been linked to a variety of negative physical and psychological problems such as sleep disorder, stress, and depression. As also shown in the case of Debra Harrell, a McDonald's employee in the U.S. who was arrested in July 2015 for allowing her nine-year-old daughter to play at the park alone while she was at work,[13] such employment arrangements force less-than-ideal parenting choices on the precariat. "Split-shift," a working shift comprising two or more separate periods of duty in a day, is particularly problematic for parents as it puts a strain on family life, especially since formal childcare services are generally offered only during standard working hours. Moreover, with new scheduling technologies:

> Employers [now] use computer programs to track demand for services and then schedule shifts to best match consumer demand. Workers impacted by these technologies not only work outside the hours of 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. but their schedule varies from week to week, often with little notice. This "just in time scheduling" frequently requires employees to call in every morning to see if their services are needed. … The pressure that unpredictable schedules impose on workers and their families is substantial. The worker's time is never her [or his] own. She [he] is always potentially a phone call away from having employee responsibilities that she [he] cannot refuse. … In extreme cases this sort of management practice effectually claims the whole of the employee's life for work.[14]

Numerous "essential workers" during the COVID-19 pandemic personify the first characteristic, especially those in 4D jobs (dirty, difficult, disdained, and dangerous) that are prone to exhaustion, stress, and mental health problems. Seafarers stranded on cargo ships registered under the "flags of convenience" practice, which are regarded as

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[12] See, for example, "Mutual obligation requirements," *Services Australia website*, accessed May 31, 2021, https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/topics/mutual-obligation-requirements/29751.

[13] Conor Friedersdorf, "Working mom arrested for letting her 9-year-old play alone at park," *The Atlantic*, July 15, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/07/arrested-for-letting-a-9-year-old-play-at-the-park-alone/374436/.

[14] Angela Carpenter, "Exploitative Labor, Victimized Families, and the Promise of the Sabbath," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2018): 80.

"floating sweatshops,"[15] sparked a global humanitarian crisis as thousands were forced to endure "overcontract"[16] due to COVID-related port and border closures. Millions of precariat worldwide lost their jobs, or ended up with reduced hours, as lockdowns and social distancing restrictions forced businesses to close or downsize. Those who still have work went to work—voluntarily and involuntarily—in even more precarious situations, as their jobs made them more susceptible to COVID, for example, cleaning staff in hospitals and quarantine facilities. Meatpacking companies in Germany, Belgium, France, Ireland, Spain, Poland, and the Netherlands, whose workers are employed by subcontractors and hail from eastern Europe, Africa, and South America,[17] saw COVID outbreaks. Forty-seven percent of Singapore's foreign workers in low-paid construction and manufacturing jobs got infected.[18] These workers, such as those in Malaysia,[19] were also stigmatized as COVID carriers. Even when their well-being and lives were at stake, they were treated poorly by host countries and employers, who often consider them expendable.

A second defining characteristic of the precariat is that they have a distinctive social income. They must rely almost entirely on their earnings or money wages. Their real wages have stagnated or fallen, and have become more volatile, constraining them to a life on the edge of unsustainable debt and chronic economic uncertainty - one illness, accident or mistake could tip them into a financial abyss. To make matters worse, they generally do not have non-wage benefits that even the proletariat obtained, such as paid holidays, medical leave, the prospect of a sufficient pension and, perhaps, even the idea of a retirement or, at least, a timely retirement as they may have to work until injury, or an utterly exhausted and frail body forcibly stops them from working.

Alabama low-wage worker Kenneth King and his family is a concrete example for the second characteristic. His wife Diane, who was forced to pawn her wedding ring, works as an office janitor—earning US$8 an hour, twenty-three hours a week—after the day care center where she used to work closed during the pandemic. Kenneth,

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[15] Christine Gudorf, "Temporary Migrants, Their Bodies and Families," in *Living (With)Out Borders: Catholic Theological Ethics on the Migrations of Peoples* (New York: Orbis, 2016), 105.

[16] The International Maritime Organization limits a seafarer's stay offshore to no more than 12 months to protect the worker's mental health. Maricar Cinco, "PH seafarers face rough waters," *Philippine Daily Inquirer,* September 25, 2020, https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1339959/ph-seafarers-face-rough-waters. See also Geoff Thompson and Benjamin Sveen, "Border controls leave an army of invisible workers trapped on floating sweatshops," *ABC News*, November 21, 2020, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-11-21/maritime-workers-left-floating-in-a-sea-of-red-tape/12899040.

[17] It is estimated that 80% of Germany's meat production is carried out by migrant workers from eastern Europe. These workers generally suffer from low pay and poor housing. See "Europe's meat industry is a coronavirus hotspot," *DW*, June 26, 2020, https://www.dw.com/en/europes-meat-industry-is-a-coronavirus-hot-spot/a-53961438.

[18] Andreas Illmer, "COVID 19: Singapore migrant workers infections were three times higher," *BBC News,* December 16, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55314862.

[19] Reuters Staff, "Malaysia rounds up migrants to contain coronavirus, UN warns of detention risks," *Reuters*, May 2, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-malaysia-migrants-idUSKBN22E04A.

meanwhile, struggled to escape the stigma of a four-year prison stint for burglary and drug use in his thirties. He juggled three jobs with none paying more than US$10 an hour. He would wake up at 3:00 a.m. to cycle to a bus station for a ride downtown and return home around 11:00 p.m. That amounts to, at the most, four hours of sleep. The King family has US$300 left in their bank account, which is not enough to pay the upcoming rent and other basic expenses. Kenneth describes living in poverty as like treading water. Misfortune comes in waves that break over and over again, giving him little time to surface for air before the next hit.[20]

The third defining characteristic of the precariat is a distinctive relation to the state. They are losing rights taken for granted by full citizens. Instead, they are denizens who inhabit a locale without civil, cultural, political, social, and economic rights, *de facto* and *de jure*. They are supplicants reduced to pleading for help from relatives, friends, or neighbors, e.g., for childcare, and for benefits and access to public services from employers, companies, and bureaucrats who may use the legal system against the precariat. Nike shifted its shoe and apparel production from Oregon to Korea, Indonesia, and Vietnam, and then to China and Bangladesh to take advantage of low wages in these countries.[21] Standing notes that this is happening most cruelly to migrants, but is also the lot of others losing cultural, civil, social, economic, and political rights. They are what Pope Francis, in *Fratelli Tutti*, refers to as the existential foreigner: "those abandoned or ignored by (the) society…citizens with full rights, yet they are treated like foreigners in their own country" (*FT* 97).[22] They feel excluded from communities that would give identity and solidarity; they cannot obtain due process if officials deny them benefits; they cannot practice what they are qualified to do; and they do not see in the political spectrum leaders who represent their interests and needs.

Migrant women domestic workers' experiences exemplify the third characteristic. Some of the most serious forms of exploitation, physical, sexual, and economic abuse, as well as discrimination, are inflicted on these underclass workers. There is Singapore's mandatory pregnancy test every six months, which applies only to foreign domestic workers. In Hong Kong, critics say the requirement to live in the house of the employer is discriminatory, because it only applies to foreign domestic workers, and inhumane as it exposes foreign maids to conditions akin to modern slavery by essentially putting employees on call twenty-four hours a day. A 2017 survey carried out by the Mission for Migrant Workers, a Christian organization, found nearly half of foreign domestic workers did not have their own room, with some forced to sleep in kitchens or balconies in cramped apartments, in cupboards, toilets or in cubbyholes above the refrigerator or oven - whatever or wherever they can fit in. In some extreme

[20] Emily Olson and Jill Colgan, "Why US President Joe Biden's next big battle is raising the federal minimum wage," *ABC*, May 5, 2021, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-05-05/us-minimum-wage-debate-president-joe-biden/100106100.

[21] Clare Duffield, "Multinational corporations and workers' rights," in *Human rights, corporate responsibility: a dialogue*, eds. S. Rees and S. Wright (Sydney: Pluto Press, 200), 191-209.

[22] Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (October 3, 2020), http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html (hereafter cited as *FT*).

cases, they live in what look like dog houses.[23] Migrant women domestic workers in Hong Kong may also be treated like goods by recruitment agencies who offer them on "sale," "discounted rates" or as "replacements." If they lose their job, Hong Kong's Two-Week Rule applies to them (upon contract completion or job termination they only have two weeks to find a new employer or be deported). Legal systems, indeed, treat them as second-class residents, too. Article 24 of Hong Kong's Basic Law stipulates that people who are "ordinarily resident" in the city for at least seven years are entitled to permanent residency. However, the Hong Kong court rejected the application for permanent residency status by domestic worker Evangeline Vallejos, who has lived in Hong Kong for more than twenty-seven years, and Joseph James Gutierrez—the seventeen-year-old son of another foreign domestic worker—who was born and raised in Hong Kong. The decision was based on an immigration ordinance that, no matter how many years they live in Hong Kong, contract workers, such as migrant domestic workers, do not count as "ordinarily residents" during those years.[24] In the Middle East the *khafel/kafala* system—an immigration sponsorship system—prohibits migrant workers from changing employers and requires them to surrender their passports to the sponsor as soon as they enter the country as well as get clearance from the sponsor in order to leave the country, thereby turning employer's homes into prisons.[25] In Lebanon the economic crisis, exacerbated by the COVID pandemic, sparked a distressing phenomenon of predominantly Ethiopian migrant domestic workers being dumped outside their country's consulate in Beirut. Some of the abandoned workers were denied entry by the consular staff so they crammed the sidewalk outside the consulate since they cannot afford local rents or a ticket back home.[26] An undercover investigation by BBC News Arabic, meanwhile, found a black market trade—or auctions—of maids through Instagram and other apps, particularly in Kuwait.[27] Extreme cases of abuse are highlighted in the story of Thelma Gawidan whose ordeal left her with a body weight of sixty-four pounds,[28] and Joanna Demafelis

[23] Beh Leh Yi, "Anger as Hong Kong court keeps 'discriminatory' live-in rule for migrant maids," *Reuters*, September 22, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/hongkong-migrants-rights-idINKCN26D1BO.

[24] Keith Bradsher, "Hong Kong court denies residency to domestics," *New York Times*, March 25, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/26/world/asia/hong-kong-court-denies-foreign-domestic-helpers-right-to-permanent-residency.html.

[25] In Saudi Arabia, Filipino children of these underclass migrant workers who are born and raised in the kingdom itself are not able to access education at government universities, forcing parents to send their university-age children back to the homeland, which is largely unfamiliar to the children themselves. Casiano Mayor, Jr. "For many OFWs sending children home for college is a nightmare," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 15, 2012, http://globalnation.inquirer.net/33279/for-many-ofws-sending-children-home-for-college-is-a-nightmare.

[26] Bahar Makooi, "Abandoned by employers, Ethiopian domestic workers are dumped on Lebanon's streets," *France24*, June 25, 2020, https://www.france24.com/en/20200625-abandoned-by-employers-ethiopian-domestic-workers-are-dumped-on-lebanon-s-streets.

[27] Owen Pinnell and Jess Kelly. "Slave markets found on Instagram and other apps," *BBC News*, October 31, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-50228549.

[28] Nisha Varia, "Dispatches: Domestic worker starved in Singapore," *Human Rights Watch*, December 15, 2015, https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/15/dispatches-domestic-worker-starved-singapore.

whose tortured lifeless body was dumped in a freezer by his employers.[29] Time does not permit me to elaborate but trafficked workers, including children, as well as low-wage workers in the garment and fashion industry worldwide—from those in sweatshops in Bangladesh, Argentina, and Ethiopia to the "outworkers" toiling in their garages, or cramped spaces in homes, in developed countries such as U.K. and Australia[30]—also typify the third characteristic, albeit in varying degrees. The Dhaka garment factory collapse in Bangladesh in 2013, which killed more than a thousand people (mostly women), is emblematic of the anomie that fuel the immiseration of the precariat.

HUMANIZING WORK: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

So how might we make sense of the plight of the precariat? Traditional Christian theologies of work are anchored on the two interrelated themes of vocation and co-creation. These themes underpin some of the influential texts on the theology of work.[31] The experiences of contemporary workers, in general, and the precariat, in particular, show that these two themes are inadequate. What resources, therefore, within the Christian tradition might help shed light toward humanizing contemporary work's dehumanizing elements? Conversely, what are the ways in which the plight of the precariat discloses the gaps and inadequacies within the tradition? What theological concepts might open up spaces toward transformative thinking and practice? I offer a response to these questions that is framed around two themes.

Rest and Embodiment

Since the rise of modern industrial society, work has come to pervade and rule the lives of human beings. Kathi Weeks explains that work dominates human life through two interrelated concepts. The first is *work society* which underpins the expectation for most adults to devote a significant amount of their lives to work, paid and/or unpaid, and the structuring of family and social life around the demands of work. The second concept, *work ethic*, ensures compliance to work society by legitimizing the demand

[29] Chandrika Narayan, "Suspect arrested in death of Filipino maid found in a freezer," *CNN*, February 23, 2018, https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/23/asia/philippines-domestic-worker-killing-arrest/index.html.

[30] See Edwin Renaldi, '"Hidden' garment workers in Australia are vulnerable to exploitation while sewing from home," *ABC*, November 25, 2020, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-11-25/garment-homeworkers-urged-to-speak-up-about-their-working-rights/12900942; Laura Heighton-Ginns and Katie Prescott, "Leicester: a city fighting fast fashion sweatshops," *BBC News*, May 10, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/ business-48226187; and Daniel Schweimler, "No action as Argentina's illegal sweatshops flourish," *Al Jazeera*, May 19, 2015, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2015/5/19/no-action-as-argentinas-illegal-sweatshops-flourish.

[31] See Marie Dominique Chenu, *The theology of work: an exploration*. Trans. L. Soiron (Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son, 1963); John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html; Armand Larive, *After Sunday: A Theology of Work* (New York: Continuum, 2004); and Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001).

that people work long and hard because "working hard" and "hard work" are seen as morally worthy in themselves. You are a "good worker," or "model employee," if you have good work ethic, or act like a "professional,"[32] and there are rewards or punishments for compliance or lack thereof.

The disastrous effects of these social narratives are evident in maladies such as fatigue, burnout, work-life balance issues, culture of work, hustle culture,[33] total work, cult of work, overwork. Shenzhen's "996" culture—which refers to the work schedule of 9am to 9pm six days a week as a result of employers demanding more overtime and more late nights—elicited debate when the phrase "996 working, ICU waiting" became viral in 2019.[34] In Japan and South Korea there is even a term for "death by overwork:" *gwarosa* in Korean and *karoshi* in Japanese.[35] The immense psychological and physical demands of contemporary work are compounded for the precariat through disproportionate exposure to other factors that make work more stressful, insecure or downright dangerous. First, they spend more hours in traffic due to (1) multiple jobs or split shifts; (2) work sector, e.g., transport or food delivery drivers; and (3) because they live in "ghost suburbs" in city fringes, where there may be poor or inadequate social services. Second, they are more exposed to the adverse effects of climate change, such as extreme heat or cold, super typhoons, and monster fires, as many precarious jobs are performed out in the field or open spaces, e.g., agriculture and construction. Third, is the 24/7 economy which requires non-standard work schedule that somewhat negates the title of Armand Larive's book *After Sunday: A Theology of Work*. Fourth, are pandemics, such as COVID, when essential workers cannot catch a break even if they need to as the burdens of life, death, and community needs weighed heavily on their shoulders. Last but not least, omnipresent technology and digital devices (think "Zoom meeting fatigue"), which employers can use for surveillance purposes—for example, the use of GPS tracking device on some street cleaners in China[36]—create a situation whereby, voluntarily or involuntarily, there is no escape, no relief, from work. It is not an exaggeration to say that the precariat's body is battered and broken by work

[32] See Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

[33] Hustle culture—also described as "burnout culture," "workaholism," "toxic productivity"—is about working constantly or devoting as much of one's day as possible working. When one is driven by this "always on" mode one can end up being on "autopilot," unwittingly relinquishing one's personal power, and becoming a slave to internal and external pressures, such as deadlines and other work demands on top of pleasing friends or loved ones.

[34] This work culture is primarily among programmers. Lin Qiqing and Raymond Zhong, '"996' is China's version of the hustle culture. Tech workers are sick of it," *The New York Times*, April 29, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/29/technology/china-996-jack-ma.html.

[35] See, for example, Choe Sang Hun, "Delivery workers in South Korea say they're dying of overwork," *The New York Times*, December 15, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/15/world/delivery-workers-in-south-korea-say-theyre-dying-of-overwork.html and Justin McCurry, "Japanese woman 'dies from overwork' after logging in 159 hours of overtime in a month," *The Guardian*, October 5, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/05/japanese-woman-dies-overwork-159-hours-overtime. The most common medical causes of such deaths in Japan are heart attacks or strokes due to stress and a starvation diet.

[36] Iris Zhao, "Chinese companies using GPS tracking device smartwatches to monitor, alert street cleaners," *ABC*, April 17, 2019, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-17/chinese-companies-using-smartwatches-to-track-workers:-report/10985890.

or, more theologically speaking, "crucified" by work. Cesar Chavez, the legendary leader of the farmworkers' movement in California, described lettuce-picking, which requires "stooping and digging all day," as "brutal work" and "just like being nailed to a cross."[37] In Pope Francis' words, it is "a life worn down by precarious and underpaid work, unsustainable hours, and bad transport."[38] It is a life degraded by "time poverty."[39] As could be seen in the punishing work schedule of Kenneth King and migrant domestic workers, "time poor" workers in precarious jobs do not have enough time for the necessary human activity of sleeping and very little to no time for the equally-vital human activity of rest and recreation. In such cases workers and their bodies are effectively turned into machines and zombies.

The direct and indirect assaults on workers' embodied welfare draw attention to the importance of putting rest and embodiment as core concepts of any theology on work today. Embodied needs mark the human condition. They are critical for the functioning and flourishing of human beings, and are essential to the sustainable "radical sufficiency" for all that Christine Firer-Hinze advocates for.[40] As Jurgen Moltmann contends work is not just a right; work subsists in play.[41] Genitive theologies that (1) promote a proper and deeper appreciation for embodiment and the material dimensions of human and non-human life and (2) critique the ways in which these have been misunderstood, or improperly valued, in mainstream culture and theology are essential in the face of the objectification, denigration, exploitation, and degradation of workers' bodies by the demands of precarious work. Rest and embodiment strike at the heart of key issues that hammer the precariat on multiple fronts, notably the lack of a decent living wage that forces them to take on multiple jobs with insecure conditions, and the lack of non-wage benefits such as paid holiday and/or sick leave, which compel them to work even if they are severely stressed and exhausted, or sick, and are in dire need of rest or medical attention. As indicated in Kipling's "How the Camel Got Its Hump"[42] we should not be forced to fill the unforgiving minute with unremitting toil.

A common approach to highlighting the imperative of rest in relation to work is by connecting it to leisure and imbuing it with a sacred dimension using the Sabbath as heuristic lens.[43] This approach holds that when we stop work on whenever and whatever is our seventh day we acknowledge that our life is not defined only by work

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[37] Frederick Dalton, *The Moral Vision of Cesar Chavez* (New York: Orbis, 2003), 64.

[38] Pope Francis, General Audience, April 8, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150408_udienza-generale.html.

[39] This is a concept that refers to individuals not having enough discretionary time—the time available after engaging in necessary activities like sleep and in the committed activities of paid and unpaid work—to engage in activities that build their social and human capital. See, for example, Claire Wolfteich, "Time Poverty, Women's Labor, and Catholic Social Teaching," *Journal of Moral Theology*, Vol. 2 (2013): 40-59.

[40] Christine Firer-Hinze, *Radical Sufficiency: Work, Livelihood, and a U.S. Economic Ethic* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021).

[41] Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 276-320.

[42] See "How the Camel Got Its Hump," *Lit2Go*, accessed May 14, 2021, https://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/79/just-so-stories/1301/how-the-camel-got-his-hump/.

[43] See, for example, Dražen Glavas, "Are we Christians only on Sunday? What about Monday?" *Nova prisutnost* 15 (2017): 425-448.

or productivity. Walter Brueggemann reckons "Sabbath provides a visible testimony that God is at the center of life—that human production and consumption take place in a world ordered, blessed, and restrained by the God of all creation."[44] Leisure is essential to our very humanity. It is "a condition of the soul" insofar as it is "the disposition of receptive understanding, of contemplative beholding, and immersion—in the real."[45] It is "considering things in a celebrating spirit;"[46] it finds its origin, its inmost ever-central source, in the festival. Thus, in the Bible and the ancient world there is a link between holy day and holiday.[47] This perspective is echoed in connections made between God, the spiritual life, and *fiesta* in contemporary theologies, such as Filipino and Latinx theologies.

There are a couple of ways in which the experiences of the precariat pose a challenge and open up spaces for a genitive embodied theology on work. The first is the tendency within theologies on work to separate, or contrast, leisure with inactivity[48] and conflate, or equate, idleness with indolence or laziness.[49] This is unhelpful for weary and bone-tired low-income workers with multiple jobs and/or multiple shifts for whom rest and leisure may literally and simply be to lie down, or slump on the couch with their feet up, and do nothing. When asked on national television what she wanted for Mother's Day, an Australian woman juggling three jobs blurted "I do not want flowers, I just want some free time to do nothing." For many, for whom even going to Mass on Sunday is a luxury because of work, doing nothing means something, if not everything. It is their re-creation, a time for regaining physical strength and renewing oneself literally.

The plight of the precariat shows that idleness and rest, or leisure, are not separate nor opposing forces but elements of a rhythm that make work and recreation possible. As could be seen in Matthew 12:1-8 (Picking Grain on the Sabbath), and in the healing miracles Jesus performed on the Sabbath (e.g., Mk 3:1-6; Lk 13:10-17; Jn 5:1-18), Jesus himself anchored his understanding of the Sabbath in the needs of people,[50] particularly the sick and the vulnerable. Theological reflections on work, therefore, need to more strongly articulate and communicate the Christian tradition's profound, incarnational attunement to the importance, value, and holiness of life's embodied and material dimensions.

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[44] Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of faith: a theological handbook of Old Testament themes* (Louisville: WJK Press, 2002), 180.

[45] Josef Pieper, *Leisure as the basis of culture*. Trans. Gerald Malsbary (South Bend: Saint Augustine's Press, 1998), 33, 31.

[46] Pieper, *Leisure as the basis of culture*, 32-33.

[47] Holiday is the meaning of non-working days: a time set aside from everyday labor for the possession of the gods; just as temples were places set aside from the usefulness of cultivation. John Hughes, *The End of Work: Theological Critiques of Capitalism* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 167.

[48] Pieper, *Leisure as the basis of culture*, 27. This may also be a result, or legacy, perhaps of interpretations of sloth as one of the seven deadly sins.

[49] Jonathan Malesic, '"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*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2015): 52.

[50] Jesus drove home this point in the biblical passage Mark 2:27 (The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath).

> An incarnational principle springs from Christianity's refusal to divorce embodied, material life from moral and spiritual concerns. This principle insists that economic processes be evaluated in connection to their embodied, material bases and consequences. Incarnational attunement further dictates that economic processes, however complex and expansive (e.g., global chains of production, exchange, and consumption), remain attentive and accountable to the situations and needs of embodied persons, local communities, and particular cultures from whence they spring, on whom they depend, and whose welfare they influence.[51]

Jesus' observance of the Sabbath highlights a second challenge exposed by the plight of the precariat in terms of how people, particularly the elite, use their free time, engage in rest and recreation, and/or observe holidays and holy days. Many migrant domestic workers, for example, dread Chinese New Year, Ramadan, and Christmas time when extraordinary demands are placed on them. Abuses in sweatshops also intensify right before the major shopping holidays in high-income countries. A sweatshop operator in the Philippines, for instance, drugged garment workers to keep them awake to meet their Christmas production quota and deadline for U.S. children's clothing company OshKosh. This raises the question of what labor structures as well as holiday and recreation practices would allow grace to take up space. As Angela Carpenter argues in "Exploitative Labor, Victimized Families, and the Promise of the Sabbath," the Sabbath command is not only to rest but to allow others to rest, too.[52] This means being mindful of, and re-considering, the ways in which our own choices for enjoying holidays, rest, and recreation demand the work of others, more so when such work is carried out in unjust conditions. Leisure and recreation should include everyone, especially the poor.

Such stance entails a shift in the consideration of leisure and free time from being a private good to a social or common good.[53] Do we use leisure and free time in a socially conscious way? Are we mindful of how the ways in which we spend our leisure or free time might limit others' ability to do the same? Taking in Rebecca Todd Peters' Christian ethic of the good life as about reconnecting to people and the earth,[54] do we take into account the ways in which we spend our free time and holidays impact other people, especially the poor, and the environment? The consideration and integration of the "care economy" and "earth economy" in our understanding and practice of rest and leisure can help facilitate sustainable embodied welfare for the precariat, especially for those whose lives and livelihoods are seriously impacted by anthropogenic climate change. On a lighter note, we could learn a thing or two about harmless spending of

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[51] Christine Firer Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors: Women, Work, and the Global Economy* (Mahwah: Paulist, 2015), 39.

[52] Angela Carpenter, "Exploitative Labor, Victimized Families, and the Promise of the Sabbath," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2018): 90.

[53] For an ethical framework and vision of free time for social good see Conor Kelly, *The Fullness of Free Time: A Theological Account of Leisure and Recreation in the Moral Life* (Washington D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2020).

[54] See Chapter 5 of Rebecca Todd Peters, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

time from the memes depicting the hilariously creative ways in which people spent their time during the COVID lockdowns. One created domestic travel (literally) for those missing airport codes: LVG for the living room, DNR for the dining room, BTH for the bathroom, BKY for the backyard. Another took this approach to the next level by putting a color-coded public transport system to connect areas in the home. Some put an ingenious spin on domestic routines by taking out the trash wearing formal wear and costumes since there's nowhere worse to go![55]

Anthropological Poverty, Justice, and Equity

The Catholic tradition's commendable theological corpus on the social justice implications of work is largely represented in its two key documents on work: *Rerum Novarum*[56] and *Laborem Exercens*.[57] Catholic social teaching (CST) asserts that "Humanity is the subject of work"[58] and that any "economistic and materialistic" perversions of work that invert the priority of person over work and labor over capital is unacceptable (*LE* 9, 10). It makes an eloquent argument for the right to employment,[59] the inalienable dignity of workers and just wage,[60] importance of labor unions,[61] among others. CST also has a sharp critique of the global economy, notably in *Evangelii Gaudium* where Pope Francis describes it as "an economy of exclusion and inequality…an economy that kills" (*EG* 53).

The constellation of challenges faced by the precariat reveals what Catholic ethicists point to as Catholic Social Thought's underdeveloped analysis of power, especially in Catholic economic thought.[62] This is reflected in "an insufficiently critical and capacious approach to gender, an anemic analysis of power and social conflict, and a lack of attention to ways in which cultural ideologies and economic practices can

[55] See Escape Writers, "The funniest travel memes to brighten life in lockdown," *Escape*, April 17, 2020, https://www.escape.com.au/news/the-funniest-travel-memes-to-brighten-life-in-lockdown/news-story/290b9debb11528c4b101e7be2913249c. For other examples that are subjected to scholarly treatment see Marta Dynel, "COVID-19 memes going viral: on the multiple multimodal voices behind face masks," *Discourse and Society* Vol. 32, No. 2 (2021): 175-195.

[56] See Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (May 15, 1891), http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html (hereafter cited as *RN*).

[57] John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (September 14, 1981), http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html (hereafter cited as *LE*).

[58] John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* (May 15, 1961), 8, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater.html (hereafter cited as *MM*).

[59] John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 43. http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html.

[60] Pope Francis *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), 190. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (hereafter cited as *EG*).

[61] *LE*, 20; *RN*, 49, 51; and Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (June 29, 2006), 64, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html.

[62] Christine Firer-Hinze, *Radical Sufficiency: Work, Livelihood and a US Economic Ethic* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021), 56

exploit differences, including gender differences, for the benefit of elites."[63] The precariat's experiences show that this shortcoming and unfinished agenda needs to be addressed. The fact that historically marginalized groups and communities are over-represented among the precariat, and the challenges they face on a daily basis are symptoms of disadvantage that has roots in entrenched asymmetrical power relations, drive home this point. Union busting, poverty wages vis-à-vis astronomical CEO salaries and exit/termination payouts, gender-related discrimination and abuses, and other dehumanizing work conditions are, in reality, salt to wound for the precariat—misery piled onto layers of historic chronic disadvantage based on class, gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, among others. There is, in these entrenched inequities that underpin the unrelenting suffering of the precariat something that amounts to what the late Cameroonian Jesuit theologian Engelbert Mveng describes as anthropological poverty. It is poverty that permeates the innermost fabric of peoples' being, a condition by which a people are robbed of their ways of living and existing, and a situation whereby persons are bereft of their dignity and made to live unauthentically.[64] Speaking explicitly on the experience of Africa and the Third World, Mveng writes:

> [T]hey sink into a kind of poverty which no longer concerns only exterior or interior goods or possessions but *strikes at the very being, essence, and dignity of the human person*. It is this poverty that we call anthropological poverty. This is an indigence of being, the legacy of centuries of slavery and colonization…[that] fuels the industries of misery while they forge the chains of our new enslavement.[65]

Anthropological poverty is egregious for it is insidious and renders certain persons, groups and, in some cases, entire communities and nation-states expendable and, thereby, treated as less human. Such poverty is overtly and covertly political. It is a form of violence and systemic sin.[66] It can be glimpsed in UN Secretary General António Guterres' statement in the wake of vaccine hoarding and nationalism as developed countries, businesses, communities, families, and individuals became heavily invested in their own survival against COVID: "[COVID] expose[d] fallacies and falsehoods of the societies we have built: the lie that free markets can deliver health care for all, the fiction that unpaid care work is not work,

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[63] Christine Firer-Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors: Women, Work and the Global Economy* (Mahwah: Paulist, 2015), 98.

[64] Joseph Ogbonnaya, "*Gravissimum Educationis* and African Anthropological Poverty," in *Christianity and Culture Collision*, eds. Cyril Orji and Joseph Ogbonnaya (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2016), 90-113.

[65] Italics added. Engelbert Mveng, "Impoverishment and Liberation: A Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World," in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (New York: Orbis, 1994), 156. For a discussion on how economic globalization, or the last 500 years of modernity and coloniality, relies on human dispensability and disposability see Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

[66] Chris Shanahan, "The Violence of Poverty: Theology and Activism in an 'Age of Austerity,'" *Political Theology* Vol. 20, Issue 3 (2019): 243-261.

the delusion that we live in a post-racist world, the myth that we are all in the same boat."[67] Anthropological poverty is an affliction (*malheur*). Simone Weil describes affliction as not simply a suffering but an uprooting of life, a more or less attenuated equivalent of death attacking life directly or indirectly in all its parts, social, psychological, and physical. It is when, among others, "the innocent are killed, tortured, driven from their country, made destitute or reduced to slavery, imprisoned in camps or cells. … At the very best, he (sic) who is branded by affliction will only keep half his (sic) soul."[68]

This affliction is more than just a stain on humanity; it is a festering wound. The social injustices that created, and continue to inflame, the wound are fed by reductive anthropological visions where one part of humanity lives in opulence while another part sees its own dignity denied, scorned or trampled upon, and its fundamental rights discarded or violated. Addressing anthropological poverty necessitates equity. Equity is different from equality, which people often associate with treating everyone the same regardless of their needs. Equity is about treating people according to their needs as Jesus did by performing healing on the Sabbath; it is about systems, structures, and practices that correct historic, existing or potential imbalances, like what the landowner did in the Parable of the Day Laborers (Mt 20:1-16), which Jean-Pierre Ruiz reframes as "the parable of the good employer."[69] Equity, according to Christian ethicist Rebecca Todd Peters, is the face of human flourishing in the context of globalization.[70] Dismantling stigma created by toxic rhetoric, such as "shithole countries," and social narratives, such as versions of the welfare queen story that blended racism with contempt for the poor,[71] is critical. As British sociologist Imogen Tyler maintains, stigma is "the machinery of inequality."[72] It dehumanizes individuals, entire groups, communities, and nation-states that are already yoked by various forms of suffering as a result of systemic injustice.

In democratic societies legal systems remain the primary recourse for facilitating systemic change. However, as illustrated in the cases and examples previously mentioned, and as immigration law scholar and professor Enid Trucios Haynes and I

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[67] "UN Chief: World 'at the breaking point' with vast inequality," *Al Jazeera*, July 18, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/7/18/un-chief-world-at-the-breaking-point-with-vast-inequality.

[68] Simone Weil, *Waiting on God* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 40.

[69] The other description Ruiz used was "the parable of the Affirmative Action Employer." See Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina 1 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991); and Jose David Rodriguez, "The Parable of the Affirmative Action Employer," *Apuntes* 15, no. 5 (1988): 418-424 as cited in Jean-Pierre Ruiz, "The Bible and People on the Move: Another Look at Matthew's Parable of the Day Laborers," *New Theology Review* Vol. 20 No. 3 (August 2007): 17-18.

[70] It happens, Todd Peters intuits, when social and economic opportunities are widely distributed and great disparities are overcome. Rebecca Todd Peters, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization* (New York: Continuum, 2003).

[71] For a discussion on the deployment of the welfare queen story against the poor in the U.S., especially the African American community, see John Blake, "Biden just dethroned the welfare queen," *CNN*, May 16, 2021, https://edition.cnn.com/2021/05/16/politics/biden-welfare-queen-blake/index.html.

[72] See Imogen Tyler, *Stigma: the machinery of inequality* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

argue in a co-authored essay titled "Labor, Inequality, and Globalization," in the book *Christianity and the Law of Migration*,[73] the law can be used to systematically exclude and exploit vulnerable workers.[74] Problems with legal systems are reflected in how longstanding worker abuses remain less regulated and the enforcement of worker protections is not prioritized. The use of legal systems as a tool for exploitation shows that while law is necessary as a means of pursuing justice, we cannot always and necessarily equate the law with justice. Yes, the law can provide a framework for justice, but it should not be regarded as the same thing as justice. As Jesus showed by saying "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Mt 12: 7) to the Pharisees chastising his hungry disciples for violating Sabbath laws by picking grain, laws can be oppressive and need to be tempered by mercy. The promise of a Christian perspective emphasizing justice informed by mercy and option for the poor and vulnerable can be a means to challenge and reimagine legal regimes that reinforce inequality, exploitation, and exclusion.

Dives in Misericordia claims that without mercy, justice cannot be established: "Society can become ever more human only if we introduce into the many-sided setting of interpersonal and social relationships, not merely justice but also that of 'merciful love.'"[75] Mercy conditions justice in the sense that true mercy is the most profound source of justice and is a mark of the whole of revelation (*DV* 14). This means that the precariat's vulnerability is the very condition for responsiveness, not only the object of concern. Mercy, therefore, is not the opposite of justice, or the complement of justice, but its very condition. This is because, as Jon Sobrino points out in *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross*, mercy is a basic attitude toward the suffering of another, whereby one responds to eradicate that suffering for the sole reason that it exists, and in the conviction that, in this response to the ought-not-to-be of another's suffering, one's own being, without any possibility of subterfuge, hangs in the balance.[76]

CONCLUSION

Humanizing work in the twenty first century requires "uncommon courage."[77] The tension between the ideal and the real is an existential reality that confronts all Christians. It is a dynamic tension that should not paralyze but rather encourage us to be courageously persistent in finding ways to respond to the concrete situations that

[73] See Chapter 16 in Silas Allard et al. *Christianity and the Law of Migration*, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2021). See also Chapter 9 and Chapter 11 in Gemma Tulud Cruz, *Christianity Across Borders: Theology and Contemporary Issues in Global Migration* (Oxford: Routledge, 2021).

[74] For examples in the U.S. context see Annie Lowrey, "Don't Blame Econ 101 for the Plight of Essential Workers," *The Atlantic*, May 13, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/05/why-are-americas-most-essential-workers-so-poorly-treated/611575/.

[75] John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia* (November 30, 1980), 14, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30111980_dives-in-misericordia.html (hereafter cited at *DM*).

[76] Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (New York: Orbis, 1994).

[77] Joan Chittister, *The Time Is Now: A Call to Uncommon Courage* (New York: Convergent Books, 2019).

history presents. "Too easily we Catholics (especially those of us who benefit from the economic status quo) insulate ourselves from, or domesticate, faith's economic demands, keeping radical social principles safely corralled in non-threatening categories of conceptual abstraction or pious platitude."[78] Citing philosopher Sally Scholz, Firer-Hinze points out genuine economic solidarity means moving beyond general "human solidarity" or cheap, sentimental "parasitic solidarity" to engaging in deliberate "political solidarities" by taking stands and risking suffering on behalf of justice for the vulnerable.[79] Consumptive solidarity is not enough. Gloria Albrecht lays the challenge clearly and directly:

> For those of us privileged by race, class, gender, or perhaps all three, it must be a courageous ethics aimed at exposing ourselves to ourselves, seeking out our intimate connections to the disadvantages of others, whether in Detroit or Bangladesh … search[ing] for the silenced voices and erased lives that challenge our innocence and dismantle our protective silos. What is it about white theology and ethics that has enabled white Christian complicity in accepting economic suffering? Truthfulness must be sought in partnerships with those who suffer from the downside of dominant privilege.[80]

Deep conversion comes not so much from a bolt of enlightenment but through a life of engagement. We do not have to go far from home, nor far from our workplaces. This ethic of risk is a testimony to the fact that our desire to improve society and the lives of individuals and communities is not born of some purely intellectual, social, or political position. Instead, it is born from a fundamental conviction of every human being's value, especially those who are chronically disenfranchised and vulnerable. Addressing the plight of historically and persistently poor and exploited workers is an essential task that Christians can no longer ignore, sidestep, or simply trim at the edges. Our responsibilities are not bound by borders but by our common humanity. Ultimately, what is at stake is how we live what it means to be human as a Christian. As Christians and Easter people, we are night watchers and heralds of hope. It is, as described by *Evangelii Gaudium*, about witnessing to the risen Christ by knowing and experiencing the wintry desolation of the human condition, fully convinced that in God's great economy of salvation, hope, not death, is the last word (*EG* 273).

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[78] Firer-Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 100-101.

[79] Sally Scholz, *Political Solidarity* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University) as cited in Christine Firer-Hinze, "Economic Recession, Work, and Solidarity," *Theological Studies* 72 (2011): 168.

[80] Gloria Albrecht, "Forget your right to work: Detroit and the Demise of Workers' Rights," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* Vol. 37, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2017): 132. The second paragraph of an introductory statement on the White House website on Biden's "Build Back Better" agenda, for instance, talks of how "Black and Latino Americans, Native Americans, immigrants, and women have never been welcomed as full participants in the economy." See "Build Back Better," *The White House*, accessed May 16, 2021, https://www.whitehouse.gov/build-back-better/.