



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT IN AUSTRALIA

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE WORKERS
IN THE FACTORY "TRANSFIELD LIMITED"***

Sydney (Australia), 26 November 1986

Dear Friends,

1. I thank you for the way you have endorsed the kind words of welcome addressed to me, and I trust you can see that I am very happy to be here with you. You may know that I, too, was a worker for some years in a quarry and in a factory. These were important and useful years in my life. I am grateful for having had that opportunity to reflect deeply on the meaning and dignity of human work in its relationship to the individual, the family, the nation, and the whole social order. Those years allowed one to share in a specific way in God's creative activity and to experience work in the light of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ.

One of my reasons for coming here is to tell you, and all the workers of Australia, how much I admire faithfulness and dedication to ordinary work. Australia is a great country because working people like yourselves go about their tasks day after day with both cheerfulness and seriousness, earning their bread by the sweat of their brow, producing goods and services for their fellow citizens, and thus gradually bringing to perfection a world that was created by a good and loving God.

2. No doubt many of you have reflected from time to time that Jesus Christ himself, although the Son of God, chose to be an ordinary worker for most of his earthly life, toiling away as a carpenter in Nazareth. There is no shortage of lessons to be learned from the life of Jesus the Worker. It is only right, then, that his Church should bring his message into the working world and to workers. In the past, the Church has consistently opposed ways of thinking which would reduce workers to mere "things" that could be relegated to unemployment and redundancy if the economics of industrial development seemed to demand it. The students among you can consult the writings of

my predecessors – going back to Leo XIII almost a hundred years ago – who treated at length topics such as the rights of workers, ownership, property, working hours, just wages and workers' associations.

Perhaps you have heard that five years ago I, too, wrote an Encyclical Letter on Human Work. My aim was to cast new light on the whole area of human work, an important subject where there are always fresh hopes but also fresh fears and dangers.

3. Among the many new elements that affect human work I wish to mention today the rapid development of technology. There is an aspect of this we can admire: in technology we can see ourselves as more than ever "subduing the earth" and gaining dominion over it. Technology itself is the work of human hands and human minds, and it enables us to produce other beautiful and useful things. This is admirable if the human person is clearly the master. But in large factories or on extended worksites, the number, size and complexity of the machines used can make the worker seem merely a part of the machine, just another cog in the whole process of production.

Many machines these days require operators with specialized training. But after being trained for a highly skilled job, the worker may suddenly discover that a new invention has made his machine obsolete and uneconomical. He may be too old to be trained a second time, or perhaps the firm employing him may go out of business. The result is that whole industries can be dislocated⁷ and individuals and families reduced to poverty, suffering and despair.

Despite the complexity of the problem we cannot give up. All the resources of human inventiveness and good will must be brought to bear, in order to help solve the social problems of our day connected with work. It is important to have clear ideas of the principles and priorities to be followed. In this context I wish to proclaim again my own profound conviction " that human work is a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question, if we try to see the question really from the point of view of man's good".

4. People need to work, not just to earn money for the necessities of life, but also to fulfil their calling to share in the creative activity of God. The human satisfaction that comes from work well done shows how profoundly the Creator has inscribed the law of work in the heart of man.

The goods of the world belong to the whole human family. Normally a person will need to work in order to have a necessary share of these good things. In the early Christian community, Saint Paul insisted that willingness to work was a condition for being able to eat: "If a man will not work, let him not eat". In special situations, society can and must assist those who are in need and cannot work. Yet even in these special circumstances, people still have a desire for personal fulfilment, and this can be achieved only through some form or other of worthwhile human activity.

Thus those who are forced to retire early, as well as those who are still young and strong but

cannot find work, may experience profound discouragement and feel that they are useless. These feelings may lead some to seek consolation in alcohol, drugs and other forms of behaviour harmful to themselves and to society.

We all need to feel that we are truly productive and useful members of our community. It is our right. And since the pace of technological change is likely to increase, it is vital for us to face all the serious problems that affect the well-being of workers.

5. No one has a simple and easy solution to all the problems connected with human work. But I offer for your consideration two basic principles. First, it is always the human person who is the purpose of work. It must be said over and over again that work is for man, not man for work. Man is indeed "the true purpose of the whole process of production". Every consideration of the value of work must begin with man, and every solution proposed to the problems of the social order must recognize the primacy of the human person over things. Secondly, the task of finding solution cannot be entrusted to any single group in society: people cannot look solely to governments as if they alone can End solutions; nor to big business, nor to small enterprises, nor to union officials, nor to individuals in the work force. All individuals and all groups must be concerned with both the problems and their solutions.

6. The Church is profoundly convinced that "the rights of the human person are the key element in the whole of the social moral order". She has long recognized the right of workers to form associations. The purpose of such associations is to promote social justice by defending the vital interests of workers and by contributing to the common good. It is important for the members to play an active and responsible role in these associations. Hence you must make sure that the leaders of your workers' associations really have at heart all the material and human needs of the members. They must also remember that the solution to any dispute must be fair to all sides, must serve the common good of society, and must take into account the economic and social situation of the country. Only if the economy as a whole is healthy will it be possible to make sufficient work available for workers, especially the young.

7. People are realizing more and more clearly that what happens in one part of the world has effects elsewhere. Worldwide problems demand worldwide solutions through the solidarity of all. No country can isolate itself from the common challenge. Union leaders and leaders of employer associations, as well as government agencies, need to work together in order to face the wide range of challenges. Every partner in this common endeavour should act on the conviction that everyone has a basic right to work in order to have a fair share of the world's goods. It must also be stressed that all the partners have a duty to work for solutions that respect the dignity of the individual and the common good of society. Economic problems cannot be separated from the ethical and social aspects of life in society.

8. On the national and local level industrial relations also require a spirit of understanding and

cooperation rather than one of opposition and conflict. In all disputes, a just and peaceful solution will be possible only if all parties are, and remain, ready to talk. Always keep open the lines of communication, and remember that if disputes are not solved quickly, it is above all the weak and need who suffer.

Fortunately for Australia, your most cherished traditions place great value on equality and mutual support, especially in difficult times. The word "mate" has rich and positive connotations in your language. I pray that this tradition of solidarity will always flourish among you and will never be looked upon as old-fashioned.

Australia also has a long and proud tradition of settling industri²¹ disputes and promoting cooperation by its almost unique system of arbitration and conciliation. Over the years this system has helped to defend the right of workers and promote their well-being, while at the same time taking into account the needs and the future of the whole community.

9. I make a special appeal to you workers to be always honest in your collaboration with others. I appeal to you to be especially conscious of all those in need, to give them practical help and to offer them your solidarity. I have been told that you have an organization for promoting development in poorer countries. For this I congratulate you, and I thank you. But you must be active too in helping the needy in your own midst, who include the unemployed, many young people, Aboriginal people, the sick, the disabled, the refugees and the new settlers.

10. I began by making reference to the new question and problems, fears and dangers that surround us because of the development and rapid use of the new technology. This technology is part of the accumulated wealth of the human family and a part of it belongs to you too. It is to be judged by the help it gives you in your work and lives. Always remember that the worker is always more important than both profits and machines.

Dear friends, workers of Australia: it is up to you to make use of the new technology and press on with the task of building a society of justice and fraternal love – a society that extends well beyond the boundaries of Australia. It is God himself who strengthens your arms, enlightens your minds and purifies your hearts for this great work.

Those of you who believe in Jesus Christ and accept his Gospel as the blueprint of your lives know that work has an even deeper meaning when it is seen in its relationship to the Lord's Cross and Resurrection. United with Christ in baptism, you are called to share through your work in Christ's mission of salvation and service to humanity. When offered to God in union with the work of Christ, your own work takes on an even greater value and higher dignity. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who during his earthly life belonged so fully to the "working world", looks for ever with love on human work.

And for all of you in this vast land, whatever may be your religious convictions or the nature of your work, I pray that you may experience the uplifting and exhilarating awareness of working with the Creator in perfecting his design and plan for the world. All of this is part of the dignity of human work, the dignity of man, and the dignity of each and every worker in Australia!

And with the passing of each day may God give you an ever greater awareness of this dignity, and may he fill your lives and your homes with his peace and his joy.

© Copyright 1986 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana