

ALBERTO I. VARGAS  
GONZALO ALONSO-BASTARRECHE  
DAAN VAN SCHALKWIJK

# TRANSCENDENCE AND LOVE FOR A NEW GLOBAL SOCIETY

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Leonardo Polo  
Institute of Philosophy

LEONARDO POLO INSTITUTE OF  
PHILOSOPHY (CHICAGO, IL, USA)

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**DOMESTIC WORK:  
THE FIRST PROFESSION?**

*Rafael Hurtado*

**ABSTRACT:** John Paul II's famous apostolic exhortation "Familiaris Consortio" calls for a better understanding of the relationship between work, family and profession. The dignity of the mother's work in the home and the importance of the father's participation in such work must be recognized as true professional works: as true contributors for building the human world. The promotion of the work that a father and a mother perform at home must be extensive to the whole of society, deserving of respect and dignity of social assets.

## Introduction

The issue of *parenthood and married life* engaged in a very important part of Saint John Paul II/Karol Wojtyła's pastoral and intellectual writings<sup>1</sup>. His thought is very unique in style, revealing two particular aspects of his personal life: one of great relevance would be his difficult childhood, lived under the custody of his widower father and Edmund, his older brother who was killed by a terrible disease when little Karol was twelve years of age. Undoubtedly, *Lolek's* (as they used to call him) character was forged by death and suffering, a fact that contributed enormously to strengthen his moral education. A second aspect would be the importance of his juvenile environment (*Srodowisko*) where Karol, now ordained priest, wielded his ministry – later on as bishop and cardinal– in a time when Poland was being tormented by political changes, wars, and various campaigns in favour of sexual freedom.

Such experiences among politicians, heroic figures of the Catholic Church and mostly youngsters showed the polish priest to have a profound respect to human love. As he commented years later on several occasions, he literally learned to “love human love”. Truly, it was among youngsters where Wojtyła sat the grounds to build up a very broad philosophical and theological rationale, together with a solid academic, religious, and pastoral instruction. It is here when he also acquired the complementary experience that encouraged him to work on a manuscript in the early sixties that would remain in the years to come as one of the most prominent writings in its topic: *Love and Responsibility*, a book inspired by a profound pastoral need among the group of friends and young couples he worked with.

All these experiences, closely related to family life, lived by ordinary people, gave full-body to what we can call an “introductory” stage to what was coming in the late sixties. It is fair to say that Wojtyła's background among students, his experiences as pastor and as lecturer became one of his most recognized abilities. A charisma that earned him prestige and fame, up to a point of being considered an authority on related topics in the areas of morals in married life, sexuality and family. In fact, a few years after *Love and Responsibility's* first edition was published in the 60's, he was called by Pope Paul VI to participate in the Pontifical Commission that was formed to investigate the hidden moral grounds in the new contraception technology. Alongside with his own Polish Commission, Wojtyła's investigations were in agreement with the Roman draft that embodied Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* in 1968, the encyclical that change the history of the modern Church forever.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Hurtado, *La paternidad en el pensamiento de Karol Wojtyła*, Eunsá, Pamplona, 2011.

As a consequence, the controversies around Pope Paul's new encyclical marked Wojtyła's future interest around sexual ethics. He took the dissentient opinions issued by the masses as an authentic challenge for scholarship, a fact that can be confirmed in a series of papers and articles he wrote about of *Humanae Vitae's* doctrine. His intellectual agenda was strongly inspired by the Pontifical document from that moment on, even when the time came for him to be called to take a sit on Saint Peter's Chair. It was at that moment when all these experiences gave birth to the one of the most promising theological works of his time: *The Theology of the Body*, an extended catechesis on human love seen through the prism of the Divine Plan, written and taught by John Paul II himself, from Saint Peter Square, in the renowned Wednesday general audiences.

Nevertheless, in was in 1980 when the Synod of Bishops was assembled in Rome with the strong purpose to discuss the role of the Christian Family against the "changing tide" brought by postmodern culture. As it is well-known today, *Familiaris Consortio* was the result of the Roman Synod, the same as John Paul's intention to conform the *Pontificio Istituto Giovanni Paolo II per il Studio su Matrimonio e Famiglia*, an initiative that was sealed with "blood, toil, tears and sweat" the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 1981, when Alí Agca shoot the Polish Pope in Saint Peter Square, at the heart of Christianity, on the feast of our Lady of Fatima.

### 1. A Renewed "Theology of Work"

Among a broad range of "bright spots and shadows" around marriage and family, *Familiaris Consortio* addresses one particular issue of tremendous importance in the way families live in our days: *their relationship with paid-work outside the home*. Certainly, John Paul II's famous apostolic exhortation can be seen as a pontifical call to all husbands and wives to reflect on a series of topics concerning their vocation to work. As a challenge for scholarship, numbers 23 and 25 call for a renewed "theology of work" that could "shed light upon and study in depth the meaning of work in the Christian life and determine the fundamental bond between work and the family, and therefore the original and irreplaceable meaning of work in the home and in rearing children"<sup>2</sup>.

Furthermore, number 23 –*Women and society*– of *Familiaris Consortio* states that the true advancement of women's dignity will come when the maternal role in the family receives the same recognition as any other profession that prevails outside the home, or any public service that holds prestige and social status. In that sense, society must be structured in such a way that wives and

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<sup>2</sup> John Paul II (1981), *Familiaris Consortio*.

mothers are not required in practice to work outside the home, so their families can live a prosperous and dignified life, even when mothers freely decide to devote themselves entirely to their own families. The Church has the responsibility to remind society that women working full-time in their homes should be recognized, treasured, and respected for the irreplaceable value of their work in the home, and the mentality that honours women more for the work they perform outside the home than for their labour within their families must be overcome. For this to be accomplished, it is necessary that men love and respect women in all their dignity, and society produces the conditions to favour work in the home<sup>3</sup>.

At the same time, number 25 –*Men as Husbands and Fathers*– states that man’s role as a father is naturally fulfilled by loving his wife and his children, above society’s constant promotion of a masculine figure that neglects family life and the education of his children by an excessive dedication to his professional work outside his home. The father is called to ensure the harmony in the home and the development of all its members. He will accomplish this by exercising a generous responsibility for the children that have been conceived under the “heart” of the mother. His role in the education of the children is a shared responsibility with his wife, which is not meant to be a cause of division but to promote unity and stability in the family<sup>4</sup>.

Relevant guidelines can be observed in these two sections (23 and 25) that can assist us in a deeper reflection on what we understand nowadays as “work” and “profession”. Regarding the later, some people believe that the father should work less, so the mother can freely pursue a professional career outside the home (ICWF-Barcelona or CIMAD-Mexico). According to this view, at the end of the day, both fathers and mothers should take care of the household chores and the education of children with a 50-50 distribution, not without external support of other individuals or civil institutions. To my understanding this position needs revision (and alternatives), but my intention here is to provide a simple reflection that could bring new lights to this relevant discussion, drawn from my developing academic research, and most importantly from my personal experience as a husband and father of four children (born in four different cities, in 3 different continents). More specifically I intent to reflect on the following key questions: what is work? What is professional work? Can the work of a father and a mother in their home be considered true “professional work”?

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2. Understanding work and profession

*Work* has traditionally been acknowledged as an activity that implies *effort* (sometimes painful) and usually done with the “bare hands”. This basic definition is expanding today as there are many ways we can work with our “bare hands” without putting in much physical effort. By examining the Latin roots of our modern term “work” we can gain some insight into its true meaning. The main characteristic of work, or *neg-otium*, remains as something different than leisure and contemplation—*otium*<sup>5</sup>. The distinction between *negotium* and *otium* illustrates the difference between: 1) the process of realizing or fulfilling a particular task (work) and 2) the glorious fulfilment of possessing its end (leisure or contemplation). Work, therefore, can be understood as *the progressive realization of something that is not yet done*, and that will eventually be realized so that the worker finds *ecstasy* in the “contemplation” of a work well done, whether interior or exterior, intellectual or physical<sup>6</sup>.

Every time the acting person finds himself in the middle of an activity that “has to be done”, he or she is still on the way to accomplishing the pursued goal or end. On the contrary, whenever we find ourselves in “contemplation”, happy to have completed the job, it means that we have finally reached our pursued goal. Saint Josemaría Escrivá maintained in his teachings that we can even set up a virtuous dialogue between a work to be done and its reward in contemplation up to the point of working without knowing *when one or the other begins, or ends*<sup>7</sup>. This means that we can work well and expect (or predict) the reward that is coming in contemplation and happiness. Why? Because they are both related to the Divine Love who has entrusted us with such specific tasks, goals or objectives that are good for us, and to be in dialogue with this Divine Love is enriched by the effort that we put into our work that is in progress.

So, the notion of work understood as *movement* or *motion* that pursues a concrete goal opens the way to discuss an equally important matter: *its relationship with personal growth*. Work and the development of our personality are deeply intertwined, because a person’s internal-spiritual development can be considered a true work according to what we just explored. What we can call “interior work” is the most fundamental work that a person can perform and, to some extent, the most essential one to be accomplished in life because: 1) it is a

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<sup>5</sup> M. P. Chirinos, *Claves para una antropología del trabajo*, Eunsa, Pamplona, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> M. Santamaría, “Hoc Genus Humanum: Amor Fit Labor, Homo Fit Christus, Mundus Fit Ecclesia”, Trigo (Ed.), *Dar razón de la esperanza. Homenaje al Prof. José Luis Illanes*, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona, 2004, 1011-1030

<sup>7</sup> San Josemaría 2002.

process to be done, and 2) it absolutely depends on *free-will*<sup>8</sup>. “Interior work” (what a person accomplishes within himself), like any other “exterior work” (what a person accomplishes in the external world), is also the outcome of a person’s individual initiative. For that reason, we can also affirm that a true work *is a process that has to be done by someone*: by a man or a woman. It is something that is there, waiting to be done by a person’s free act. It is not “naturally” accomplished, or ruled by the mere forces of nature, where everything functions according to a set of immovable laws. Human work is something that has to be done and is presented to the doer as a chore, an occupation, a task or a job that awaits a definitive free-answer of the possible doer.

Nevertheless, to answer “yes” interiorly, meaning to freely accept a work that has been given, has a *threefold dimension* that can be drawn from a simple analysis of what the basic responsibilities of the human person are: 1) to develop our personality; 2) to give back what has been received; and 3) to be ready to participate in building of the world for other human beings<sup>9</sup>. We can deduce from our first analysis of what work is that these three dimensions have something in common: each one of them can be accomplished through *work*. How can we justify those three dimensions of human existence? The human person comes to life with a certain level of *inconclusiveness*. This is a fact that can be confirmed in every-day experience, not just with human beings but also in the world around us. Freedom makes sense in front of a world that holds a certain degree or level of “plasticity”, an internal inconclusiveness that is also shared by human beings: a “space” that allows us to grow up, to be brought up. We find ourselves immature in front of an equally “immature world”. Human persons are not brought up or educated automatically. It is only through the progressive realization of acts that involve our freedom (virtue) supervised by the people we trust and care for, that the human person becomes truly “human”. To grow in the physical, intellectual and moral realms constitutes our first formal work that takes place mostly inside us at the first stages of our personal history.

At the same time, we are members of a particular species that hold a particular genetic code; living in a concrete era; we are loved and embraced by a particular culture through the goodwill of our parents, our friends and our community. Furthermore, we came into existence through the love of our mother and our father, cared and nurtured by our relatives and friends. We are *children of other children*, and after reaching a certain level of maturity we are entrusted with the task of giving the same gift (life) that has been given to us. To be a person, man or woman, radically implies to be a “son” (as Leonardo Polo would have agreed) and a “potential parent” at the same time. To reach maturity im-

<sup>8</sup> Santamaría, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> *Íbid.*

plies being ready to care for the growth and education of others, not just in the natural sense but also in a spiritual dimension. It is true that we come to life through the love of our parents, but at the same time we are born into the intellectual and spiritual life through our teachers, mentors and priests.

And finally, because we are also called into existence in a world that holds a degree of indefiniteness –as mentioned before–, we enter this world recognizing a certain responsibility to build it up as the world of men and women, as the cradle for the Children of God, like our own existence, by means of our own free-will, that is: *through our work*. To civilize the world, in simple terms, means to participate in building the global “cradle” or “home” for our children. This basic task, realized over the centuries, requires the development of a *Polis*, a society, full of strong relations between individuals and institutions; full of homes and families, with great protagonists in the economy, law, politics, ethics and religion, which can become a place for “civilizing” the future generations<sup>10</sup>. In that sense, being involved in building the world can be considered true work, because it implies the progressive realization of a task or a job that “awaits” to be done. Still, there is something else about working on “building the world” that calls our attention. There is an extra character imprinted in this kind of work that claims a certain level of *mastery* and *commitment*. We are talking about a *profession* (from *profess*, ‘declared publicly’), understood as the way human beings contribute to build and enhance society in a technical way. In that sense, the criteria that distinguish a professional work from non-professional work are: 1) a character of service, and 2) its connection to the social sphere, both of them as direct result of reaching personal and social maturity<sup>11</sup>. A professional work, then, is a service that is publicly declared that benefits society for which the worker receives compensation (due to its import to society), becoming the promise of a “good service” and a “good product”, so common and heard of in our days, by which the individual earns a “compensation”, a “wage”, or a “salary” for a job well done.

We can see there are some professions that can be considered *essential* from a “technical” point of view. That is to say, that without them, no other professional work makes real sense in building the social sphere. If a true professional work is defined by its intrinsic character of service, mastery and commitment to participate in building the world for human beings, we can point out some basic professional works that can be seen as the most essential and of immense social importance: 1) to give birth to children and nurture them; 2) to educate them to return what has been given to them; 3) to encourage them to work in the con-

<sup>10</sup> R. Alvira, *Intento de clasificar la pluralidad de subsistemas sociales, con especial atención al derecho*, Persona y Derecho, 33, 1995, 41-51.

<sup>11</sup> Santamaría, *op. cit.*

struction of the world. A society that holds its culture in high esteem and understands it fully would keep and safeguard the supremacy of these “professional works” that are basically accomplished within the family by mothers and fathers in the home.

### 3. Work of the home. The first profession

Learning to work and to love in the home requires technical skills to be acquired in order to reach perfection. But those skills are not innate: we have to learn them from “experts”. Certainly, parent’s true contribution to society’s wellbeing can be described as upbringing “healthy” children in the physical, psychological and spiritual realms. But still, it wouldn’t be reasonable to say that mothers and fathers are self-sufficient or completely independent in performing this (professional) work. They need help and support from other members of their community in order to fulfil this task the best possible way: they need siblings, extended family, friends, neighbours, schools and Churches that collaborate with them in the education of their children.

Saint Josemaría Escrivá used to say that *children are indeed the first and most important business for parents*. What this phrase suggests is that the upbringing of children (mainly accomplished in the home) can be called *mankind’s ultimate “profession”* because it is precisely through the upbringing of children that society is nurtured and perpetuated. I believe there was a time when perhaps that statement was addressed only to husbands and fathers. Today, however, it seems that it is acquiring a very strong meaning for wives and mothers as well. Mother’s, in particular, need to remember the importance of their involvement in the work of the home. This will be facilitated by the example of father’s who show how much they value the work of their wives in the home by being part of it again. Only then society will begin to recognize it as a true “professional” work. My perception of the matter is that, in order for society to move on from today’s misconception of parenthood, it is essential that husband’s recognize the vital importance of the mother in the home as well as their own. Otherwise, it will not be possible for mothers to accept it either, as *Familiaris consortio* has stated: “This requires that men should truly esteem and love women with total respect for their personal dignity, and that society should create and develop conditions favoring work in the home”<sup>12</sup>.

*The family (the home) is the place where we all come back to*, as Professor Rafael Alvira has stated over the past decades in many occasions<sup>13</sup>, and the vin-

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> R. Alvira, *El lugar al que se vuelve. Reflexiones sobre la familia*, Eunsu, Pamplona, 2000.

dication of the “professional character” of the work that a mother and a father do at home to educate their children –the future generations of any society– is most needed today. Caring for a home and a family is, without a doubt, the most important professional work a person can perform to build the “global cradle” for the Children of God, where women especially have been entrusted with a very special “charisma”, as G. K. Chesterton would have agreed<sup>14</sup>. Certainly the richness of being a human person, man and woman, allows fathers and mothers to be subjects of a broad and plural set of “professions” in the social sphere. But still, the most basic and necessary one is primarily accomplished in the *home*, where the human person can experience, in a pure and natural way, all there is to know that makes life worth living.

Rafael Hurtado, PhD.  
Panamerican University  
rhurtado@up.edu.mx

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<sup>14</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *La mujer y la familia*, Ed. J. R. Ayllón. Styria, Barcelona, 2006.

