

## THE IDEA OF THE COMMON GOOD IN THE LIGHT OF ENCYCLICALS *LABOREM EXERCENS* AND *CENTESIMUS ANNUS*

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**Summary.** John Paul II placed man at the centre of his reflection in the encyclicals *Laborem exercens* and *Centesimus annus* and it was in man, his intelligence and competences, his capacity for creative initiative and entrepreneurship, that the pope saw the mainspring of social wealth and good. The deliberations in both the papal documents are founded on the idea it is not material capital but science, technology, and skills, referred to as new types of property, that are the greatest asset of industrial countries at present. In John Paul II's belief, a correctly interpreted relationship between economy, anthropology, and ethics is the key to overcoming social problems, with various forms of alienation being the gravest. A vision of man as a creative subject whose ability of personal participation is the basic common good of every society plays a special role in giving the right shape to organized social life. The pope argued a personalistic understanding of common good both relieves tensions between private property and the right to the universal destination of goods as defined by the Catholic social philosophy and paves the way for economic success of nations and states.

**Key words:** person, community, personalism, participation, alienation

### INTRODUCTION

In his 1891 encyclical *Rerum novarum*, Leo XIII, countered arguments of revolutionary socialism by stating firmly the right to private property is natural and fundamental to autonomy and development of a human person.<sup>1</sup> Both him and his successors, however, agreed in stressing private property, though fair and necessary, is liable to certain limitations, while the right to possess goods is not absolute. This is affirmed by the words formulated in the Ministerial Constitution on the Church in the contemporary world, *Gaudium et spes*,<sup>2</sup> of the Second Vatican Council: "When using these goods, man should regard these external things not only as his own but also common in the sense that they should bring benefit not only to himself but to others as well" (no. 69). The Constitution says private property is social by its very nature, based as it is on the right to universal destination of goods (GS 69, 70).

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<sup>1</sup> Leo PP. XIII, Litterae encyclicae de conditione opificum *Rerum novarum* (15.05.1891), ASS 23 (1890-1891), p. 641-70, no. 3-12.

<sup>2</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, Constitutio Pastoralis de Ecclesia in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes* (7.12.1965), AAS 58 (1966), p. 1025-115 [henceforth cited as: GS].

John Paul II referred to this classic teaching of the Church, too. This article posits Wojtyła proposed the common good as the key to resolving the tension between private property and the right to the universal destination of goods in his encyclicals *Laborem exercens*<sup>3</sup> and *Centesimus annus*.<sup>4</sup> The pope went on to argue a properly identified common weal is both an effective method of overcoming social disorders and the path leading nations and states to economic and political success.

### 1. SOURCES OF WEALTH OF SOCIETIES: SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The encyclicals *Laborem exercens* and *Centesimus annus* are not treatises on economics or sociology, but documents of the Church's Magisterium. They are John Paul II's interventions into perceived threats to and maladies of both man and humankind. Their interpretation of phenomena worrying the pope is predominantly theological and philosophical. The author placed man at their centre and it was in him, his intelligence and competences, his capacity for economic initiative and entrepreneurship that the pope saw the mainspring of wealth and good of contemporary societies. The pope emphasised land, its fertility and natural resources had been the chief factors in man's wealth in the past, whereas nowadays man can take advantage of his intelligence to integrate wealth of the land and his work, not only physical but also mental, in a variety of ways. Therefore, knowledge, technology and skills are currently the basic capital of humankind, what he calls the new type of property in *Centesimus annus* (no. 32).

Development of science has made possible enormous progress of technology. There are plenty of instances of practical benefits from the nearly every day development of human knowledge. Transformations in industrialised countries since the early 20th century have led to a virtual civilisational breakthrough in the area of both material and mental life. Technology, understood as a set of tools including state-of-the-art electronic and IT technologies, is an undoubted ally of man. Specialised equipment not only facilitates, but also streamlines, accelerates, and multiplies human work. It also substantially improves quality of products (LE 5). These benefits may also be extended from artefacts to man himself. Owing to continually expanded and skilfully employed knowledge, man is able to help himself, as evidenced by achievements in medical sciences [Jaroszyński 2008, 9].

Another major source of wealth of contemporary societies is the capability of timely recognition of others' needs and systems of production factors most conducive to satisfaction of these needs (CA 32). In this connection, John Paul II em-

<sup>3</sup> Ioannes Paulus PP. II, Litterae encyclicae de labore humano, LXXXX expleto anno ab editis Litteris Encyclicis «Rerum Novarum» *Laborem exercens* (14.09.1981), AAS 73 (1981), p. 577–647 [henceforth cited as: LE].

<sup>4</sup> Idem, Litterae encyclicae Venerabilibus in episcopatu Fratribus Clericisque et Religiosis Familiis, Ecclesiae Catholicae Fidelibus universis necnon bonae voluntatis hominibus saeculo ipso Encyclicis ab editis litteris «Rerum novarum» transacto *Centesimus annus* (1.05.1991), AAS 83 (1991), p. 793–867 [henceforth cited as: CA].

phases the role of entrepreneurs. The process of manufacturing goods necessary for correct development of man and communities requires cooperation and commitment of sometimes great numbers of individuals or even entire labour communities. Organisation of the process, its planning in time, and adequate care for its progress show the determining role of creative and appropriately disciplined human labour, with the capacity for initiative and entrepreneurship its essential parts (CA 32). All of this convinces the pope man himself and his cognitive abilities, expressed as appropriate scientific qualifications, participation in solidary work organisation, and the ability to sense and satisfy other people's needs, are the decisive factors in the contemporary enterprise economy (ibid.). This is not machinery but individual people who work and commit their intellect, creativity, and spiritual powers. They show resourcefulness by introducing new technological solutions, recognise their opportunities, avoid unnecessary risk and, through their activities, build networks of new economic, social, and political relations [Losinger 1998, 218].

John Paul II notes essential links between economy, anthropology, and ethics – between the desire for well-being and improvement of living standards and the vision of man as a creative subject capable of initiative and collaboration with others. The pope draws attention to two crucial points of this link. John Paul II stresses, first, labour is an expression of human creativity and, second, man is the subject of each and every work.

“Labour is the good of man – of his humanity – since, through labour, man not only transforms nature and adapts it to his needs, but also realises himself as man and somehow becomes more of a man, too,” John Paul II wrote in *Laborem exercens*. Wojtyła analyses human labour from the perspective of the Christian vision, founded on the words of Genesis: “Replenish the earth, and subdue it” (1:28). Accordingly, labour is both an expression of God's blessing and the Creator's instruction. By means of his work, man begins to cooperate with God, who somehow ordered man to complete His work. Man should read the laws of nature skilfully in order to subdue the earth with technology. Labour is man's proper response to God's gift of the earth, its fertility and resources. Touched by human intelligence, inventiveness, and physical toil, the earth bears the right fruit and becomes friendly to man (CA 31).

John Paul II saw labour as a ‘fundamental dimension of human being’ (LE 4). He wrote to define it, “Labour [...] means any activity of man, regardless of its nature and circumstances, that is, any human activity that can and should be considered labour out of the whole gamut of activities a man is capable of and predisposed to by his nature, by the very virtue of his humanity” (LE, *Introduction*). This definition is theological and moral. Activities “that can and should be considered labour” denote all man's activities that serve the faithful fulfilment of the Creator's order to “subdue the earth.” When discussing the essence of human labour, though, the pope did not mean so much improvement to the external world

or tools man uses to work as improving the subject of labour, that is, man himself [Myczka 1983, 328].

*Laborem exercens* contains the characteristic distinction of labour in its objective and subjective senses (LE 5–6). By means of labour in its former meaning, man employs technology to expand his dominion over the earth, adjusts potentialities inherent in nature to satisfaction of his human needs, and develops culture. It is thus understood as a transitional activity oriented towards an external object. Its effects indicate man uses resources of the natural environment to transform it or supplement its deficiencies [Wierzbicki 2011, 72].

However, even use of specialised technology does not result in an utter objectification of labour, since it also has a far more profound subjective dimension. This stems from the fact labour is invariably performed by a man who is a person. As a subjective being, he is capable of planned and purposeful action, self-determination and self-fulfilment. As a person, man “carries out a variety of activities that are part of the labour process, all of which, regardless of their nature, are to serve realisation of his humanity, fulfilment of a personal vocation, proper to him by virtue of humanity itself” (LE 6). In this sense, only man labours. Machinery and equipment at best function. In *Laborem exercens*, the pope stresses the objective of any labour, even the most subservient, monotonous or compromised according to humdrum value judgements, is not so much an external product, whose value is measured and qualified by market pricing, as man himself who, by means of his labour, becomes a “creator of himself” as a conscious and free subject (ibid.).

Emphasising the personalistic dimension of labour, John Paul II speaks of an “economy of enterprise” and “economy of entrepreneurship” (CA 32). He goes on to object to those economic systems that secure an absolute domination of capital and ownership of production tools and land over human subjectivity and liberty. He deems reducing an enterprise as a unit of production to a mere association of capital with a sole goal of generating profit wrong. No doubt profit is an important indicator of an enterprise’s good performance as it shows production factors have been applied correctly and the corresponding human needs have been satisfied (CA 35). It is not the only or the most important indicator, however. The price of an enterprise’s economic success may happen to be humiliation of its workers’ dignity. John Paul II believes the overarching objective of any units of production is their very existence “as a *community of men* who strive, in various ways, to meet their basic needs and constitute a special group serving society as a whole” (CA 35). An enterprise is above all an association of persons who, in diverse manners and to varying extents of responsibility, make their contributions that are necessary to its operations (CA 43). Therefore, not only economic but also human and moral factors influence its life and development. Arguing for priority of labour over capital, John Paul II wrote in part 15 of the encyclical *Laborem exercens*, memorably entitled “The personalistic argument”: “If man works using an assembly of means of production, he also desires the fruit of his labour to serve himself and others and share, in the process of labour itself, in the

responsibility for and creation of his workplace” (LE 15). In the pope’s belief, all should be done to make man, working as part of various systems of labour organisation, feel he works “for his own sake.” Otherwise losses arise not only across the economic process, but also in man himself (ibid.).

Private property results from a combination of human effort and resources latent in the earth and the natural world. Beginning with the encyclical *Rerum novarum*, the Catholic social teaching has stressed man’s right to possess it. The Church’s position on the issue, however, is radically different not only from the Marxist collectivism but also from the programme of capitalism.

In spite of the Marxist socialism, John Paul II wrote in *Centesimus annus*: “Since man, deprived of anything he could call his own and of the possibility of supporting himself with his own entrepreneurship, becomes dependent on the social machine and those who control it, which makes it considerably more difficult to grasp his dignity as a person and bars him from creating a genuine human community” (CA 13). The pope interprets private property as a pre-requisite of human liberty and integral development as a person. The right to this property is natural and one of fundamental personal rights. A person’s possession serves to emphasise that person’s role and provides space needed for their autonomy. The Second Vatican Council recognises goods held by a man as a type of “extension of personal liberty” (GS 71).

John Paul II finds the position of “rigid capitalism” on this matter inadmissible as well since it defends the exclusive right to ownership of private means of production as a “dogma” of economic life. Man works not only “for others” but also “together with others.” Capital, including science and technology, should be understood as a product of generations’ work. The product continues to be made as if in a great workshop at which the current generation works too (LE 14). The Church, therefore, defending man’s right to private property, points out it is not an “absolute right.” According to *Gaudium et spes*, “private property is social by its very nature, based on the right to the universal destination of goods” (GS 71). Therefore, using goods, man “should regard the external things he holds not as his own but rather as shared, in the sense that they should be beneficial not only to himself but to others as well” (GS 69). By virtue of his labour, man becomes part of the chain of solidarity with others. He participates in labour and good of other people – workers of the same enterprise, labour of suppliers, and consumption of customers. It is for this reason that man cannot keep the fruit of his labour and the resultant private property to himself only. Ownership of means of production is right where it serves useful labour and contributes to development of its subject and good of others. It is no longer justified when it does not serve others, contributes to unfair exploitation or abuse, or undermines solidarity of the world of labour (CA 43). John Paul II claims such ownership “finds no justification and [...] is abusive” (CA 43).

Development of science and its associated technological progress undoubtedly improve living standards in a range of areas. Beside extraordinary opportu-

nities, though, they bring a number of threats. This discussion will continue to present the fundamental threats to man and humanity as indicated by John Paul II. They consist in an imbalance between man's growing technical capabilities and development of his spiritual and moral strength. Their most profound source will also be identified.

## 2. THREATS TO CONTEMPORARY MAN AND THEIR CAUSES

In *Redemptor hominis*, John Paul II's answer to the question "What does the contemporary man fear?" is "The contemporary man seems constantly jeopardised by his own creation, result of the labour of his own hands and also – and increasingly – of his own mind and strivings of his will" (no. 15).<sup>5</sup> The painful experience of humanity, especially in the twentieth century, has demonstrated the fruit of man's multifarious activities, his resourcefulness and creativity, can not only be taken away from both man and their creators but also turned dramatically against man himself, becoming a means to and a tool of his self-destruction (*ibid.*). The mechanism described by the pope is known as alienation. He believes it continues to afflict man as the mainspring of his fears and existential anxieties.

The concept of alienation, known already in ancient and medieval times, was applied by Carl Marx to his theory of economics. The German philosopher stated alienation occurs in the capitalist system and affects mainly workers, whose labour is reduced to the status of commodity and themselves to tools of production [Kołakowski 1989, 116]. In the circumstances, labour is not a source of human development and fulfilment but a crippling means to earning one's keep. Their own products enslave not only poorly paid mercenaries but also owners of means of production, who become merciless tyrants of the workers [Stępień 1990, 62]. L. Kołakowski wrote in his *Main Currents of Marxism*: "man's life in general and the human community become paralysed by alienation; his personal life is paralysed by the same token" [Kołakowski 1989, 117]. The author of *Das Kapital* was convinced liquidation of economic alienation is conditional on liquidation of private ownership of means of production. Hence his theory assumes removal of private property will automatically lead to removal of all and any forms of alienation, whereas the defective economico-social relations can only be changed by revolutionary means, with properly organised proletariat as the key actor [Marks and Engels 1969, 82]. In his critique of Marx's position, A. Szaff tried to prove "various forms of alienation arise in all known forms of the socialist society. This means no automatic mechanism exists that would liquidate alienation as private ownership of means of production is abolished" [Szaff 1965, 153–54]. The very assumptions of Marxism imply, therefore, certain forms of alienation will survive even after the socialist revolution.

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<sup>5</sup> Ioannes Paulus PP. II, Litterae encyclicae ad Venerabiles Fratres in Episcopatu, ad Sacerdotes et Religiosas Familias, ad Ecclesiae filios et filias, necnon ad universos bonae voluntatis homines Pontificali eius Ministerio ineunte *Redemptor hominis* (4.03.1979), AAS 71 (1979), p. 257–324.

John Paul II does not undertake, like Szaff, an internal critique of the Marxist theory of alienation. His reflections on the essence and source of the problem primarily refer to Christian anthropology. He writes in *Centesimus annus*: “Alienation involves a reversal of the relationship between means and ends: by failing to recognise value and greatness in himself and his neighbour, man deprives himself of the possibility of fully experiencing his own humanity and building the relationship of solidarity and community with others [...] Since man becomes truly himself by means of a free gift of himself; the gift is made possible by the human person’s basic capacity for transcendence” (CA 41). In this way, the pope reduces the problem of alienation to personalistic instead of economic categories. The latter deny the personalist understanding of man’s social nature and ignore his ability to transcend himself towards the truth, particularly the truth of himself as man [Wojtyła 2018, 13].

Remarkably, Wojtyła notes the mechanism of alienation, dangerous to man and society, in both the social systems based on Marxism and in capitalist countries. It comes in a variety of shapes in the latter. In consumption, “when man entangles himself in a web of false and superficial satisfaction instead of seeking aid in a genuine and concrete realisation of his personality” (CA 41). As far as man’s labour is concerned, alienation arises where “organisation is exclusively focused on maximising production and profits while ignoring to what degree a worker fulfils himself as man by means of his labour” (ibid.). The error of the so-called “primary” capitalism consists in treatment of man somewhat on a par with an entire assembly of material means of production, not as a subject, or a reasonable and free actor, but as a tool (LE 7).

Not an individual carrying out work or a group of employees but also the whole labour of a country or a global region may be alienated. John Paul II notes such a situation is possible in case of mutual economic exchange between highly and poorly developed countries. The trade frequently suffers from diverse forms of exploitation and injustice. Highly developed countries or the so-called “international organisms” that have considerable means of industrial production at their disposal impose as high prices for their products as possible while setting unfairly low prices for raw materials or intermediate products required for their own manufacturing, which increases income imbalances between both individuals and entire societies. In effect, the gap between rich and poor countries widens (LE 17).

In John Paul II’s opinion, the issue of alienation cannot be reduced to a purely materialist level as it is far deeper and more universal. An alienated state, the pope claims, is incapable of taking advantage of capital inherent in capacities of its citizens. Development and reinforcement of man’s and society’s subjectivity are not fostered by either the totalitarian state relying on violence and terror or the welfare state characteristic of liberal democracies. In Wojtyła’s belief, “by intervening directly and depriving society of responsibility, the welfare state causes waste of human energies, overgrowth of public structures at huge costs, and prevalence of bureaucratic logic rather than the drive to serve its users” (CA 48). De-

spite its best intentions, the welfare state wastes the civic potential by removing responsibility from those offering and those needing aid and by making the latter dependent on the state's benefits. By replacing citizens in their duties, the state deprives them of the possibility of pursuing their own creative initiatives. Added to all that, the depersonalised bureaucratic machinery not only keeps expanding its costly structures but also begins to respond only to man's material needs while ignoring the personal dimension of each interpersonal encounter [Zięba 2013, 117–18].

John Paul II was aware that, to effectively fight social disorders, it was not enough to focus on their consequences alone, but necessary to reach at their causes. He diagnosed the false vision of man himself as the main cause of defects in a range of areas of human life. He saw a dangerous anthropological error as lying at the deepest roots of contemporary culture and “triggering” avalanches of consequent errors.

In *Centesimus annus*, the phrase “anthropological error” refers to the socialist vision of man. When describing that error, John Paul II said: “It considers an individual as a mere part and portion of the social organism, so that good of an individual is utterly subordinated to operation of the socio-economic mechanism; on the other hand, it maintains an individual's good can be realised without regard to their independent choice and regardless of whether they accept responsibility for good or evil in an individual and exclusive manner. Man is thus identified with a set of social relations and the concept disappears of a person as a self-sufficient subject of moral decisions who creates a social order while making these decisions’ (CA 13).

A one-sided (*pars pro toto*) reading of the human nature is the source of the multidimensional anthropological error [Kiereś 2003, 299]. The wrong conception of person results in both deformation of law and objection to private property (CA 13). Man in socialism is treated not as a sovereign and autonomous subject but as part of society. Not being a subject, he is deprived of the right to make independent decisions he could be responsible for [Jaroszyński 2003, 396–97]. In this way, man, “deprived of anything he could *call his own* and of the possibility of supporting himself with his own entrepreneurship, becomes dependent on the social machine and those who control it, which makes it considerably more difficult to grasp his dignity as a person and bars him from creating a genuine human community” (CA 13).

The error of socialism, which bases its core assumptions on materialism, consists in presupposing a reductionist vision of man that ignores both his transcendental dimension and spiritual needs. By attempting a total reduction of man to the economic domain and focusing exclusively on satisfaction of his material needs, however, capitalism commits the same error, John Paul II declares (CA 19). Tending towards increasingly satisfactory living standards is obviously correct in itself. The pope warns, though, manufacturers and producers of goods appealing solely and directly to human instincts and neglecting an integral vision of

man leads to generation of unbridled consumption habits that are not only harmful to his physical and spiritual health but also opposed to his human dignity (CA 36). Drugs and pornography are the most blatant examples, whose presence is a symptom of grave disorders of the social body and of ecology, including human ecology. Driven by an unrestricted desire to possess and use the earth's resources, instead of caring for and developing nature, man tyrannises and devastates it, thereby putting his own life at risk (CA 38).

John Paul II did not limit himself to objections to worrying processes and developments or to identifying sources of social disorders, but pointed to specific ways towards resolving them. He saw the key to a proper organisation of social life in a correctly interpreted common good. He claimed it could be found in the personal constitution of the human existence – a person's ability to participate.

### 3. FROM PARTICIPATION TO COMMON GOOD

The philosophy of man outlined by Karol Wojtyła in his *Osoba i czyn* (*Person and Action*) and articles supplementing and developing it is the theoretical foundation of John Paul II's social thought as expressed in *Laborem exercens* and *Centesimus annus*. The anthropological analyses contained in the former reveal the subjective dimension of the person as an actor and provide grounds for explicating the relations between man and community. In Wojtyła's philosophy, man is a person, that is, a substantial, real subject of being and of rational and free action. He is also a "to-social" being since the "stamp of community" [Wojtyła 1994a, 302] is impressed on the human existence itself. In the final part of *Osoba i czyn*, entitled *Zarys teorii uczestnictwa* (*An Outline of the Theory of Participation*), the Cracow-based philosopher argued a man-person, by virtue of his nature, is capable of multifarious interpersonal and social relations. According to his personalistic interpretation, the most profound part of these relations is situated in man's nature itself, in his personal constitution. A person's capacity for subjective participation is key to explicating that "stamp of community."

The concept of "participation" was given a specific meaning, deeper than a part in joint undertakings itself. Wojtyła wrote: "Participation means a person's property, an internal and homogeneous property, which determines that, while being and acting *together with others*, the person is and acts as a person" [ibid., 310]. By virtue of the capacity for subjective being and action, a person, being and acting together with others, not only does not "lose itself" but, on the contrary, reveals and affirms itself fully as a personal being – a subject capable of creative presence. The author of *Osoba i czyn* believes man, owing to his capacity for participation, joins a range of undertakings together with others and "preserves all that arises from the community of action while – by its very virtue – realising the personalist value of his own action" [ibid., 309]. The phrase "by its very virtue" expresses the proper sense of participation. It indicates this is acting together with others that fully reveals and emphasises the personal value of action. There-

fore, man fulfil himself as a personal being “to the end” only in social relations [Szostek 2014, 62].

Karol Wojtyła realised interpersonal relations were of various nature and intensity, therefore he wrote: “Participation in diverse relations of acting together with others is a form of a person’s reference to others that is appropriate to these relations, and thus varied [...] this means not only a variety of forms of a person’s reference to others, of an individual to society, but also [...] the very foundation of these forms that is inherent in and proper to a person” [Wojtyła 1994a, 311]. He pointed out participation is also the “stamp of a community itself.” By participating, a person and a community are not hostile or indifferent, but complementary to each other [ibid., 316]. In addition, a community spontaneously releases the capacity for participation in a person. As a result, this property not only corresponds to a person’s subjectivity but also opens a person to others.

K. Wojtyła developed his interpretation of the foundations of social life in the context of the tension between individualism and collectivism characteristic for modern philosophy. The former regards an individual’s good, treated as fundamental and superior to good of a community, as the supreme good. As such, it questions the community dimension of the human existence. The latter applies the opposite principle, aiming for a total subordination of an individual to a community and society. Wojtyła deemed both the theories a-personalistic, or even anti-personalistic [ibid., 312–14]. They grow out of a common concept of man as an individual more or less deprived of the capacity for participation. According to individualism, “*others* are for an individual but a source of limitations, or even a pole of multifarious contradictions. A community, if one arises, is intended to secure an individual’s good among *others*” [ibid., 314]. Totalism in turn protects a community from an individual. Either way, man does not fulfil himself in a community. Not fulfilling, he fails to bring his own structures and possibilities to a proper fullness.

The theory of participation as a person’s property is closely associated with the personalistic interpretation of common good.<sup>6</sup> K. Wojtyła does not analyse this issue in all of its complexity. By basic the teleological concept of the common good developed in the framework of classic Aristotelian and Thomist philosophy on the personalistic foundations, he attempts to capture its deepest essence. He believes the proper sense of common good cannot be grasped without regard to its objective aspect, connected to objects of joint action, and the subjective aspect, that is, the moment of action in relation acting persons [Wojtyła 1994a, 320]. Stressing the latter, he states “the common good is not only an object of action performed in a community in its purely objective meaning, but also, and above all else, what conditions and somehow releases participation in persons acting together and thereby forms a subjective community of action. If common good can

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<sup>6</sup> On K. Wojtyła’s understanding of the common good, cf. Wojtyła 2017, 82–88; Idem 2018, 63–68; Idem 2019, 88–96.

be comprehended as an aim, it must have this double meaning, both objective and subjective” [ibid., 321].

In K. Wojtyła’s interpretation, those who belong to a community and who shape it are the fundamental common good of every community. Affirmation of everything in a community that “conditions and somehow releases participation in persons acting together” leads to establishment of a certain human “we” with a subjectivity of its own, whose proper and full sense is at all times to move from “a multisubjectivity to a subjectivity of the many” [Wojtyła 1994b, 411]. The released participation should be understood here as a person’s fully subjective commitment to any type of community. It is expressed as the full richness of personality an individual brings to a community – their ability to take creative initiative, creativity, entrepreneurship, as well as competences and experience. All of these constitute the greatest social capital, or the common good.

John Paul II, calling for the correct understanding of common good, spoke of both the priority of ethics over technology and of human labour over capital. It was in the same spirit that he warned against a variety of restrictions of the right to business initiative, individual property, and economic liberty (CA 24). The conviction man’s greatest wealth and common good is not tangible capital but another man with whom a community is created in the spirit of brotherhood and solidarity is the cornerstone of the pope’s social thought. A human person is fully realised only in a disinterested gift of itself, including the gift of its talents to others. He concluded in *Osoba i czyn*, therefore, participation in the very humanity of others within the framework of reference to “the neighbour” is the most profound level of participation. Any membership of a community assumes others are neighbours. He wrote: “The notion of *the neighbour* makes us not only perceive but also appreciate in man what is independent of membership of any community. It makes us perceive and appreciate something more absolute” [Wojtyła 1994a, 330]. Only based on this system can a community be built whose members will look at each other not as enemies and competitors one must secure against or consumers whose needs must be continually created, but a gift that can make us constantly richer. Any forms of limiting such participation inevitably lead to subsequent forms of alienation.

It can be noted in conclusion man’s creative labour, his abilities and skills, creativity, competences, scientific and engineering qualifications can become that buried talent of the Gospels which, “once set to work,” brought palpable profit. For them to become a common good, their development must be fostered by appropriate institutions, funding, and political instruments. Prudent care for such common good seems to be among the most important and timeless tasks John Paul II set to economists, entrepreneurs, and politicians in the encyclicals *Laborem exercens* and *Centesimus annus*.

## CONCLUSION

Sufficient time has passed since publication of the encyclicals *Laborem exercens* and *Centesimus annus* to ponder and assess “the new things” that pose contemporary challenges in light of the reflections contained there. Although the present economic, political and social context is very different to the times of Wojtyła’s encyclicals, a number of problems he addressed have remained unsolved. I have already noted these documents are not textbooks in economic or social sciences. In his texts, John Paul II draws attention to man and desires to remind those in charge of states: economists, entrepreneurs, central and local politicians, it is not the earth and its resources but man and his personal abilities that are the greatest wealth and the fundamental common good of any community, from local to national and international. Ignoring this basic truth dooms any social efforts to build a better future to failure.

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IDEA DOBRA WSPÓLNEGO W ŚWIETLE ENCYKLIK *LABOREM EXERCENS*  
I *CENTESIMUS ANNUS*

**Streszczenie.** Jan Paweł II w centrum refleksji zawartej w encyklikach *Laborem exercens* i *Centesimus annus* umieścił człowieka i to w nim – w jego inteligencji i kompetencjach, a także w zdolności do twórczej inicjatywy i przedsiębiorczości – widział główne źródło bogactwa i dobrobytu społeczeństw. U podstaw rozważań, zawartych w obydwu papieskich encyklikach, leży myśl, że wspólnie największym kapitałem krajów uprzemysłowionych nie jest kapitał rzeczowy, lecz nauka i technika oraz zdobyte umiejętności, które nazywane są nowym typem własności. Według Jana Pawła II kluczem do przewyższania społecznych problemów, wśród których za najpoważniejszy uznał przybierającą różne formy alienację, jest właściwie odczytany związek pomiędzy ekonomią a antropologią i etyką. Szczególną bowiem rolę, w nadawaniu prawidłowego kształtu zorganizowanemu życiu społecznemu, odgrywa wizja człowieka jako twórczego podmiotu, którego zdolność do osobowego uczestnictwa stanowi podstawowe dobro wspólne każdego społeczeństwa. Papież przekonywał, że personalistycznie rozumiane dobro wspólne zarówno usuwa napięcie pomiędzy własnością prywatną a prawem do powszechnego przeznaczenia dóbr, o którym mówi katolicka nauka społeczna, jak również jest drogą prowadzącą narody i państwa do ekonomiczno-gospodarczego sukcesu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** osoba, społeczność, personalizm, uczestnictwo, alienacja

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