

Work is the Key

**TOWARDS AN
ECONOMY THAT
NEEDS
EVERYONE**

**IRISH
CATHOLIC
BISHOPS'
CONFERENCE**

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CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Part I Addressing an Urgent Problem	7
Part II The Contribution of Church Social Teaching	14
Part III The Application	22
Part IV A Spirituality for the Challenge	34

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INTRODUCTION

A hunger for jobs is the greatest social issue facing Ireland today. High unemployment is causing suffering to an extent that is wholly unacceptable. More can be done to reduce it, and more must be done. Other ills scar our society, but because of the sheer scale of joblessness, and the way it feeds other problems, the main focus in this Pastoral Letter is on unemployment.

Ireland is in danger of accepting an employment rate that was unthinkable before the 1980s. Our failure is moral as well as economic. A grave evil has put down deep roots in our island and most of us are getting on with our lives, accepting what is, in fact, the cause of deep suffering to a huge number of people.

Yes, there are factors outside Irish control working against creation of jobs on this island. We learned more about them as we prepared this Letter. We also learned about what Ireland can do, and have come to regret nothing so much as the growing fatalism about the supposed inevitability of high unemployment.

We are convinced that work for everyone is the most worthwhile undertaking which can unite all of us on this island: man and woman, city and country dweller, unionist and nationalist, clerical and lay person. Only imagination, energy and solidarity will reduce unemployment substantially by the end of the decade.

We have met a deep desire for work in individuals, families and local communities. They are clear in stating what they most want in order to meet their needs: 'a decent job!'. Unemployed people long to earn their income, and to do so in a way that respects their freedom and the dignity of their work. We repeat: high unemployment is not something to be 'lived with'. It ought to be banished from our island.

As bishops, we have no expert advice on how jobs might be created.

Ours is a spiritual role. In this Pastoral Letter, we are trying to raise fundamental questions in an attempt to forge an agreement on the human and ethical issues that are at stake. What is high unemployment saying about the moral quality of our society? How committed are we to ending it? Have deep is our awareness of what can be done? As a people do we see employment as a top priority?

Solving the problem of unemployment is beyond any of us, acting as a single group, institution or person. But neither will it be solved without us. It can be done if sufficient groups, institutions and individuals work together out of a sense of solidarity with the great number of people in Ireland seeking jobs.

Our spiritual role makes us write in particular to those who share our Christian faith and who wish to follow Jesus Christ in our divided society of today. The struggle to make Irish society, north and south, more responsive to the work needs of its people is a potential place for meeting our crucified and risen Lord. In it, we will come face-to-face with the reality of sin and see, at first hand, how it lessens the humanity of both sinner and sinned against. In it, we will learn about the cost of discipleship today and about the meaning of the preferential option for the poor. In it, we will glimpse the presence of the Holy Spirit. Through it, we will become more the Church that is a servant of the Kingdom of God; we will be expressing in a new way the universal love which is the hallmark of the Christian.

Women and men from every level of the economy in both parts of Ireland gave generously of their time and expertise in helping us to prepare this Letter: unemployed people and their spouses; the managers of multinational and Irish companies; trade unionists, economists, financiers. Advisors and friends came forward to help us. A discussion document circulated in advance brought many different, and always valued, responses. We are deeply grateful to everyone who helped us. We hope that all this consultation and dialogue will not end with the publication of this Letter but grow stronger and spread out to include even more people.

PART I

ADDRESSING AN URGENT PROBLEM

If we do not face the high unemployment that is deeply rooted in our society with courage, a large number of people will continue to have a poor quality of life. In fact, the quality of life for everyone will disimprove: our society will become more sharply divided; people's commitment to the common good will weaken further, and emigration will undermine our self-respect as a people and reduce our country's influence in world affairs.

Poverty and Social Division

Many of those who have jobs like to believe that the situation of most unemployed people today is quite tolerable, thanks to reasonably good social security payments, and/or earnings from the black economy. There is a sense that unemployment can be 'lived with'.

The reality is less easy to face. Put starkly, a very substantial number of our people who want a job on this island are denied the opportunity to participate in the mainstream of Irish life. Their options are to emigrate or to risk leading dead-end lives at the mercy of our social welfare systems. It needs to be said again and again that the most damaging cost of unemployment is carried not by the taxpayer, but by the individuals, families and communities who have it thrust upon them. 'No one here is actually starving,' it is often argued. 'Unemployed people can smoke and watch videos!'. The sad fact is that, behind ordinary hall doors, many unemployed people are battling to rescue their health, self-esteem and family lives from extraordinary difficulties.

These difficulties include:

- the sense of rejection that comes from the experience of repeated unsuccessful job-hunting. Self-confidence is worn down by failure

after failure to get a job. A father can feel humiliated by the poor example he is giving his school-going children; young people worry that they have failed their parents; a woman can believe she was never made for the world outside the home.

- a continuous and often impossible battle to make ends meet when the money for the week just does not cover the essentials. Certainly, even poor households in Ireland enjoy things which are way beyond the reach of homes in much of the Third World. But poverty in Ireland is still very real. It makes people's diets dependent on cheap filler-foods. There is no money to replace normal household appliances, decorate the home, buy new clothes, enjoy social outings. Long-term unemployment squeezes variety and security out of living standards.

Yet unemployed people dependent on low incomes window-shop in the same streets, watch the same TV channels and tune in to the same radio stations as the rest of the population. They cannot escape what is presented to them as evidence of success, freedom and popularity by modern advertising.

- the dreariness of an existence lacking opportunities to make choices in life and all chances of planning for a brighter future. Unemployed people struggle with boredom. Their lack of a job means they have little to occupy them during the day, and they may be deterred from trying to create some structure and activity for themselves because of the requirement that as a condition of receiving unemployment payments they must be available for work.

- the desperate plunge into emigration, although a person does not have the qualifications and contacts to make a good start in another country. Too many Irish emigrants to Britain continue to be unemployed, moneyless, vulnerable young people. They join emigrants of earlier decades, some of whom may now be unemployed and growing old in a land not their own. Even better-qualified emigrants may have to settle for a degree of success below what they should have been able to look forward to in their own country.

These examples show what a blight employment can be on the lives of those who have to endure it. When not addressed, high unemployment goes on to become a different type of curse for those who have jobs. National output is below what it might be, tax revenues are reduced, public expenditure is higher. More people experience the temptations of crime and anti-social behaviour; drinking and drug-taking increase, and so does homelessness. A society which tries to 'live with' high unemployment ends up trying to defend itself from many other problems.

In the face of these forces that are working to widen the social divisions on our island, it is important to acknowledge and praise the work of those bodies which are doing so much to keep this reality and its challenge before our conscience. Unemployment, however, risks beating down their best efforts to solve poverty. We believe that the Church's social teaching points out the direction which policies have to take if this totally unacceptable type of poverty is to be overcome: '... work is the key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question' (*On Human Work*, Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II, 1981).

Civic Culture and Public Morality

Unemployment also reflects, and contributes to bringing about, a weak sense of identity with each other as citizens of one society. It results in wanting less responsibility for each other and having little regard for what is public. Some term all this our 'civic culture'. If that is what it is, it is dangerously weak.

A strong civic culture would show itself in the first place in high standards of public morality. Public morality refers to our relationships with one another in society. It includes, therefore, how we approach our tax responsibilities, how we use things that are publicly funded (the social welfare system, business grants, health and education services etc.); how we price our services in commercial transactions; how promptly we pay debts, especially when we have more economic power than those to whom we owe money; how we respect the law; how responsibly we speak

when on the media; how actively we participate in associations, trade unions and other public bodies.

People in authority have a responsibility to lead the way in setting high standards of public morality. It is unfortunate that there is widespread cynicism towards authority throughout Ireland – in politics, business, public administration, the trade unions, and in the churches too. This cynicism, we believe, is a greater danger to the health of our democracies than many care to accept. It is all too easy to succumb to cynicism but the more difficulties there are, the more important it is to restore respect in the democratic process.

That Irish civic culture is so weak makes it much more difficult to mount an effective campaign to create jobs. If, somehow, we could produce the necessary mobilisation of our society to effectively tackle unemployment that, by itself, would cause our civic culture to become stronger. Human work is, essentially, a collaborative and social activity; it is, 'work with others and work for others' (*On the Hundreth Anniversary*, Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II, 1991). Not surprisingly, a society where work is plentiful tends to be a society with a strong social fabric.

Emigration

No one who has ever stood in an Irish airport or ferry terminal after the Christmas holidays would be fooled into thinking that emigration is a healthy sign that our youth are sampling the benefits of European union or the attractions of a wider world. We should hang our heads in shame to describe as 'Ireland's exceptional labour mobility' the pain of family separations, the anger of young people facing into being migrant workers again after a holiday at home; and the gloom that descends on streets and neighbourhoods after the bustle and virality generated by the brief reappearance of the young.

Membership of the European Union has been extremely important for Ireland, giving the Republic a responsibility and power far beyond its

economic weight or population size. Yet there are dangers inherent in the strong centralising forces of the EU's single market. If rewarding jobs cannot be provided on this island, the young and better qualified – those our economies most need – tend to be the first to leave.

While not denying genuine economic progress in recent years, we have to point out that nothing is more fundamental to the 'soundness' of an economy than its ability to provide satisfying jobs for its people, and that the 'economic fundamentals' which are drawn from Catholic social teaching have primarily to do with work, and not with money.

The bishops of the West of Ireland were able to help many people in the west find their voice together and shout 'stop' to further emigration. They speak from a part of Ireland where the population has fallen by 24 per cent since 1926, from rural districts where as many as two out of three young people emigrated in the late 1980s, from areas where, for many, not to emigrate means putting in long hours on small farms to squeeze out a small income that still does not support a decent livelihood for a family. In parts of their dioceses, forests are fast replacing people and their homes. They see clearly the difference between 'labour mobility' and the death-throes of a way of life. Theirs is not a voice against the east and city dwellers in general but a call for the development of that part of Ireland where they live. In every province, including Leinster, there are rural communities whose experience mirrors that of the west because of the departure of so many of their young people.

Rural communities have a right to expect the system to work with them and support them. A genuine listening to their needs will require a willingness to help strengthen local and regional structures, north and south, a development that is needed if responsibility and resources are to be brought closer to the people on whose response everything ultimately depends.

Every year, we encourage observance of Emigrants' Sunday. It is one way we keep alive in our hearts those who have had to leave this country to find a job. It is particularly important that we shoulder our responsibility

ities for those emigrants who find themselves prey to financial or social exploitation. We salute those agencies and individuals who, on all our behalf, strive to support them.

The Need for Determination

As unemployment eats away at the self-respect and self-reliance of so many individuals, families and communities, how can we continue to live so complacently with it? We need to feel genuine indignation if we are to become determined enough to overcome this evil. There can be no watering down of our determination by rationalising the problem or by making the kind of excuses that sound weak and unacceptable to unemployed people themselves.

It is not easy for people without jobs to express their indignation. They have to guard themselves against stress, apathy, ill-health and financial desperation, and against a general lowering of their expectations and fatalism about job prospects. Yet their voices must be heard, for how else will society come to know about the ravages of unemployment? How else will we come to realise that what is said about unemployed people is often an unwitting rationalisation, or the product of selfish indifference or of simple ignorance? Those who support the efforts of unemployed people to find their collective voice are performing a valuable service to the whole of society.

It is also difficult for people with jobs to feel the necessary indignation about unemployment. They too may be struggling financially. The high taxes some of them face make them vulnerable to seductive voices which suggest that it is the income transferred to unemployed people which is to blame, rather than the cost of servicing the national debt or funding of public sector pay increases. In addition, the day-to-day lives of people who are long-term unemployed may be far removed from those who have jobs. This is partly because housing policy has combined with unemployment to produce some urban areas with local unemployment rates of 60 per cent or higher, while areas where the way

of life is based on home and car ownership have unemployment rates in single figures.

People whose own lives and families have not been scarred by unemployment need to listen to their unemployed brothers and sisters. No one can teach us so much about the importance of having a job in Ireland today as those who have been years without one.

How much suffering, how much worry and misery unemployment causes! ... the first and fundamental concern of one and all, rulers, politicians, trade union leaders and owners of enterprises, must be this: to give work to everyone. To expect the problems to be solved as the more or less automatic result of an economic order and development, of whatever kind, where employment appears as a secondary consequence, is not realistic and therefore not admissible. Economic theory and practice should have the courage to consider employment and its modern possibilities as a central element in their aims. (*Address of Pope John Paul II to Workers, Sao Paulo, 3 July 1980*)

PART II

THE CONTRIBUTION OF CHURCH SOCIAL TEACHING

What can we as bishops say about this island's way out of high unemployment? We have no particular expertise in economics or business affairs; identifying what can be done in economic and political terms needs a lot of expert information and careful analysis.

But, in God's providence, we have been entrusted with a message about the grandeur and struggle of what it is to be a human being. We long that this message, which God has shared with all humanity through his son, Jesus, should be a real source of Good News and liberation to all Irish people who are anguished by persistent high unemployment.

What is more, the Church in which we are pastors has developed a body of **social teaching** in response to the needs of industrial society and the modern economic world. With this Letter, we would encourage more Irish people to become familiar with this teaching and to discover for themselves its application to the circumstances of our economy today.

In fact, our contribution to finding the way out of high unemployment largely takes the form of recalling people to simple but important truths: what is economic activity really about? What is its basic **human purpose**? What **ethical framework** does it need and presuppose? Much of the debate about unemployment is limited to exploring what can be done within what are seen as political and economic constraints. Decision-makers have to reckon with the likelihood of electoral defeat, tax evasion, capital flight, industrial unrest and so on, which make some policies simply not feasible. We need to reflect, then, on why there can be widespread resistance to policies that would help create jobs. We want our contribution to help strengthen some fundamental values that are weak at present and whose weakness is making our society less than willing to pay the price necessary to achieve higher levels of employment.

1 The Dignity of the Human Person

The first of these fundamental values is simply this – the unique value of each human being. Giving witness to the dignity of the human person is an essential part of witnessing to the Gospel. Jesus in the Gospels is full of indignation at whatever hems in or limits the potential of people's lives. So too, in our own time, unemployment takes its place alongside other wrongs as a denial of the dignity of the person made in God's image.

This reverence for the human person is the foundation of the Christian's **preferential option for the poor**. A key part of Christian witness in every historical age is seeking out and relating as sisters and brothers to those people who, for whatever reason, have been pushed to the margins of society.

2 The Dignity of Human Work

A second fundamental value which we seek to highlight is the value of human work. In the opening pages of Genesis, God is depicted as a working God who laboured for six days to create the universe and then invited the first human being to become a co-worker at the dawn of creation (Gn 2:19). The human race was given the responsibility and stewardship of creation to be carried out through work.

In his encyclical, *On Human Work*, Pope John Paul II points out that through work, a person not only transforms nature, but also achieves fulfilment as a human being. People must work out of regard for others, especially for their families, but also for the society to which they belong, their country, and the whole human family. 'All this constitutes the moral obligation to work.' (n. 16)

When we reflect on this relationship between the dignity of the human person and work, we must be deeply concerned by the reality of unemployment in Ireland. In the Christian understanding of the human

being, it is **part of being human** to want, and to need, to work. Work is a process of basic self-expression and self-assertion by a person.

It is important to distinguish between 'work' and a 'job'. Not all human work is organised in the form of a job, for example, the commitment of the homemaker, of those caring for infirm or aged relatives, of the student, or of the vowed religious. Nor is every job deserving of the description 'human work', for example, filming pornography, or being a torturer, or manufacturing chemical weapons. However, in our view, the basic moral obligation of honouring every person's need and right to work translates, in the Ireland of today, into the need to create more jobs.

We have heard no convincing argument nor seen any evidence that there is a sound alternative to job creation if we are to respect the vocation to work and, consequently, the human dignity of that huge number of people who are unemployed.

Witness to the dignity of human work is often lived out in quiet ways:

- It is lived when people refuse to go along with low standards of honesty accepted by others in their company or union.
- It is lived when people fight for funding so that work which benefits society, such as the care of social groups in need, or of the environment, can be organised into proper jobs.
- It is lived when people respect and value what others are doing, even though no salary is being paid for it, for example work in the home, the work of study, the work of many members of religious orders.
- It is lived when people fight for better rates of pay and conditions, whether for particular jobs or for special labour market schemes. They are insisting that such 'jobs' measure up to the requirement of human work.

In all such instances, we celebrate the presence of the spirit of Jesus who said: 'My Father goes on working, and so do I' (Jn. 5:17).

The perspective that the Gospel provides on work underlines how challenging it is to prepare young people for adult life. Parents, teachers, instructors and lecturers will understand the importance of helping young people to see that each of them has some contribution to make; that their contribution is needed and will be valued, and that it is worthwhile preparing themselves to make it. What pain and frustration, on the other hand, is caused when young people leave school more aware of what they lack than of what they have, and that Irish society gives a large number of them a choice only between unemployment, dead-end jobs or emigration.

Work and Poverty

Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, *On the Condition of Workers* (1891) stressed the link between work and poverty. This link is still strong today. The Church continues to point out that much poverty arises either because of the lack of work or because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to security for workers and their families. 'A just wage is the concrete means of verifying the justice of the whole socio-economic system.' (*On Human Work*, n. 19)

Church social teaching sees employment, therefore, as the first defence against poverty. When society cannot provide employment, the basic principle that the earth's goods belong to all still applies, resting on the fact that 'God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone.' (*On the Hundredth Anniversary*). It follows that unemployed people are entitled to an income which allows them to live with dignity. However, jobs that pay fairly remain the norm towards which Church social teaching points.

People who are poor not only want a better standard of living, they also want the dignity of earning. Instances where they have to turn down a job offer because the wages are too low, or because the social protection they currently have (for example, public health care or housing benefits) would be withdrawn, are particularly unfortunate. It is to add insult to injury to interpret this need of unemployed people to protect their already low living standards as evidence of 'work shyness', or that they want 'money for nothing'. Disincentives to work arising from interactions between social welfare, taxation and low pay have to be dealt with, but without worsening the situation for unemployed people.

Work and Ownership

Our Church's social teaching is also aware of the link between the ownership of property and the exercise of human work. It holds that ownership carries with it a moral obligation. The nature of that obligation is clear: 'the only legitimate title' to the possession of the means of production 'is that they should serve labour' (*On Human Work*, n. 14). Such ownership 'morally justifies itself in the creation ... of opportunities for work and human growth for all.' (*On the Hundredth Anniversary*, n. 43). Church teaching also understands that in modern industrial society, the 'property' that is socially accountable includes personal know-how, technology and skills.

3 Human Development

These reflections on the dignity of human work and the moral obligations of ownership bring us to the third fundamental value which we seek to highlight here – 'integral human development'. In Church social teaching this is understood as the wider historical process in which every person's capacity for work, and every owner's property, finds its appropriate use. That teaching asks that all men and women should contribute to the 'personal and collective effort to raise up the human condition...' (*On the Social Concern of the Church*, Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II, 1987, n. 31).

We are called, therefore, to assume our individual role in what is a vast undertaking, '...authentic development, a development which is for each and all the transition from less human conditions to whose which are more human.' (*The Development of Peoples*, Encyclical Letter of Pope Paul VI, 1967). For a great many people in Ireland today, 'more human conditions' begin with having a job.

It needs to be said again and again that society is more than an economy. New products and services provided by science and technology can delude people into believing that a better 'standard of living' means simply the ability to buy more. Human development in its wider meaning looks beyond mere material goods and recognises the importance of things that are central to the quality of human life – family and community relationships, social peace, a clean environment, cultural and spiritual attainments, the opportunity to work.

A culture that sees economic growth as the fundamental purpose of society is impoverished. When people choose what to do, and measure the worth of what they do, solely by how much money it brings in, they are degrading their own humanity and contributing to the debasement of human work. In occupation after occupation today, an obsession with money and a narrow concept of efficiency are in danger of diminishing the personal care and inter-personal dimension that should imbue people's work.

Regulating Market Forces

An important way in which the wider concerns of human beings prove stronger than economics is through the willingness of society to regulate market forces responsibly. Uncontrolled and blind market forces favour the powerful and neglect the weak. The free market is an instrument to be respected, but should not have the final say in how society is shaped, be it in either part of Ireland or in the European Union as a whole.

We must be consistent. If Ireland expects assistance from our stronger European partners to allow our economy to compete in the Single

Market, it follows that we should be willing at home to ensure that weaker individuals, social groups and regions are not excluded by market forces from full participation in the life of our country.

The Virtue of Solidarity

Church social teaching also emphasises that proper social and economic development requires the virtue of **solidarity**. Solidarity can be described as a willing and responsible acceptance by a person of the fact of human interdependence in our society and on our planet. Solidarity helps us to see the other person as our neighbour, on a par with ourselves in the banquet of life to which we are all equally invited by God (*On the Social Concern of the Church*, n. 38-39).

Within Ireland, the greatest test of solidarity is, of course, whether the majority who are in employment use their power to prevent unemployment being forced upon so many others.

Employers and workers have to accept that what each takes out of their firms can often affect the ability of the overall economy to expand and create jobs.

Solidarity obliges Irish management and directors to be more open and accountable in the use they make of whatever surplus their companies generate. It asks that their remuneration levels remain a just proportion of what others in the economy receive, and that they actively pursue policies of job creation in Ireland. It obliges Irish workers – and their trade unions – to assume their share of responsibility for the health and expansion of the firms employing them. It asks them to respect the use of the strike weapon, and when making wage demands to bear in mind the income levels of those who, through no fault of their own, cannot participate in the economy.

The virtue of solidarity is clearly absent when management and unions agree together to have a smaller workforce but one that is more highly paid (through, for example, regular and substantial overtime working,

the 'buying' of redundancies, etc.). Indeed, the amount of overtime that is regularly being worked in some parts of the economy is deeply disturbing because it seems to reject any responsibility at all for alleviating unemployment.

PART III

THE APPLICATION

It is easier to agree in principle with the values presented here than on how we are to live by them in practice. We know that the step from values and principles to policy is complex, and that it is open to many different points of view. However, it is part of our religious role, and of our responsibility as pastors, to support those concerned with policy-formation by pointing to what we have come to believe are the type of policies necessary to tackle unemployment in ways consistent with the Christian vision of the human person.

Our comments on the impact of the Christian message on Ireland's economic and social policies are intended as a contribution to the debate on this serious topic that affects so many Irish people. There are those who may disagree with what we have to say, but we ask that we be listened to, and we, in turn, will listen to the contributions of others so that a common vision may eventually unite us. What is happening to unemployed people is far too serious for us all to regard judgements as to what is to be done as purely personal and private affairs.

1 Improving our Economic Stewardship

We believe that the major responsibility for creating more jobs on this island lies in Irish hands. Some argue that what is happening is beyond our control, that other countries have high unemployment too, that technology is advancing relentlessly, that we are a small country on the edge of Europe, that we have a high number of young people entering the workforce each year.

But the factors they point to should not be seen as full-stops or crippling handicaps. It is sobering to compare our performance with that of other small industrialised countries in Europe: their unemployment rates have generally been far lower than ours, yet they face similar challenges from worldwide economic change.

It concerns us that young people are spoken of as a major cause of our high unemployment rather than as an asset in tackling it. Some even believe that we have to 'ride out' high unemployment and emigration until population growth slows down in the next century.

Surely this is evasion on a grand scale of the challenge and opportunity that our young society offers for a different and better economic development. When included in our places of work, the openness and qualifications of young people enable new work practices and technologies to be more rapidly adopted. As consumers they expand the domestic market, as PAYE earners they help to share the tax burden, as citizens they increase the vitality of social and political life. If their energies and skills are considered surplus to our economy's current requirements, then it is the economy that has to change.

Until we have exhausted every avenue for economic development and job creation, we cannot describe our jobless levels as inevitable, nor can we blame 'Brussels', 'technology' or anything else.

It should be clear to everyone how much the economic development of this island is an unfinished task.

- We still do not make sufficient use of the high quality raw materials from Irish farms to expand the food-processing industry and through it provide a substantial boost to the rest of the economy.
- Dramatic growth in exports from factories operated by multinational companies operating in Ireland have had a relatively light impact on the rest of the economy. This is because much of the raw materials they buy are imported, and much of the profits generated by them leave the country.
- Nothing is so home-made in the Republic as its taxation system and yet it is openly acknowledged as a major obstacle to better progress in job creation. Its reform could be a major lever in raising employment levels.

- Irish management still remains weak in international marketing, product innovation and business strategy and in fostering a dynamic partnership with its employees. Yet all depends on the success of Irish companies if our island is to reap the benefits of the Single Market.
 - Domestic savings in the Republic, and its net foreign currency earnings from balances of payments surpluses, are high by international standards, yet these funds are not finding their way into job-creating investment.
 - A single market is still far from being a reality on this island. Each part of Ireland is importing from outside the island goods and services that are available from companies in the other part.
 - While there is a shortage of jobs, there is no shortage of work to be done in many areas of Irish life. The challenge is to give greater priority to these needs by putting resources into meeting them.
- Our purpose in drawing attention to these examples of poor stewardship of our economic resources is to show why we believe it is simply **not true** that everything possible is being done about unemployment.

We can meet the challenge to build a strong economy on this island only if we show more solidarity with each other and greater intelligence in our policies.

The challenge of job creation particularly concerns Government. A clear, long-term programme for job creation, not just for economic growth and fiscal stability, needs to be decided upon and implemented and Irish people should expect the State to play the leading role in this and to secure the wide co-operation necessary.

2 Widening a Consensus on Jobs

We have seen that a lot of what can be done to bring down unemployment lies in our own hands. But we must agree on what has to be done. In a small trading economy such as Ireland's, key actors cannot afford to have widely different views on what has to be done. Our solidarity as a people must find better institutions and procedures if we are to work together to develop the skills and resources of this island in the interests of all.

Being small presents both danger and opportunity. One danger is that elite groups can engage in exchanging favours to cement their privilege and power. Another is that, if industrial disputes arrive at a point of damaging overseas trade, there are no winners, only losers. On the other hand, being small means that even a tiny increase in world market share, achieved through intelligent and agreed strategies, may bring a huge rise in national income.

All sectors need to be involved in reaching consensus on economic policy: public representatives, business people, the unemployed, trade unionists, those in the voluntary sector. Within firms too, economic health ultimately depends on consensus and co-operation between management and workers.

3 Business Enterprise

A specific and vitally important area where consensus is needed is the role of Irish business enterprise. It is clear that the economic development of this island can never be done **for** us. It can only be done **by** us. Neither multinationals nor the European Union can hand us a resilient, modern economy.

There is a welcome emphasis today on the role of home-based industry and on the contribution that Irish people themselves have to make as managers and entrepreneurs. It has never been so necessary that women

and men of talent apply themselves to the challenge of creating internationally trading companies that put down deep roots in the rest of the Irish economy. Our need for people of enterprise is greater than ever in the context of the Single Market, where the rewards to companies for being efficient, and the penalties for not being so, have become very large. The success of Irish trading companies within the Single Market depends on the quality of investment and business decisions made at company level.

Fostering business enterprise need not lead to greater selfishness, greed and inequalities of wealth. A Christian understanding of enterprise views the individual's freedom to take initiatives as important for the common good also. The intelligence and talents of one person can motivate many others. It should give entrepreneurs in Ireland great personal satisfaction to know that their energy and drive enable others to participate in economic life and experience the dignity of earning.

The important respect which should exist between business entrepreneurs and the rest of society is weakened when some of them flaunt wealthy lifestyles that set them apart from their fellow citizens. Business is an occupation, like others, through which the community is served. It is right to expect business leaders to lead lives which are purposeful to themselves and to the nation as a whole.

When a business person behaves immorally, the social damage can be great. Fraud, misappropriation and dishonest gains are never victimless crimes. The ability of the economy to generate jobs – and, as a result, the quality of life of unemployed people – is always at stake.

People in business have to be guided by more than what the law does not forbid. They should value openness, and be willing to have all their decisions and gains reported publicly. They should also value social solidarity, and seek to ensure that the resources they control bring real benefits to society, especially its weakest members.

Ireland cannot afford cynicism towards the role of entrepreneurs in business. The tragedy of dishonest dealing is that it tends to erode public regard for the civic and social role of business in general. Irish people need to be more understanding of those who fail honourably in business, and to encourage them to try again, rather than to judge all business failure harshly. Those who create an enterprise which provides worthwhile jobs for the unemployed are practising a genuine form of patriotism.

4 Empowering Communities and Regions

The people of this island have a deep attachment to place. The large number of local voluntary associations is proof of how willing they are to work to improve their own area. However, they live in two of the most centralised states in western Europe where local and regional autonomy has only very limited recognition.

In our counties and towns many people find it difficult to influence the development of their own area. They feel that their involvement in decision-making is marginal. Our island is passing up a major opportunity to help people acquire a deeper civic responsibility through involvement in local government and regional authorities.

It is also limiting an important potential contribution to economic development and job creation. Local knowledge and commitment are key ingredients in development. The identification of business opportunities that build on local amenities and resources, and the application of the energy and skills that can harness them, need a real partnership between local people and outside agencies.

Fortunately, community and voluntary effort is very much alive. In some deprived urban and rural areas, local organisations have played the role of social entrepreneurs and have created needed services in their own communities: women's centres, child-care facilities, youth services, supports for job-seekers and small businesses. Their efforts need adequate recognition by the State, and where it is clear that no alternative jobs are

available, public funding should be maintained on a long-term basis and on a level which enables proper wages to be paid which reflect the dignity of the work involved.

There are also encouraging examples of how parishes and local communities have helped unemployed people to find their voice. This type of solidarity is an important part of being a Christian community. We urge every parish and Christian community to show creativity and determination in bringing together people from every walk of life to develop a truly inclusive community where the rights of unemployed people are fully respected.

5 Job Creation and the Environment

In Ireland, we might well count our blessings when we compare our environment with those of many, supposedly 'richer' countries. Nowhere, however, is the natural environment a limitless warehouse of cost-free materials. Its riches and resources are finite, a gift from a loving Creator to the whole human family. It is also a heritage handed down to us from previous generations, sometimes greatly enhanced by their work. We should want to hand it on enriched in turn by our work to those who will live on this island after us.

New jobs should not mean that the quality of the environment has to be sacrificed. A concern for the environment can actually generate jobs – in making filters, treatment plants and other equipment, in tending land, trees and water systems, in organic agriculture, waste recycling, urban renewal. Our relatively unspoilt environment on this island has also attracted jobs in the food and tourism industries, in particular. The challenge to those who frame our laws and policies and to all who work in the economy is to ensure that economic growth genuinely benefits the human family and its habitat.

6 Jobs and Europe

Unemployment is a problem throughout the EU but it has been particularly serious in Ireland. Our call for a practical and effective commitment to jobs should be heard strongly within the EU.

This is not simply to look for more money but to contribute to the debate on the type of Europe we would like to see develop. High, long-lasting unemployment damages the EU in the same way as it damages Ireland – that is, it deepens social divisions, weakens people's interest in one another and the welfare of the wider community, and reduces the EU's influence in the wider world. There are difficulties associated with the present movement towards economic and monetary union (EMU) which need to be highlighted, not out of a narrow Irish interest, but out of concern for the future European Union.

The development of the present EU is about much more than economics. It is about the quality of life and type of society we want, and about the contribution the member states can make towards a safer and more just world. The growing European consciousness on this island is encouraging, as is the participation of so many Irish people in building a more united Europe. 'Helping to build Europe' should mean trying to bring the positive human and Christian values of our Irish tradition into dialogue with the values of all other people within the present 'Community'. There is no doubt that we have a lot to learn which will enrich and improve life on this island, but we also have positive things to say which will enrich other societies.

7 Justice while Unemployed

Even if there were to be a dramatic upsurge in jobs, it would not remove the immediate pressing obligations which we have towards those who are currently unemployed **now**. We need to change their experience of being unemployed **now**. They have particular rights which must be recognised and protected.

In the first place, unemployed people are entitled to an income that keeps them and their dependants out of poverty. Of course, high unemployment means a higher social welfare bill which the taxpayer has to bear. But paying this transfer should be a 'non negotiable' in our political life. We are dealing with the income on which people are expected to live and it is unhelpful and one-sided to speak of this as a cost or financial burden which some must bear because of others. Unemployed people, too, are taxpayers. Value-added tax falls heavily on them. On the other hand, employed people get State support from tax reliefs, but these are less visible than the social security paid to the unemployed. Just as it is unthinkable that the government should neglect to pay its employees properly, or to service the national debt, so it should be unthinkable to provide anything other than an adequate income to those who are unable to find jobs.

Secondly, unemployed people are entitled to courteous and respectful arrangements for giving them an income. Those claiming payments are entitled to the same standards and courtesy as, for example, people get from banks or other financial institutions which handle their money.

Thirdly, people who have been unemployed for a long time need specialised assistance to help them find a job again. Long-lasting unemployment is particularly harmful. Individuals can lose confidence, work habits and skills to such a degree that when vacancies occur they are not even considered for them. Better times for the economy pass them by. They need extra supports to escape from this state of 'unemployability'. For the same reasons, everything possible needs to be done to prevent any more of the short-term unemployed from falling into the same trap. It is encouraging to see the recognition that is now being given to the particular problem of long-term unemployment.

Work schemes for the unemployed have caused much dissatisfaction over the years. Participants on these schemes may find themselves falling between the protection of social welfare for the unemployed and the benefits of legal entitlements received by employees. The schemes may provide little or no useful training; there may be no financial incentive

to take part in them. Too often, only the dole awaits participants when the scheme ends. We believe that the experience of those who take part in schemes must be listened to more closely and allowed to influence their design and implementation. These schemes should not mean 'poor jobs for poor people'. Nor should they be seen as the solution to the political need to be 'seen to be doing something about unemployment', but should be for the good of people who are unemployed.

Unemployed men and women have obligations as well as rights. These obligations are as much to themselves as to the rest of society. This may mean improving their skills, perhaps by catching up on education, or taking part in training or personal development courses. It may mean deciding to lead an active rather than a passive life by getting involved in community or voluntary work, or developing a new talent or interest. It might entail a couple deciding to share responsibilities for family and home in new ways.

Unemployed people are also under an obligation to be honest and fair in their dealings with public officials. That is how they expect to be treated themselves. There is abuse of the dole, just as there is of every public programme. Some unemployed people are not reporting earned income, just as there are people in jobs who are not declaring all that they earn. While unemployed people should not be targeted for suspicion, neither should the public programmes which serve them be exempt from the careful monitoring that is due to every use of public money. Reforms, here as elsewhere, should minimise the incentive to abuse. The most important lines of reform are: ensuring that what society gives people as their weekly income is adequate to live on; ensuring that when people do take up a job, they do not find themselves worse off than when on the dole; and ensuring that the 'availability for work' regulation is applied in a humane way that recognises the need of unemployed people to lead interesting and active lives even while out of a job.

Those who work in public training, in placement agencies and in social security offices should see themselves as allies of people searching for employment. They need to make allowances for those who have not

worked in a long time. Symptoms of unemployment, such as low energy and poor time-keeping, should not be dismissed as a sign that some people are not capable of ever working again. Imagination and courage are needed to find new ways in which society can help unemployed people to lead active and fulfilling lives. This needs listening, consultation, and flexibility in the way public support is given.

8 Any Job is Not Better than None

The scale of unemployment and the large numbers of people seeking work do not provide any justification for employers to change good jobs into bad ones. Responsible employers reject 'poverty wages'. They know that poorly paid workers become bad workers and are no foundation for any business to build on. Public authorities also reject poverty wages for they damage health and well-being, reduce skills and flexibility, and diminish the hope of unemployed people of ever being able to better themselves by working. Every job should be a defence against poverty. A Christian society has to concern itself with the question of a minimum wage. There are different ways of achieving an adequate minimum income but the important thing is that no person's honest work should be allowed by society to leave that person below a decent income threshold.

The full-time, permanent job is much less common than it was. People seeking jobs increasingly find that they are offered part-time work, fixed-term contracts, sub-contracts, home-based work or work with an agency. A growing number of people opt to work for themselves. These new arrangements have some advantages. They enable companies to be more flexible in serving market requirements, and they allow people a greater choice as to when and where they work.

There are also worrying aspects, however. These 'atypical' work contracts may widen the gulf inside large organisations between a core of full-time staff on good salaries, to whom the company is committed and in whose training it invests, and a periphery of 'replaceable' workers on temporary

contracts (or not on the company's payroll at all but on that of a subcontractor), for whom the company feels no real responsibility and whom it pays as little as possible. This development of a dual labour market must be carefully guarded against; its long-term dangers to the economy and society are as yet poorly understood.

It is for employers, workers, trade unions and the public authorities together to find ways to humanise the changes sweeping through the world of work today. The task is crucial to the health of our economies and to the cohesion of our societies.

Profitability is not the only indicator of a firm's condition. It is possible for the financial accounts to be in order, yet for the people – who make up the firm's most valuable asset – to be humiliated and their dignity offended ... The purpose of a business firm is not simply to make a profit, but is to be found in its very existence as a community of persons who are in various ways trying to satisfy their basic needs, and who form a particular group at the service of the whole of society. (*On the Hundredth Anniversary*, n.35)

PART IV

A SPIRITUALITY FOR THE CHALLENGE

The whole Church on this island, and every member of it, is called to witness to the dignity of human work and to the virtue of solidarity in the face of unemployment and emigration.

As bishops, our contribution is primarily as teachers of the faith. But the contribution of the whole Church – that is, the People of God, with members in every walk of life – has to go far beyond words. It has to have a real impact on our economic, social and political life. In translating the teaching in this Pastoral Letter into action, we encourage lay people to take the lead.

... it belongs to them, without waiting passively for orders and directives, to take the initiative freely and to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the community in which they live. (*The Development of Peoples*, n. 81)

Reducing unemployment in Ireland is a huge task, but not an impossible one. Every one of us is called to change. Yet we will prefer identifying the changes that others should make rather than those we ourselves (our social group, our profession, our organisation) can contribute. It is easy to point to what others are failing to do; it helps to justify our own failure to act.

The process of change must start in the heart and mind of the individual person. Economic change will not be possible without a 'true conversion of mind, will and heart' (*The Redeemer of Man*, Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II, 1979).

People who open their minds and hearts to Christ find a purpose in life deeper and more lasting than that which any job can give. It is a purpose that enables them to witness to the dignity of human work, no matter what job they hold and even when they are unemployed.

As we listened to others in preparing this Letter, we experienced this reality in the lives of many different people. The Church is present throughout the land, in boardroom and dole queue. Everywhere, men and women who believe in the message of the Gospel are searching for ways to witness to the dignity of human work and the virtue of solidarity.

Through this witness, the Christian learns what it is to die to self and to live to others in the power of the Spirit which Jesus gives.

The Spirituality of Work

There is a real danger in every employment today of choosing what one does, and valuing it, only because of the amount of money it brings in. It takes courage to decide that, in the first place, one's work is about people – relating to and serving other people. Of course, a job has to bring in a fair wage. But the purpose of life is not to earn but to serve; and Christians see their jobs as an important way of serving others. They know that their work has a value in itself because it is **their** work, because it is expressing **their** love for others, and showing their appreciation of creation, a creation of which they are a small part.

The Advance of the Kingdom of God

The witness which Christians must give in the world of work goes far beyond the obligations arising from their own individual work situation. They are called also to take responsibility for playing a part in overcoming injustices in economic structures and institutions; in helping to create the conditions which will enable more people to participate in work, and in fostering the development of a spirit of community and solidarity within individual workplaces.

Challenges like these may make us feel that our efforts are small and have little effect. But the revelation of God's love in Christ comes to transform this sense of helplessness. We recognise that the world is in God's hands

and that, in divine Providence, no work for justice, no act of solidarity, is ever wasted.

Faith deepens the human virtue of solidarity. It presents the unity of the human race as founded on God's love and mercy, and therefore is asking much more of us than that we simply respect each other's rights. We must be ready to give what can never be demanded as a right – forgiveness and love.

Beyond human and natural bonds ... faith sees a new model of the unity of the human race ... This supreme model of unity is a reflection of the intimate life of God, one God in three persons, and is what we Christians mean by the word 'communion'. (*On the Social Concern of the Church*, n. 40)

As Christians we are called to see our efforts to honour the dignity of people's work as contributing to building up the Kingdom of God. The knowledge that God is building the Kingdom of peace through us gives us a sense both of serenity and of urgency. Though we experience resistance, in ourselves and in others, we do not give in. Through our results appear small, we do not give up. Our one shame would be not to play our part.