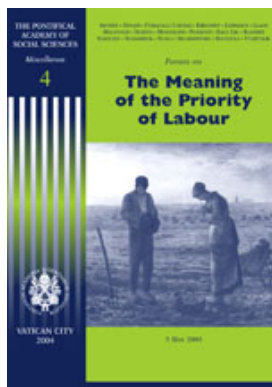




## The Meaning of the Priority of Labour



Forum, 5 May 2003  
*Miscellanea 4, ed. E. Malinvaud*  
Vatican City, 2004  
pp. 112  
ISBN 88-86726-15-5

This is a brief presentation of the exchanges here published. They took place at the seat of the Academy on Monday, 5 May 2003 between three high prelates of the Church (H.Em. Cardinal Karl Lehmann, Bishop of Mainz, Germany. H.E. Msgr. Angelo Scola, Patriarch of Venice, now Cardinal Angelo Scola. H.E. Msgr. Diarmuid Martin, Archbishop of Dublin, Ireland) and the general assembly of academicians. They were meant as a dialogue of the kind required by Article 1 of the statutes of the Academy, which stipulates: 'The Academy, through an appropriate dialogue, offers the Church the elements which she can use in the development of her social doctrine and reflects on the application of that doctrine in contemporary society'.

Since the beginning of their activity, academicians have paid a great deal of attention to the organization of the dialogue with the Church, beyond that which would naturally take place as a result of regular publication of the works of the Academy and the addresses of the Holy Father.

Broad agreement seemed to emerge in favour of the idea of a 'forum' where high figures of the Church could meet with our general assembly in order to discuss some of the conclusions drawn from the academic scientific interchange. It was decided that a forum could be held when the Academy was sufficiently advanced in the study of a subject to have reached well formulated conclusions on matters of interest to the Church.

This first forum will remain an essential part in the programme devoted by the Academy to the broad theme of Work and Employment, which was first discussed in its second plenary session, being introduced on 20 March 1996 by a lecture of academician Father Johannes Schasching, S.J., on Catholic social teaching on labour, work and employment. Two other plenary sessions were devoted to the programme in 1997 and 1999. Following the publication of the contributions in our proceedings (Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences Acta 2, 3, 5), a book was prepared and issued in order to present the content of the programme and some synthetic elements to readers in universities throughout the world (Edmond Malinvaud and Margaret Archer, eds., *Work and Human Fulfillment*, Sapientia Press, Ypsilanti, 2003, 329 pages).

For its best relevance the forum had to focus on a specific subject selected among all those which had been discussed in the programme.

After surveying various other questions raised by the realization of a first forum and considering a number of possible topics, the Council of the Academy proposed to the 2001 general assembly: 'The meaning of the priority of labour over capital in the present world', which was accepted. The following two years turned out to be necessary for a serious planning and preparation of the forum. This publication in English aims at being as faithful as possible to actual oral exchanges. Given such a purpose it has the form of minutes following the course of the meeting. However, it begins with the translation of a full written text that Cardinal Lehmann was so kind to prepare, especially as a background document for his initial presentation of the subject.

Academicians are, and readers will be, very thankful to him for this highly valuable and thorough analysis of the subject examined in the forum. The text of the booklet is divided into the same four parts as applied to the tempo of the forum. First come the three presentations respectively made by Cardinal Lehmann, Cardinal Scola and Archbishop Martin. The second part reproduces the oral contributions of academicians who had announced in advance that they would stand ready to speak on such or such aspect of the subject. The third part is devoted to a second round of contributions made by academicians after the mid-morning break. The

floor was first given to the two colleagues who had written notes circulated in advance to all participants in the forum: Professor Archer, who from 1994 on accepted the heavy responsibility of organizing the activities of the whole programme on Work and Employment, and myself. Then six other academicians also took part in the exchanges. The fourth part reproduces the conclusions of the forum as drawn respectively by Archbishop Martin, Cardinal Scola and Cardinal Lehmann.

It would be too bold of me to pretend to give here even a brief personal summary of these conclusions. But I may be excused to formulate answers that I found to three questions which the prospect of this forum had naturally raised in my mind.

What could be expected from a forum in which high prelates of the Church would meet us academicians? How could that make our other activities more effective? Probably only through a real dialogue will the two parties, the Academy in particular, 'at least come to ask the right questions' (Martin). At the end of a forum we should be in the position of identifying 'a number of topics' on which 'a more focused dialogue' could bear (Scola).

What kind of contributions from the Academy would the Church most value? Those in which we would 'try and apply the perennial principles of the Catholic social teaching in a concrete way to the reality that is there' (Martin). Those in which we would draw the implications of changes in historical conditions and so help in a critical revision of the texts in order to make them more relevant to the present reality, particularly to the reality as lived by the young (Lehmann). The Academy is well placed to adjust the concepts and principles of the social doctrine to the new language now being used in the teaching of social sciences (Lehmann).

In which major respect should the knowledge conveyed by my discipline, economics, be developed to better serve the Magisterium, especially if and when it will want to reformulate the principle of the primacy of labour over capital? Here I note: 'What specifically matters to the Pope ... are the human beings involved' (Lehmann); 'Economics not only requires ethics but also anthropology' (Scola); 'Economy requires anthropology and the social teaching of the Church springs from a particular vision of the human person which marks it out as different from other social visions' (Martin).

Edmond Malinvaud