

IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS ETHICS OF AN INTERRELIGIOUS APPROACH TO SPIRITUALITY OF WORK: *BHAGAVADGITA* AND CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

There is a great deal of interest among business ethicists of today on the topic of spirituality of work (SW). The connection between SW and business ethics has been acknowledged in scholarly literature, but such connection is expressed in different ways (Corner 2008). For some, SW offers solutions to the ethical issues in the workplace brought about by the current unpredictable industrial environment. New technologies, globalization, downsizing and fluctuating economies have caused stress, isolation, diminished view of work and feelings of distrust and alienation among workers (Benefiel et al. 2014). Various studies indicate that recognition of SW in the workplace is positively connected to informed ethical decision making, cooperation and teamwork, company loyalty, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, meaningful work and workers' wellbeing (Ajala 2013; Saks 2011; Rego and Pina 2008; Jurkiewicz and Giacalone 2004; Jackson 1999). Employees who develop deep spirituality are less susceptible to stress and anxiety and exhibit more trusting relationship with their co-workers, tolerance of diversity, and altruistic behavior (Benefiel et al. 2014; Lynn et al. 2010; McGhee and Grant 2008; Marques et al. 2007). Overall, there is a growing consensus that spirituality and corporate profitability are not mutually exclusive.

But despite being a widely discussed topic, Gotsi and Kortezi (2008, p. 575) observe that SW is still "full of obscurity and imprecision for the researcher, the practitioner, the organisational analyst and whoever attempts to systematically approach this relative new inquiry field." Many scholars have addressed the issue of SW from a secular perspective. They claim that spirituality is and should be distinct from formalized religions. "While religions often direct people outward toward social rites and rituals, spirituality directs one inward toward the wealth of knowledge, senses, aspirations, and feelings one harbors within." (Marques et al. 2007, p. 10) Religion is a personal matter that has no place in the business world. It can encourage discrimination, bigotry and proselytizing that could be divisive in the workplace and disruptive to the organization and its clients. On the other hand, spirituality is a unifying force, it is non-prescriptive, "non-dogmatic, non-exclusive, non-patriarchal, and gender-neutral approach to connect with this one source of all existence" that is open to believers and non-believers alike (Marques et al. 2007, p. 10).

While spirituality can exist without religion, religion cannot be separated from spirituality. "Beliefs and experiences that are part of traditional religiousness (e.g. prayer, going to church etc.) are also spiritual if they are part of an individual's search for the sacred." (McGhee and Grant 2008, p. 62) For Hicks (2003, 2002), religion is an integral part of SW. Secular SW aims to be generic by appealing to the least common denominator of employee's values and beliefs obtained through empirical measurement. The result is that spirituality is defined in terms of inner wholeness, a sense of supernatural or transcendence, concern for ultimate reality, interconnectedness, serenity or relaxation, higher meaning, personal values, cosmic oneness, or deep trust – but oftentimes these terms suffer vagueness or lack of substance when separated from religion (Benefiel et al. 2014; Lynn et al. 2009; Gotsis and Kortezi 2008; Biberman and Whitty

2007; Hicks 2003; Ashmos and Duchon 2000). Spirituality becomes undefined, or even ill-defined (Brooke and Parker 2009). Further, the secular approach fails to consider numerous researches that demonstrate the unique contribution of religion to employee motivation as well as to business and organizational ethics. Theoretical and empirical studies indicate that religion is an important element in ethical behavior and decision making in the workplace (Mele 2015; Hejase et al. 2013; Emerson and Mckinney 2010). Benefits of religion in the workplace, including its positive influence on workers' behaviors have also been noted (Ngunjiri and Miller 2014; Kutcher et al. 2010; Parboteeah 2009; Day 2007). In sum, many people are influenced by their religions when they come to work. But it will be difficult for employees to bring their religious motivation to work if their religion (or lack of it) is not acknowledged and respected in the workplace.¹ Separation of spirituality from religion impoverishes the latter, reducing religion to "a dead faith of the living resulting in traditionalism, ecclesialism, and authoritarianism." (Lynn et al. 2009, p. 229)

It is thus clear that as literature continues to link spirituality and religion to organizational outcomes and employee wellbeing, there is a need to develop a more inclusive framework that addresses the concerns of both the secular and the religious approaches. Moreover, in the current global economy where workers from different cultures enter the workplace, there is a growing need to understand SW across cultures and religions. Against this background, various scholars in interreligious dialogue have debated substantive ethical issues, including those related to business. "Ethics is being asked to respond to the globalization of the economy, and among the various responses one can see the emergence of inter-religious approaches" (Reber 1999, p. 150). Kung's global ethics paradigm that highlights the common values and principles shared by major religions is currently used as a moral base for international business. Inasmuch as working life is the number one thing that believers share in common, an interreligious approach to SW merits scholarly attention. As Miller and Ewest (2013, p. 29) argue in calling for a conceptualization of SW in a multi-faith environment, "if the inclusion of religion in the workplace is to be a growing concern for business professionals, then a means to detect universal religious manifestations must be developed which could allow business professionals to understand, measure, and as appropriate adjust the policies pertaining to the spiritual climate." Interreligious SW is an alternative to a purely secular but acontextual approach and to a contextual but exclusively religion-based approach. Interreligiosity is not about eclecticism, religious syncretism, relativism or endorsement of a particular faith. It aims to promote awareness and sensitivity to different religions and foster mutual respect and enrichment, rather than zealotry or proselytizing, by crossing over doctrinal and cultural barriers. It accepts religious diversity as factual without privileging any particular religion by default, but it does not consider all religions as equal in truth or goodness.

This essay is an interreligious study of SW and its implications for business ethics. It considers the normative / doctrinal teachings on work in *Bhagavadgita* (*BG*) and Catholic Social Teaching (*CST*). It will begin by exploring a Hindu SW based on *BG*. The paper will analyze salient ideas and relevant passages in the text that tackle the religio-spiritual significance of our daily engagement in the world through paid work from a Hindu perspective. A discussion on major themes in *CST* that resonate with *BG*'s teachings on work will follow. These themes will

¹ According to Pew Research Center, 5.8 billion people in the world are religiously affiliated, representing 84% of the 2012 world population.

serve as analytical elements that will frame an interreligious SW from the two points of view. Next, the essay will tackle the implications of a Hindu-Catholic SW for business ethics. Finally, the conclusion will demonstrate how the findings of this study relate and enhance the outcomes of current studies in SW, and will point out the need for a more conceptually religious-based comparative studies of SW. The choice of Hinduism fills in the current gap in investigating SW outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition, which has been the predominantly focus of attention (Mele 2015; Ewest 2015; Lynn et al. 2009; Fernando and Jackson 2006). According to the study of Sanchez-Runde et al. (2013) an in-depth understanding of ethical conflicts in the global business is hampered by overreliance on Western models. Hinduism is one of the major religions in the world, comprising 15% of the world population. Inasmuch as the focus of this study is SW, it does not present a systematic and comprehensive comparison of the two religions. There are genuine differences between the theism of Catholicism and Hinduism, the distinctions they hold between the Creator and the created, and their respective beliefs in afterlife and in salvation/liberation. Unlike Catholicism, Hinduism has no dogma, no canonical scriptures, no founder or hierarchy of leaders. Similarities and differences between the texts under consideration will be examined, but such examination will be limited to the most critical and relevant points.

A HINDU SPIRITUALITY OF WORK IN *BHAGAVADGITA*

Hinduism is not a single religion in the sense religion is understood in the Western context. In its origin, Hinduism is somewhat a geographical term. It encompasses the various beliefs and practices of people who originally inhabited the Indus Valley. Treating Hinduism as one tradition without considering its diverse and pluralistic character as well as the historical and textual factors that influence its development and complexities is highly problematic. As mentioned, this study uses *BG* as its primary source – one of the most important texts in Hinduism “that virtually all Hindus know and many recite daily by heart” (Klostermaier 1994, p. 14). Despite its identification with Vedantic tradition, it is accepted as an important source by other schools of Indian philosophy. According to Majithia (2015, p. 56), *BG* “seems clearly to be a syncretistic text that attempts to reconcile various tensions in the Indian tradition.” Whether the text succeeds in doing so is doubtful. Indologists agree that *BG* consists of accretion of verses with a number of interpellations and redactions over centuries. As a result, *BG* contains inconsistent teachings. Nonetheless, these hermeneutical issues did not discourage many Hindu and Western thinkers to write extensive and at times competing commentaries on it as well as practical applications using different interpretative frameworks.²

It is well known that the teachings of *BG* are contained in the metaphysical dialogue between Arjuna, the warrior prince, and his charioteer and guide Krishna. Prior to the start of the decisive war as the two opposing armies of the princely cousins the Pandavas and the Kauravas face each other in the battlefield, Arjuna experiences a profound crisis as he wonders about what will be the outcome of this fratricidal war. He questions whether proceeding with this struggle is the right thing to do. Arjuna is conflicted between his duty to protect his family and

² For further readings, see Sharpe (1985) and Sharma (1987).

his duty to regain his kingdom, between his personal and class-nuanced dharma. It becomes clear, however that the problem of Arjuna is not only a moral conflict but an existential one as it involves *moksha* – the state of release from the cycle of death and rebirth (*samsara*). The law of *karma* states that effects are the normal binding characteristic of action. Whether one performs good or evil actions, she will suffer reincarnation to reap the results of such actions until all the effects of her actions are exhausted. Although the term action (*karma*) in Sanskrit applies to all kinds of human activities including their moral consequences as well as human thoughts and ideas, we are concerned in this study with action in a specific sense i.e. action as pertaining to professional work or paid employment, and it is in this sense that *BG* speaks highly of it (Nadkarmi 2013, p. 9). While this limits the extension of the term, it is not contrary to the comprehension of the term ‘action’ in the text since the dialogue in *BG* begins with discussion about the action of Arjuna as a kshatriya, i.e. action in relation to his specific social function. Now, since all actions cause bondage “withdrawal from the world is a kind of insurance against being entangled in worldly desires” (Edgerton 1944, p. 158). One must eliminate action in order to avoid its binding effect. If the objective is the achievement of enlightenment by detaching oneself from the concerns of mundane existence, the right thing to do is to turn one’s back on the world and live an isolated existence.³

The meaning of *moksha* and the way to attain it are described differently in various schools of Hindu philosophy. It is in *BG* where one can find an attempt to synthesize these diverse and competing accounts. While *BG* does not reject ascetic renunciation per se, it presents a different solution to Arjuna’s dilemma. It argues that one can perform actions to fulfill his worldly responsibilities without incurring their binding effects. “It is impossible for anyone to give up action. True relinquishment consists of abandoning the desire for benefits arising from an act.” (*BG* 18.11) The key is to modify one’s attitude toward actions. *BG* aims to resolve the conflict between the mystical ideal of renunciation and the necessity of actively engaging in the world by presenting different yogas or paths to enlightenment. While there is no consensus as to the number of yogas presented, many commentators (Dhiman 2013; Loy 1988; Minor 1980; Radhakrishnan 1962) agree that three major paths can be discerned: *Jnana*, *Karma*, and *Bhakti* Yogas. “All other spiritual disciplines such as *Dhyanayoga* etc., are also implicit within these three.” (Dhiman 2013, p. 23) The path to *moksha* includes all three, they “are not in the end different paths for different temperaments, but three elements of the one way affirmed by the *Gita*” (Minor 1980, p. 340). They are not mutually exclusive as no yoga is sufficient by itself. Because each is present in the other, a practitioner of a specific yoga would likely argue for its superiority because it incorporates all others. Thus, one can read Krishna proclaiming the preeminence of one yoga in some parts of *BG*, and then extolling the value of another in other parts. For the sake of instruction, Krishna’s presentation of the three yogas is progressive. But in applying them into daily life, they are to be practiced simultaneously, rather than in a step by step fashion. One must attempt at cross-fertilization of all paths in order to achieve total efficacy. This essay’s interpretative treatment of *BG* will focus on the interrelationship between the three yogas.

³ There are two kinds of *moksha* in Hindu philosophy – one that can be attained in this life, i.e. achieving *moksha* while alive (*Jivan Mukti*), and one that comes after the death of the body (*Videha Mukti*). In the first kind, *moksha* is not beyond, but rather simultaneous with our earthly existence.

Yoga of Knowledge – *Jnana*

The first point made by Krishna is that actions are inevitable because they are part of our lower or embodied self (*prakriti*), the controller of the body and external senses. *Prakriti* is the self that is part of nature and of the social world, the agent of our actions. Analysis of action to determine what is right presupposes understanding of one's true nature. Comprehending the nature of self will lead to wisdom in action. Here, knowledge is a virtue, not information-gathering but self-understanding. Shideler (1960, p. 310) describes Arjuna as one who "was caught in the error of tending to make his selfhood and his experiences of things final and ultimate." However, our higher self (*purusha*) is a pure subject without any quality, it does not act, creates no agency, and remains steady and unchanging. It is the eternal unchanging subject or witness that can never be an object. It rather observes the individual's actions and state of emotions. *Purusha* is the passive enjoyer of experience that should not be identified with the doer or the object of experience. It is completely independent from *prakriti* and from the physical world of space-time-causality. Unlike the empirical self, *purusha* is the conscious and unmanifest part of oneself, the one/spirit in the body that does not die, it neither kills nor is killed (*BG* 2.17-26).

Prakriti is the "locus of all activity" (*BG* 3.27). Within *prakriti* are the three *gunas* (qualities, threads, or modes) that are responsible for the variety of things that exist in the phenomenal world by their different combinations, permutations and interactions. Whatever *guna* dominates determines the manifest characteristics or natural qualities of an entity. *Sattva* possesses lucidity, intelligibility, knowledge, light, pleasure, purity; *rajas* is for energy, passion, misery, greed, pride, exertion; and *tamas* for entropy, apathy, lethargy, dullness, inertia and delusion. Because of the constant activity and interaction of the *gunas*, action is inevitable. But unlike the lower self, our higher self is inactive and without *guna*. "While *prakriti* is involved in the operation of and changes in the phenomenal world, *purusha* provides the direction or orientation for them" (Kwak and Han 2013, p. 64; Cf. *BG* 13.26).

BG claims that the individual is a single entity. The higher self and the embodied one both constitute the individual person. But because the higher self is unchanging, it is the lower self that evolves and constitutes the physical and psychical features and activities of human nature, including intellect (*buddhi*) which produces consciousness, mind/will (*manas*) responsible for sensations, and ego-ity or I-maker (*ahamkara*). According to Stietencron (2005, p. 215), "Egoism develops out of ego. If there were no *ahamkara*, no 'I-maker' in our psychic instrument, there would be no separation of subject and object and so no objects 'out there' at all." Ignorance comes from confusing *purusha* with the ego or I-faculty, resulting in the entanglement of the former with the latter, when in reality the I-faculty is not part of *purusha*. Proper knowledge is to distinguish *purusha* from the evolutes of *prakriti* and cognitively detach the higher self from bodily actions.

Jnana aspires to go higher than our ordinary way of knowing by acquiring the right frame of mind in order to transform the way we perceive ourselves and our relation with the world. The ordinary way of looking at ourselves is to identify our self with our external experiences and emotional responses. This knowledge is fixated on sense objects and breeds attachment, desire,

delusion, and lust of possession. *Jnana* “aims at disconnecting the mind from various sense objects to which it is attached” (Theodor 2010, p. 8). “When a man is not attracted to external objects, he finds peace at the core of his being. When he is totally absorbed in the contemplation of the supreme being, he finds unlimited happiness” (*BG* 5.21). This is essential so that the mind can focus on *purusha*. “Just as a lamp does not flicker in a windless place, the disciplined mind of a yogi doesn’t waver in the peaceful contemplation of the higher self” (*BG* 6.19). The goal is to acquire wisdom that discriminates the real from the unreal, the eternal from the temporal, the higher from the lower self. This form of intellectual discipline provides new insights for action and centered living. One becomes indifferent to the external outcomes of her actions. Worldly happiness and sorrow, gain and loss, material success and failure are all regarded with an even eye. Freed from worries, one achieves peace of mind and tranquility that enables her to work effectively.⁴

Purusha is eternally free from all forms of desire. As pure consciousness, it is a pure subject. While the two selves are inseparable, most people fail to recognize the presence of their higher self. This is because we are so preoccupied with our sensual desires that are activities of the lower self. When the mind is fixated on sense objects, it loses sight of the higher self and gets completely absorbed with the empirical self and how it is affected by actions and passions. By distinguishing *prakriti* from *purusha*, one is freed from the trappings of physical objects and sensual pleasures. She realizes that the higher self is not the doer of actions, and so learns to detach herself from the external results of the latter (*BG* 3.27-28).

Yoga of Action - *Karma*

Karmayoga is the model for moral development in the Indian context that has “three interrelated constructs, duty-orientation, indifference to rewards and equanimity” (Mulla and Krishnan 2014, p. 348). It is not enough to do our actions with the right mental attitude, we must do only those actions that are right. Proper or right action is that which is in accord with *dharma*, improper action is contrary to *dharma*.⁵ ‘*Dharma*’ stands for duty, ethics, law, righteousness,

⁴ One may raise the objection against the Gita that it is rational to consider the outcome of one’s action, not to do so may lead to recklessness. However, excessive focus on the results – positive or negative, success or failure, winning or losing – can lead to anxiety or indecision. The external results of action lie in the future and inasmuch as no one can tell what exactly is the future, we can never be totally sure of the outcome of most of our actions, “we have no idea what outcome would be best for ourselves and for everybody else.” (Das 2004, p. 65) The advice of Krishna is for Arjuna to constantly live the present moment by being in communion with his higher self, and not be bothered by what lies in the future. This should not be interpreted as carelessness or irresponsibility, not caring about the result comes after one has already decided what is the right thing to do based on her duty.

⁵ “‘*Dharma*’ in the context of Indian philosophy may be broadly taken as equivalent to ‘ethical behavior’ and *adharma* to ‘unethical behavior’. The equivalence is by no means perfect. As a matter of fact *dharma*, as used and understood in the Indian tradition, is a term of very wide connotation including within it the sense of a whole host of duties as well as virtue which ought to be performed by man” (Chattopadhyay 2012, pp. 117-118).

truth, or right conduct. It “has its roots in the structure of the cosmos, and the socio-ethical law of humankind is but one facet of an all-embracing law encompassing all beings” (Klostermaier 1994, p. 52). Dharma is related to the pre-Vedic notion of *rta*: a universal rule that no one can alter. *Rta* works spontaneously within each thing to guide the orderly movement of nature. As the normative function of *rta* becomes more significant, it acquires a moral dimension and is gradually replaced by dharma in the *Upanishads*. Eventually, the extension of the term is expanded in post-Vedic texts to cover wide range of ethical and social practices while retaining the principal Vedic position that duties and proper conducts vary by class and state in life. Because of this all embracing character of dharma, a strict demarcation line between secular and religious in Hinduism cannot be drawn. Dharma satisfies the dual demands of our physical and spiritual lives. It is both cosmic and ethical, universal and particular, personal and social – providing the organizing principles of social and individual lives. Some examples of universal dharma (*sadharana*) are non-injury, truthfulness, abstention from anger, purification, non-stealing, gift-giving, hospitality, compassion, and forgiveness. Personal dharma (*svadharma*) includes tasks and duties proper to a particular individual in connection with her physical, emotional, and mental characteristics. Muniapan and Satpathy (2013, p. 181) define personal dharma as the “individualized application of ‘dharma’ dependent on personal ‘karma’.”

Social dharma refers to one’s familial and social duties. It is understood in terms of sets of coordinates required for each *Varna* and stage in life (*Asrama*), “for these represent the main factors of time, place, and circumstance that determine one’s own specific dharma” (Koller 2006, p. 86). In this context, dharma is one of the four objectives (*purushartas*) that define the aims of Hindu way of life.⁶ The other three are *Artha* (worldly success); *Kama* (all forms of enjoyment); and *Moksha*. These ends encompass our biological, economic, social and spiritual needs. Hinduism does not condemn material success as long as it does not hinder us from the attainment of *Moksha*. Further, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Dharma* are valid objectives only up to a certain stage in life. Thus, the four ends in life are supposed to correlate with the four stages in life or *Asrama*.

“Of the *asramas* the householder and the renouncer stages are clearly the most important both ideologically and in terms of concrete historical developments.” (Flood 1996, p. 64) They represent two opposing tendencies in Hinduism: engagement and contemplation – active concern for the world and complete abandonment of ordinary life in favor of a more perfect state. While *BG* does not reject the concept of *Asrama*, it presents a different solution to this dilemma by pointing out that one can perform action without incurring its binding effects, a sort of actionless action. In the beginning, Arjuna is not concerned with the pursuit of *Moksha*, he is worried about the outcome of war and the fate of his family and loved ones. One who discovers his higher self as disconnected from action loses interest in the results of the action. Krishna advises Arjuna to perform his action for its own sake, as a sense of duty, with indifference to material outcomes, future consequences, or extrinsic rewards.

⁶ As referring to social or worldly responsibilities, *Dharma* is one temporal end just like *Artha* and *Kama*. In another sense, dharma refers to the totality of temporal values (including *Artha* and *Kama*) in contrast to *moksha*. See Creel (1975, p. 164).

If *Asrama* is a model of ordering individual life, *Varna* is a system of ordering society. Both are institutions devised by ancient Hindu sages to ensure “the application of ethical, moral and spiritual values of all work done by human beings” (Agnivesh 2004, p. 89). Krishna tells Arjuna to set aside his personal relationship and look into his *varna dharma* or class duty. The *Varna* system already existed as early as the Vedic period.⁷ The earliest reference to it is in the *Rig Veda* where *The Hymn of the Primeval Male* describes how the four classes originated from dismemberment of the primordial-cosmic person. The system was further developed in later texts. *The Laws of Manu*, which became the textbook of Hindu social system, states the principal duties that are assigned to each class. The system is not a mere social construct but divinely ordained. *BG* (4.13) declares the four classes as creation of Krishna. Class differentiation is based on different qualities, talents and abilities rooted in one’s nature i.e. the predominance of a certain *guna*. “The scholars, the warriors, the merchants and the workers are all destined to perform certain duties, according to their natures born out of these qualities.” (*BG* 18.41) *Varna* addresses the different needs of society: cultivation of knowledge and culture, food and financial security, peace and order, manual work, etc. “In an ideal Hindu social order, each type is responsible for the performance and fulfilment of different functions, and proper functioning of each part is necessary for the stability of the whole society” (Richardson et al. 2014, p. 77). All achieve their perfection by actualizing their natural talents and abilities while accomplishing their respective dharmas.

It is preferable to perform one’s own duty imperfectly than to perform someone else’s duty perfectly. By performing one’s own duty, which is born of one’s nature, a man does not earn any future consequences. One should not shrink from doing one’s duty though it is flawed, since all ventures have their shortcomings like the fire which is marred by smoke (*BG* 18: 47-48).

Since *Varna* is based on the nature of an individual, birth becomes a criterion, or else the notion of *guna* and natural qualities will not make sense. But it is not the only criterion. The *Varna* system is much more flexible and allows upward mobility as evidenced in literature. It is not meant to restrict professional development or social progress. As the outcome of natural differences among human beings resulting from the interaction of the three *gunas*, there is no reason why it should be coercively implemented (Theodor 2010, p. 3). The classification is not only hierarchical but also functional. “Each requirement was assigned to be fulfilled by a class possessing the particular gifts necessary for its fulfillment. The evident inequality of individual attainments was recognized, but the possession of gifts added to one’s responsibility” (Gandhi and Desai 1946, p. 102). The *Upanishads* (Chandogya 4.4.1-5) states that the ultimate basis of social class is not birth but virtue, character and ability. Unfortunately, when birth acquires greater significance than qualification and hierarchy takes priority over function, *Varna* degenerates into casteism, racism, gender inequality and exploitation that plague India for thousands of years and cause many of its social ills.

⁷ “In the period of the Vedic hymns (1500 B.C. to 600 B.C.), there were classes and not castes. We do not find any reference to connubial or commensal restrictions. The occupations were by no means hereditary” (Radhakrishnan 1940, p. 372). Caste is not a Sanskrit word, it is derived from the Latin word “castus” which means pure or chaste. *Varna* means color, not skin color as has been believed, but colors used to identify the arrangement of participants in Vedic *yajna* or holy sacrifice (Klostermaier 1994, p. 334). *Jati* is the actual social group where one is born. No one knows the origin of the *jati* system and how it gets related to *Varna* in practice.

Yoga of Love and Devotion- *Bhakti*

Bhakti is ontologically based on the nature of our higher self. Like other paths, *Bhakti* involves detachment, but here, one detaches the self from finite things so that she can attach her higher self to Krishna. Our relationships with the world and with our fellow humans are contingent, which brings with them expectations beyond the present situation. “As long as there is the delusion of self apart from the world,” Loy (1988, p. 284) comments, “then resentment will naturally arise from any perception of a threat to that self and its desires.” The way of selfless action is not complete without deep devotion to God, the highest Being, for in the final analysis selflessness is not simply the denial of oneself, but the offering of oneself to God. It is not detachment from material things alone or attainment of peace of mind, but union with God that is the final stage of deliverance.

Several passages in *BG* give emphasis on *Bhakti*.⁸ If these lines are separated from the rest of the text, they give the impression that one is enlightened simply through the grace of Krishna. There are also passages in *BG*, however that downplay the ritualistic tradition, claiming that the reward for ritualistic/devotional sacrifices is temporary and finite rather than complete liberation.⁹ Blind performance of devotional ceremonies without understanding their meaning does not lead to *moksha*. Thus, one must bear in mind that *Bhakti* should be not separated from the other paths. One cannot practice *Bhakti* without overcoming self-centered habits (Loy 1988, p. 286). The ethic of selfless action is essential in order to become a pure devotee, for sacrifice, austerity, or charity “can become vices if divorced from the rule of selflessness or detachment” (Gandhi and Desai 1946, p. 95). When prayers and religious rituals are performed correctly, *Bhakti* becomes a way of knowledge and selfless action (Koller 2006, p. 195). In addition, *Karma* and *Jnana* are both forms of devotional worship too. Since the higher self is one with God, *Jnana* includes devotion to Krishna (*BG* 4.9-11). When actions are performed without intention of desire or aversion to outcomes, all actions are performed in an attitude of devotion (*BG* 18.46). Conversely, devotional offerings must be performed in the spirit of non-attachment, similar to *Karmayoga*. Otherwise, they will only result in continual rebirth due to the influence of desire and ignorance. In his commentary, Radhakrishnan (1962, p. 562) claims that “*Bhakti*, or true devotion, according to the Gita, is to believe in God, to love Him, to be devoted to Him and to enter into Him. It is its own reward.”

God in *BG* is both immanent and transcendent. He pervades all and permeates all (*BG* 7.6-10). As an avatar, Krishna is the reincarnation of the God Vishnu, the embodiment of the ultimate reality in human form. He is a God who intervenes and becomes part of human history to restore dharma. While His higher nature is eternally inactive, His lower nature is the source of

⁸ See *BG* (9.13-34; 12.3-10; 18.56-71).

⁹ See *BG* (17.11-13; 17.20-28).

all actions in the world. *BG* (6.11) emphasizes how Krishna loves and cares for each individual, for everything in the phenomenal world is a manifestation of His lower nature. The everyday realm of material concerns is not an illusion or insignificant. Krishna is the support of all beings, all things exist in him. He is ever at work, lest the world should come to an end, but nothing that He does affects or disturbs Him (*BG* 3.24; 4.6-8). Love of Krishna does not only entail performing specific rituals or sacrifices. Krishna says in *BG* (12.4), “They reach me too by disciplining their senses, adopting an amiable attitude toward others, and by engaging themselves in the service of others.” One cannot love Krishna without cultivating universal love to all His creatures. All comes from God. Seeing God everywhere, one is free of any negative feeling toward anything. Krishna tells Arjuna to abandon all dharma and seek refuge in Him alone. “Bow devotedly to me and take shelter in me. By my grace you will achieve the eternal and peaceful abode of the supreme self” (*BG* 18.62). This should not be interpreted as license, for in this part of the dialogue Arjuna is already committed to his dharmic actions. Through *Bhakti*, one transcends any form of internal conflict in the performance of dharma, as one attains peaceful oneness with Krishna.

DIALOGUE WITH CST

Catholicism’s SW has its roots in the scriptures, both the Old and the New Testaments. The Book of Genesis, which John Paul II calls the ‘Gospel of work’ depicts the creation of the universe as God’s work done in six days. According to Psalms (8:3) the universe is the work of God’s hands; He is the provider of humanity (Gen. 2:6-8); and caretaker of the created order (Ps 104: 10-22) who continues to work even until now (Jn 5:17). Work is part of the divinely ordered structure of the world and of human nature, as work is God’s ordinance for the life of the person from the very moment of creation. God did not create humans to be idle. Work existed even in the prelapsarian paradise. Genesis (2:5-15) states that “The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it.” In working, the person participates in God’s activity. “The word of God’s revelation is profoundly marked by the fundamental truth that man... shares by his work in the activity of the Creator and that, within the limits of his own human capabilities, man in a sense continues to develop that activity, and perfects it” (*Laborem Exercens* [LE] John Paul II 1981, 25). The New Testament states that we worship God with our whole existence, including our work (Rom. 12:1). According to Matthew (25:35) what is central to our salvation is not just faith or worship, but the work that we have done to care for those who are poor, oppressed, marginalized and exploited. St. Paul admonishes early Christians to avoid idleness and being a burden to others by working hard to earn their living. He says, “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.” (2 Thes. 7:10)

While there are writings by the early fathers and medieval thinkers of Catholic church that follow the positive view of work contained in the Bible, theological and philosophical reflection on SW remains largely undeveloped until the emergence of CST in its modern form as a response to the enormous socioeconomic problems unleashed by the industrial slavery of the 19th century. Work in medieval worldview is a means to acquisition of temporal goods and to more noble ends such as penance for one’s sin. It provides believers with opportunities to exercise Christian virtues and to practice God’s commandments. The monastic practice of *ora et labora* emphasizes unity between spiritual and physical work. CST follows this tradition, but

it clarifies that sanctification of work happens not only when the latter is directly related to charitable acts and religious duties, but in any type of decent work. Work is sanctified even in the family, political, social, and cultural life, whenever it is done with honesty, professional competence, and the spirit of Christian charity.

Work as a Vocation

Beginning with *Rerum Novarum*, CST provides a vision of work as an integral part of human being and becoming. Work is a fundamental fact of our embodiment, relationality and situatedness in a particular state in life in order to fulfill God's plan. *Centesimus Annus (CA)* states: "Work thus belongs to the vocation of every person; indeed, man expresses and fulfills himself by working" (John Paul II 1991, 6). Work is central to our identity and self-fulfillment. It provides us with avenues to exercise and develop our natural faculties and in the process, we become fully human. "In other words, our everyday work is a means of achieving the purpose for which each of us was created" (Gomez 2006, p. 810).

The term dharma in Hinduism captures the notion of work in CST as both a duty and a calling or vocation (from Latin *vocare* – to call) in a personal and a universal sense. Similar to Hindu dharma, vocation in Catholicism is both universal/personal, supernatural/temporal, and generic/specific-to-an-individual. In a universal sense, all are called to respond to God's eternal plan – a life of holiness by following Christ and living according to the universal message of the Gospel: the practice of love and justice. On a particular level, every individual is called to make specific choices that will enable her to fulfill God's plan in consideration of her actual conditions and concrete circumstances. Some call individual vocation as secondary since it has to conform to the universal calling to holiness, which is considered primary. In explaining the role of the laity *Lumen Gentium* (Vatican Council II 1964, 31) says:

the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations...They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven.

Human vocation is both supernatural and temporal. "The Christian who neglects his temporal duties," as stated in *Gaudium et Spes (GS)*, "neglects his duties toward his neighbor and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation" (Vatican Council II 1965, 43). This calling requires thoughtful response and steadfast commitment, for to seek fulfillment is a responsibility, not a mere option. Paul VI (1967, 15) explains, "every man is called upon to develop and fulfill himself, for every life is a vocation.... Endowed with intelligence and freedom, he is responsible for his fulfillment as he is for his salvation." Work is a vocation rather than a mere career or means of livelihood. "Approaching work as a calling makes labor a duty instead of a curse. The calling establishes work's necessity apart from material necessity." (Muirhead 2004, p.106) As Raines and Day (1986, p. 105) write, "Work is not to be a random activity – something created to fill our time, keep us out of trouble or enable us to make our monthly car

payments.” It is not simply a performance of a specific task, for vocation “is not merely something a person does, it is something one is” (Brady 2008, p. 48).

LE (25) exhorts workers to “learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation, and its orientation to the praise of God. Even by their secular activity they must assist one another to live holier lives.” Every person is unique in terms of talent, cultural background, character, and experiences. The *gunas* in *BG* represent human potentials for perfection. While we have different abilities and talents, all humans are made up of the same *gunas*, so the idea is to develop one’s nature. “The *gunas* not only confine, but pave a kind of an existential path for each and every individual entity; accordingly each entity progresses in a more or less predetermined path” (Theodor 2010, p. 112).

That work is a vocation/dharma implies specialization and division of labor in so far as one is expected to devote time and energy to that to which she is called. CST is not against specialization. *LE* (25) states:

Therefore, by their competence in secular fields and by their personal activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them work vigorously so that by human labour, technical skill, and civil culture created goods may be perfected according to the design of the Creator and the light of his Word.

CST goes at some length to discuss the changing aspects of work on account of the developments in the industry and technology, from the development of new tools of production, the wide-use of automation that requires new skills and training, up to the increasing interdependence of work-related activities and national economies due to financialization and globalization. Companies need to hire and promote people most suited to the job in terms of qualifications and abilities. Jobs are allotted on the basis of workers’ ability and competency. CST and *BG* acknowledge and value the natural differences that exist among peoples. “These natural differences actually aided the whole community, for different people needed to play different parts in community life” (Holland 2003, p. 181). Work is essential for one’s self-actualization. It is not the division of labor itself that undermines work, but the valuation of one type of work (intellectual) at the expense of another (physical).

Human Work as Participation in the Divine Activity

The guiding principle of CST is a holistic understanding of the person grounded on the Biblical doctrine that God created human in His image and likeness. The person is composed of body and soul substantially united to form one nature. According to Fiorenza (1980, p. 96), “Christian anthropology teaches that human beings are not just externally juxtaposed bodies and souls, since body and soul interpenetrate.” Sharing in God’s image, the human soul is intellectual, spiritual, and immortal. “Man is the image of God partly through the mandate from his Creator to subdue, to dominate, the earth. In carrying out this mandate, man, every human being, reflects the very action of the Creator of the universe” (*LE* 4).

Commenting on *LE*, Gini (1992, p. 230) notes that although the text “never uses the terms ‘co-creation’ or ‘co-creator’”, John Paul II makes it clear that the divine action of creativity

and human work are dynamically interrelated.” As part of our nature, work is inevitable and both Hinduism and Catholicism hold this view. It must be recalled that in *BG*, actions are a necessary aspect of our embodied lower self (*prakriti*). But this does not imply that work is a burden or something humanity has to oblige with, for Krishna is also a worker. The Bible likewise presents God as the archetypal worker in terms of His creation, providential governance, and redemptive action. “Man is a symbol, the *imago Dei*. His actions express and are the very meaning of his life. The good man reflects the glory of God as a visible manifestation of God’s invisible nature” (Navone 2014, p. 137). Human work is an imitation, or a co-creation, not a duplication of God’s work because only God works *ex-nihilo*. This does not make a person equal to God. The person is an *imago*, not identical to God. He is subordinate to God and subject to the latter’s ordering. Perricone (2012, p. 825) observes that “It is important to note that God does not require creation for the splendor of His majesty; rather the work of creation is a manifestation of God’s splendor.” Similar to *BG*, CST presents the Divine activity as the unity of action and contemplation. The work of God in the Bible has no end outside of Himself and for this reason, Thomas Aquinas defines God as a being in pure act who does not act for extrinsic end.¹⁰ God creates out of superabundance of His goodness. In the same manner, although Krishna’s lower nature is the source of all actions in the world, His higher nature is eternally inactive. He has no need to act, but he incarnates age after age to restore dharma. Both traditions affirm “God’s inseparable *transcendent-and-immanent* presence within creation” (Holland 2012, pp. 116-117). As a cooperative or participative activity with God/Krishna, human work needs to be modelled after the Divine work – productive, good, and valued for its own sake. Hence, *BG* (18. 41-49) declares that all work has intrinsic worth, for in the final analysis it is not what we derive from work but what we express through it that matters. In terms of outcomes, inequality in work is evident. But as a divine participation and an offering to God, every type of decent work according to *BG* and CST has an equal value.

Social Dimension of Work

“Spirituality at work has appeared in part because people want to feel connected to work that is important, and they want to feel connected to each other at work” (Ashmos and Duchon 2000, p. 137). The pursuit of work as a vocation moves one to be concerned with the welfare of others. Mere excellence in one’s profession is not enough. To discern one’s vocation or dharma requires re-examination of signs of the times and actualities of change as well as reflection on how to make good and wise use of the gifts one received from God to serve the community. In Catholicism, caring for others is part of human vocation.¹¹ We do not just work for ourselves to pursue our personal ambition or satisfy our individual needs and desire. “To experience ourselves as fully human, we must be responsive and responsible for the needs of others” (Brady 2008, p. 36). The completion of human vocation and the welfare of society as a

¹⁰ See Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 44 a. 4.

¹¹ “Returning to the roots of the tradition, we find that from its earliest usage, vocation was never far in meaning from community. In fact, the word the early Christians adopted from Greek culture to designate their assembled community was *ekklesiai* which is built on the root *kaleo* “to call.” At that time, *ekklesia* did not have any religious or cultic association but was more of a political term referring to a group of people with a unified purpose and structure” (Raines and Day 1986, p. 107).

whole are closely intertwined. We are not created by God to live in isolation. “The person and society define one another as parts of God’s unitary creation” (Sandelands 2009, p. 97).

In *BG*, Krishna is not simply presenting a deontological argument to Arjuna, i.e. doing duty for its own sake. He is presenting dharma as a set of social demands. He tries to convince Arjuna that there is no conflict between his personal and class-nuanced/social dharma. As social beings we are part of our community, our neighborhood, and the firm where we work in. Work is a social need, it is a human reality as well as divine. Work is sanctified as a path to relationship to God and to our neighbors, as God is present in our neighbors. As mentioned above, love of Krishna and of the whole world are inseparable. Love in *BG* is not an emotional sentiment. *Bhakti* means “a state of consciousness in which you forget yourself” (Easwaran 2011, p. 126). It is the total absorption of the self to Krishna (*BG* 8.7). When our will becomes one with God’s, our conduct becomes expressive of the divine. It is God then who acts in us, we are only His servants or instruments. In the case of Arjuna, “The lack of ego will be expressed by his accepting the role of Krishna’s servant, and accepting the fighting of the war as his service” (Theodor 2010, p. 105).¹²

The search for Christian fulfillment or Hindu *moksha* does not mean negation of the world of social concerns. In his reflection on CST’s view of work, Fiorenza (1980, p. 96) points out that the “economy of salvation and incarnation do not imply the annihilation of the material world, but rather its transformation and incorporation into the order of grace. Work should be seen as a part of this transformation and integration.”¹³ Work plays an important role in how we contribute to society and in our position in the community. “Each person’s passions, talents, and resources offer that person different choices about how to participate in the community” (Collier 2014, p. 178). Work serves most commonly as the root of social organizations and the link between the individual and the community. Work unites people and binds them into small groups. To fully comprehend the reality of work, we need to understand the social setting in which it takes place.

Society is the realm in which we assume our obligations to others – this is what the Hindu institution of *Varna* would like to accomplish in its original intent. “Varna is a way of grouping individuals according to their own natures and qualifications so that they might make a maximum contribution to the social order while at the same time enhance their prospects for fulfillment and liberation” (Koller 2006, p. 95). Under this, each person knows her social standing and responsibilities toward society. In the traditional Hindu society, *Varna* mediates between the individual and the community. Today, it is obvious that we are situated in our respective communities in different ways, not only by birth or occupational groups, but also by religion, economic status, political affiliations, cultural heritage, civic organizations, etc. In India’s history, *Varna* has been wrongly interpreted and practiced, which leads to marginalization of women and the poor, i.e., those who have less power in the traditional Hindu society. But this is contrary to *BG* which states that *Varna* is for the sake of prosperity and world order (Doniger 2014, p. 168; Koller 2005, p. 94). It ought to be about service to the community rather than entitlement or privileges. Radhakrishnan describes *Varna* as a kind of ethical pyramid - more is expected to higher class in terms of moral and spiritual demands, and less in terms of personal enjoyment. “While it recognizes that men are unequal in scale and quality, it insists that every human being shall have the right and the opportunity to contribute to human achievement, so far

¹² See *BG* (13.13).

¹³ See *CA* (31).

as his capacity goes” (Radhakrishnan 1940, p. 368). The fact however, is that there are external factors that have limiting effects on our career choices and occupational functions. This is what *LE* calls the objective dimension of work. From this perspective, work is an integral part of the socioeconomic realm, and as such, the way it is organized depends on historical and economic realities. Because of our embodiment, we live a conditioned existence. The work that we do and the social organizations we establish are marked with imperfection. It can lead to our bondage or entanglement with worldly concerns. Work can be a dehumanizing element in life, not because it is so by nature but by the way work is concretely organized.

The degradation of *Varna* into casteism, where work is imposed arbitrarily and binds many in conditions of slavery, is one example of how work can be used against the person. CST calls this condition alienation. It is the loss of the authentic meaning of work. It happens whenever people are used as means to an end. The human worker becomes subject to labor rather than the subject of labor. While CST does not explicitly address the issue of caste system, it points out that “objectification and instrumentalization of labor can happen in many subtle ways” (Gomez 2006, p. 810). *CA* (41) says, “the concept of alienation needs to be led back to the Christian vision of reality by recognizing in alienation a reversal of means and ends.” CST is not against division of labor as long as its end is to facilitate order, cooperation, productivity, and efficiency, and workers are not simply treated as instruments of production or cogs in the machine, but as persons with rights and dignity whose participation in management is not only welcomed but encouraged.

LE states that work is the foundation and starting point of human solidarity. Human society is a complex web of relations, it is much more than a composite of autonomous, self-interested individuals “who make a ‘social contract,’ but rather an organic unity of which the family is the most basic cell” (Naughton and Laczniak 1993, p. 985). Work makes possible the maintenance of the family and the education of children. “In fact, the family is simultaneously a community made possible by work and the first school of work, within the home, for every person” (*LE* 10). Indeed, the importance of the family and its preservation is also emphasized in the first chapter of *BG* (1:37-43). It is not surprising thus, that many Hindus sometimes “leave career development to go back to their family home and take care of their parents” (Suri and Abbott 2009, p. 8).¹⁴

Subjective Dimension of Work

Both traditions view the person not only as a biological or social animal but as a *homo spiritualis*. Commenting on CST, Williams (2003, p. 17) writes that these texts give primacy to the spiritual dimension of the person, for “That which is truly human is spiritual.” What is spiritual (i.e. human soul) cannot come from matter but is directly created by God. At the innermost level of who we are is the spirit that is closely related to God and is the source of our transcendence. While we see a dualistic view of the person in CST and in *BG*: body and soul, lower/embodied self and higher self – self-realization or enlightenment lies in overcoming these dichotomies. In *BG*, *prakriti* and *purusha* are not “two ontologically separate substances but as two types of reality of the soul involved in the lived experience of every human being” (Kwak

¹⁴ See also Darbha (2013).

and Han 2013, p. 64). The embodied/lower self is not meant to be negated in *BG*. What the text denies is the ultimacy or absoluteness of *prakriti*, for it is only a limited part of who we are. While the two texts differ in explaining how the self or soul is related to the body and the outside world, both affirm that the spirit is not opposed to the body, nor the body a hindrance to the spirit. The person is an embodied being, but she is also transcendent. Although there is difference on how the two texts ground this claim, they both affirm that human fulfillment is not the same as ego or physical satisfaction.

Work is not only a transitive action, it is also an immanent or a self-perfecting act. “For when a man works, he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well. He learns much, he cultivates his resources, he goes outside of himself and beyond himself” (*GS* 35). *LE* calls this the subjective dimension work. Work is not a mere economic activity. It is an act of the person (*actus personae*) that can only be predicated to the person. It cannot have meaning and value apart from the individual worker from which it proceeds. “[W]ork bears a particular mark of man and humanity, the mark of a person... And this mark decides its interior characteristics; in a sense it constitutes its very nature” (*LE* 1). As *actus personae*, work cannot be considered a material commodity, much less be valued according to the laws of market economy. The subjective dimension of work takes priority over its objective aspect. While objectively, work may appear in various types, work is only a single activity subjectively considered.

As Krishna counsels Arjuna to look into his higher self (*purusha*) in order to discover the true meaning of his action, workers must develop the capacity to intend their actions as emanating from their innermost being so that *LE*'s notion of human work as *actus personae* will be fully realized. Like Arjuna, every human worker from CST perspective is a free and responsible subject who is capable of deciding for herself and directing her actions, rather than an automaton who is bound by external circumstances.¹⁵ In other words, workers need a spiritual framework, or in the words of the *BG*, right understanding (*Jnana*) of work so that they can live out its subjective dimension, otherwise they become subject to work or work only for the sake of consumption. Subjectivity of work cannot depend solely on organizational or technological conditions. What workers need is a conscious awareness of the immanent and transcendent aspects of work. Work must be accompanied by reflection (*Jhana*) and devotion (*Bhakti*) because it is a conscious act that can only be performed by a rational being. The subjective meaning of work comes in the day to day experiences of workers - ordinary activities in the workplace that provide opportunities for reflection, active involvement, practice of virtues, exercise of responsibility and value judgement.

¹⁵ *BG* accepts the doctrine of *karma* as axiomatic (Gandhi and Desai 1946, p. 34). *Karma* is both a moral and a natural law having its basis on the law of cause and effect. “The belief in the law of cause and effect makes us realize that we are placed in a particular situation because of unfulfilled past obligations on our part and we develop a sense of connectedness with all beings.” (Mulla and Krishnan 2014, p. 344) A common misconception is that the doctrine of *karma* suggests that individual actions are passive and pre-ordained. This is incorrect. *BG* firmly rejects fatalism as it portrays Arjuna as a free being who can choose which path to take and change the course of his existence. “Similar to the belief in a just world, belief in *karma* reaffirms one’s faith in a just world and makes every person responsible for his or her own well-being and suffering.” (Mulla and Krishnan 2014, p. 342)

Work as a Path to Salvation

“Christianity and Hindu religion have a sense of the world as alienated, fallen, and in *in need to redemption*” (Kung 1986, p. 226). According to *BG* our identification with our external experiences makes us lose sight of our eternal self and entices us to believe that we are isolated individuals defined by our own selfish desires and sensual pleasures. But the external world of sense experience, both in the physical and social sense, is not rendered illusory, otherwise active engagement in it will not make sense. The point made by Krishna is that the pursuit of *moksha* can be reconciled with daily work and worldly concerns. Even ordinary routine labor by which people earn their daily bread is a path to salvation. Similarly, CST teaches that work is a holy activity. It is not only the person who is sanctified by work but work itself is sanctified. Through work, the individual does not only enter into a relationship with her fellow humans but also with God. Work is a means of directing the person to God or Krishna, of worshipping and serving Him. It is not against our salvation nor should it hinder us from it.

It is not only in the creative aspect of work where we can find its spiritual dimension but also in its redemptive aspect. In the same vein that *BG* strives for the integration of knowledge, action and devotion to Krishna, CST teaches that service to God does not only include prayers, church worship or devotional sacrifices. As fulfillment of God’s plan, work is a way of glorifying God. Work well done in the spirit of charity is a form of service rendered to God. By doing one’s work as an offering to God and doing it well, it acquires a supernatural value. Similarly, “An individual’s actions should not be for personal fulfillment of any type, but rather in the service of God (Krishna). It is through everyday actions, inconsonance with *swadharma* that an individual acquires true knowledge of Krishna” (Chaturvedi 2010, p. 423). CST and *BG* teach that salvation through work is a path open to all because it is by means of everyday actions. Through faith in God and prayer for His grace, a believer undergoes internal transformation so that even if she performs the same task, this task is performed with higher motive and level of awareness until she reaches the point where she acts for the highest good.

Both textual traditions call their adherents to dedicate their actions to God and to offer them to Him as heart-felt devotion. As embodied beings, experience is the most significant mode of our interpersonal encounter. A personal God becomes a fundamental necessity in this case. As known to many religious scholars, the concept of an incarnate personal God is not unique to Hinduism or Catholicism. It manifests a divine-human encounter mediated through historical experience. “God’s descent into the world in human form is an extremely effective way of bridging the gap between God and Humans, a truth recognized by Christians as well as by Hindus” (Koller 2006, 185). It implies God’s continued engagement with the world and His ultimate concern for humanity.

A number of texts have been written that draw parallels and contrasts between Krishna and Jesus (Largen 2011; Sheth 2002; Mohammed 1989; Kung 1986; Paradkar 1969) and to pursue this topic further is to go beyond the scope of this essay. Just to emphasize one point of comparison, Krishna is an avatar not because of his wealth, privilege, or power, but because of his extraordinary spiritual qualities. He is not a prince in *BG* but a humble charioteer. Jesus, on the other hand, is presented in the Gospel as an ordinary craftsman who worked at the carpenter’s bench for some fifteen years of his life (Mark 6:3). He took many examples from daily life of toil in his parables, and chose his apostles from the working class. At a time when manual labor was despised and relegated to slaves in the ancient world, we find in Krishna and Jesus the

exaltation of ordinary occupation. No type of decent work can be considered bad because none of which is beneath the dignity of Krishna or Jesus.

But in contrast to *BG*, the cross is an indispensable and a unique element of a Catholic SW, for it “reveals a new good springing from work itself, from work understood in depth and in all its aspects and never apart from work” (*LE 27*). In Jesus, God became man, He became like us in all things except sin so that we can fully comprehend the full meaning of suffering that we encounter in our working lives. His entire ministry of preaching, healing, and discipleship were all fruits of his dedication and hard work. CST argues that the toil and pain that accompanies all types of work is not meaningless. “The Christian finds in human work a small part of the cross of Christ and accepts it in the same spirit of redemption in which Christ accepted his cross for us” (*LE 27*). By patiently and selflessly bearing the toil and hardship that accompany work, Catholics share lovingly in the suffering of Christ and become conscious collaborators with His redemption for humanity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS ETHICS

I am convinced more than ever that business ethics needs a spiritual foundation. (Bouckaert 2015, p. 16)

From the discussion above, it is clear that SW is central to business ethics. Firstly, spirituality is the root of the morality of work, i.e. what makes work good per se and worthy of human pursuit. The two textual traditions deepen our understanding of what is meaningful work by giving explanations to the questions why must we work, what is the right attitude to work, and how our work connects us with others and with our ultimate end. This sense of connectedness “moves people beyond self-interest, such that workers consider the influence of their actions on others and prompts more ethical behavior” (Corner 2008, p. 378). In the words of Hindu philosopher Raju (1954, p. 206), “In one sense, every human activity is spiritual, when performed with the realization of its relation to the inner spirit; otherwise, it becomes mere selfish activity.” Both Catholicism and Hinduism offer a positive and holistic view of work by presenting different motives for work, from social subsistence and self actualization to self-fulfillment through Divine participation, and ultimately – salvation. To work is to glorify God and nourish one’s spirit. From a philosophical standpoint, the need for a work that is meaningful does not need any special justification. But because meaningful work has been linked with a number of desirable organizational outcomes, it has been a subject of interest for business ethicists and organizational theorists (Michaelson et al. 2014).

Since work is a spiritual activity, it is a moral activity as well. Hence, career choice is a moral choice. It involves self-analysis and self-criticism through discernment and deep reflection. In line with this, Chattopadhyay (2012, p. 117) points out the significance of *Jnanayoga* because, “Only when one has self knowledge can he undertake to manage himself.” We must not only choose a profession befitting our character and personality or, in the words of *BG*, to the most dominating *guna* in our personality. Part of the notion of profession as dharma in *BG* in the commentary of Easwaran (2011, p. 125), is to see to it that one’s “occupation is not at the expense of others. Making money from products or activities that are harmful, such as

cigarettes or weapons, sets a low ceiling on spiritual growth.” No matter how much profits they generate, we must not engage in economic activities that degrade people including ourselves and do not address authentic human needs. A Hindu-Catholic SW imposes a set of values on us as workers. We do not just work for ourselves to pursue our personal ambition or satisfy our individual needs and desire. In all economic activities, we need to consider the wellbeing of our communities. Because work has a social character and a vehicle for social interconnectedness, “work entails a social responsibility to work in harmony with others - and with the environment - so that the rights of all are balanced” (Ford 1995, p. 31). We need to foster a spirit of cooperation to maintain the common good and solidarity with all workers so that everyone will benefit from God’s creation.

BG and CST affirm that every worker has a spiritual soul or a higher self (*purusha*) that is closely related to God. She should be regarded as an end rather than an object to be used for the betterment of another. As she takes priority over all other material things, the person is the moral basis of any economic or social organization. Because persons are endowed with intelligence and free will, they ought to be treated with respect and dignity. Such dignity covers the world of work in its totality. This is clearly articulated in *BG* when Krishna says that all types of professions are created by Him. “Since the concept of human dignity is not based on human merit, or distinctive features of some people and not others, there is no justifiable reason to differentiate in the degree of respectful treatment due each person.” (Hick 2003, p. 31) This reprobates all forms of discrimination, including religious. It also entails respect for religious freedom in the workplace. CST “considers it her task always to call attention to the dignity and rights of those who work, to condemn situations in which the dignity and those rights are violated and to help guide the above-mentioned changes so as to ensure authentic progress by man and society” (*LE* 1).¹⁶ However, this notion of rights as arising from the inherent dignity of the individual person apart from the community is lacking in traditional Hinduism. “In Hinduism the rights of the individual person are always the rights of individuals in a community and consequently cannot be discussed without reference to one’s community duties and responsibilities (*dharma*)” (Coward 2005, p. 39). Nonetheless, there is a shift of emphasis among contemporary Hindu ethicists toward a universal aspect of *dharma* that includes duties and responsibilities to all beings.¹⁷

Given the many problems arising from the world of work today, including forced labor, bonded labor, child labor and other forms of exploitation, transforming the human world requires the transformation of the world of work so that the dignity of the person as a spiritual subject is respected. Every worker has an inner life or higher self that needs to be nourished. *LE* (6) states that since the person is the author and beneficiary of work, work is for the person, not the other way around. When the latter happens, work is overvalued. In *BG*, the claim that work does not emanate from our higher self (*purusha*) does not mean it is not part of who we are, for our whole

¹⁶ Some of the most important rights of the workers that CST defends include the right to work, to form trade unions, to strike, to receive just wage and social benefits, to rest and to work in safe conditions.

¹⁷ “Hinduism is not credal. Adherence to *dharma* is therefore not an acceptance of certain beliefs, but the practice or performance of certain duties which are defined in accordance with dharmic social stratification” (Flood 1996, p. 12). Here lies both the strength and weakness of Hindu *dharma*. As a non-dogmatic concept, it is open to change and flexibility, it can be re-examined, criticized and reformulated to deal with actualities of change and meet the needs and challenges of modern times. However, its lack of specific content and its justification become a problem as traditional social structures turn out to be obsolete. A new and more consistent theoretical framework is needed to provide grounding for *dharma*.

self is present every time we work. But we are not totally absorbed by our work since our higher self is free of any agency, it transcends all our actions. While work has an intrinsic value, valuing work above persons would be contrary to the teachings of CST and *BG*. Thus, our social roles and professional obligations have to be coordinated with the nature of our transcendent soul/self. We have spiritual aspirations that must be considered in the workplace in order to promote our overall health and psychological wellbeing. Problems related to work are not only material or economic but spiritual or moral too – human fulfillment, dignity, meaningfulness, creativity, work-life balance, etc. Recognition of the spiritual/higher self is essential to develop a holistic paradigm of work. This entails rejecting the notion that work is a commodity. At present “the material paradigm still constitutes the main framework of reference and driving force in defining public policy” (Peccoud 2004, p. 24). Religious and spiritual variables have been largely excluded from organizational research (Neubert and Halbesleben 2015). According to Zsolnai (2015), the dominant management model today is still based on a materialistic conception of the person – a being who seeks to maximize her sensual pleasure and self-interest. CST points out that the degradation of work is the result of the triumph of materialistic-economistic thought that denies the spiritual dimension of work.

SW is not only about company retreats or meditation and prayers in the workplace, it also concerns material realities of economic life as both *BG* and CST recognize the social and the objective dimensions of work. The priority given to the spiritual or subjective aspect of human work in *BG* and CST does not entail total disregard of the material aspect of work and its external outcomes. SW is not simply an individualized pursuit of meaning, it is a lived experience connected to our embodied existence in the community of which we are a part. When work is devalued or distorted, society is damaged, and families and communities suffer. Thus a Hindu-Catholic SW would be “very critical of the present global neo-liberal economic paradigm of deregulation, privatization, flexibility, consumerism and free market economy in which profit, capital and wealth stand over people” (Peccoud 2004, p. 28).

The task that lies ahead is for business leaders to develop a model of work organization that will respect and promote the spiritual dimension so that “spirituality becomes a dimension, not only of human work, but also of organisational culture, a quality that would be manifested in all aspects of organizational functioning.” (Gotsis and Kortezi 2008, p. 854) Recognition of the spiritual “goes beyond the material aspects of quality – which might include, for example, an uncontaminated workplace, a safe job and a minimum wage” (Peccoud 2004, p. 25). To begin with, there is a growing awareness among business ethicists to rediscover the meaning of religious vocation or spiritual calling and how it relates to secular professions. Studies show the significance of religion when it comes to one’s choice of profession and work values (Parboteeah 2009). Spiritual calling has been linked to organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Neubert and Halbesleben 2015). The term ‘professional,’ according to Schaefer (1984, p. 271), “as referring to the quality of ‘one who professes’ is linked to a concept of ‘vocation.’ One is ‘called’ to a certain task in life, a task suited to the expression of one’s personality.” Having established that work is a vocation and an important part of being human, people have the right to work, and to work in such conditions that support their calling to be a person. A society that respects this right is a more humane and decent society. Therefore unemployment is “in all cases an evil, which, when it reaches a certain level, can become a real social disaster” (*LE* 18). Business leaders are challenged to enable their employees to realize their spiritual potential while fulfilling the requirements of their professions by providing them with work conditions where

they can flourish, act responsibly, and serve their community. “Managers should be attentive to the gifts displayed by employees as signs of that vocation and willing to provide resources and opportunities, as appropriate, for employees to recognize and fulfill their vocations” (Kennedy 2003, 92). Work should enhance one’s God-given or natural talents. Companies have the obligation to hire and promote people most suited to the job in terms of qualifications and abilities.

Part of treating employees with respect is giving them a chance to participate actively in production and decision making in their workplaces through some kind of co-management and profit-sharing. “They should be given the possibility to be responsible and accountable for what they do” (Naughton and Laczniak 1993, 990). Intrinsic or non-material motivations such as self-actualization, sense of fulfillment, security or peace of mind, service to community, spiritual contentment, and interpersonal relationship should also be the focus of management, without totally abandoning the extrinsic/material rewards of work. When workers are intrinsically motivated to do their jobs, they experience a kind of *flow*, a sense of oneness with the activity. Workers also deserve a workplace where the firm’s goals, visions, and policies are clearly defined and transparent, respectful and trusting relationships are present, and where they are provided with support, tools, and opportunities to excel in their profession and grow as a person in all dimensions, including their social/family life. *GS* (64) states that the final end of economic production is “the service of man, and indeed of the whole man with regard to the full range of his material needs and the demands of his intellectual, moral, spiritual, and religious life.”

Inasmuch as work is a divine participation and a path to salvation, it is important that business leaders provide reasonable accommodation for workers of various faiths to express in their own ways their religious commitments. Hindus and Catholics need a kind of work that has connection with their subjectivity or inner lives, that nourishes their soul/spirit, and provides opportunities to glorify God. Accommodating employee’s spiritual and religious expressions in the workplace not only has possible benefits to any organization (Krahnke and Hoffman 2002), it also avoids potential religious harassment or discrimination litigation. On the other hand, when workers perceive religious discrimination in their organization, their commitment and engagement are negatively affected (Messarra 2014). How much religious expression will be allowed in consideration of the needs of the company as well as other cultural, legal, or ethical constraints is a subject for a different research. However, as employees increasingly bring their religious beliefs and practices in the workplace, religious discrimination cases have also increased.¹⁸ One explanation to this is that as a source of identity, religion is not necessarily observable (i.e. it is possible for it to be concealed), thus many expect that it should remain concealed or hidden. (Ghumman et al. 2013, p. 440) Another major cause of religious discrimination is ignorance, leading to stereotypical views of religions. As mentioned, this is one of the results of separating spirituality from religion that often leads to simplistic and even distorted generalizations that reduce religion to membership in specific faith community or expression of rituals, behavioral patterns, etc. (extrinsic religiosity) (Benefiel et al. 2014). On the contrary, rather than implying overtly religious acts, a Hindu-Catholic SW refers to the integration of faith in the concrete circumstances of a person's life. Increased understanding of

¹⁸ “Although religious discrimination claims are relatively low compared to other types of claims, recent statistics from the Equal Employment Opportunity commission (EEOC 2011a) reveal that religious-based discrimination claims from the years 2000 and 2010 have risen sharply (96% increase) over the past decade in comparison to most other protected categories” (Ghumman et al. 2013, p. 440).

different religions and their commonality will help employers manage their workers effectively in terms of ethics programs, engagement, recruiting and retention (Miller and Ewest 2013).

CONCLUSION

This interreligious analysis demonstrates that as far as *BG* and *CST* are concerned, *SW* can be a unifying force, a locus for cross-cultural dialogue, and a bridge between different beliefs. It challenges the contention of the secular approach to *SW* that the presence of religions in the workplace is undesirable. It also provides theoretical grounding to some of the findings of empirical research on *SW*. For example, some of the core elements of *SW* measured are experience of joy or fulfillment, a sense of whole self while at work, consciousness of transcendence, peace of mind, and interconnection with others. (Marques et al. 2007) Hindu and Catholic religions strive for work-worship integration and regard secular profession as part of human dharma/vocation that is based on the nature of the self as a substantial unit. Spirituality and action as well as commitment to transcendental life and engagement in mundane tasks are not mutually exclusive. We fulfill this vocation with full seriousness and commitment, not being too fixated on success, failures, or external rewards. Fulfillment comes from work because there is an inherent satisfaction when one uses and applies to perfection her potentialities, skills, and natural qualities (*gunas*). Muniapan and Satpahty (2013, p. 182) describe *Karmayoga* as dexterity in action. "When one is in a profession that suites one's talents and temperaments he is peaceful, balanced and equanimous." Lastly, work is also a source of connection to our community and fellow humans.

It was discussed earlier that ethics is inseparable from spirituality. But a major problem with secular *SW* is its inadequacy in conceptualizing the complex relationship between spirituality and business ethics. Because spirituality is detached from ethical teachings of religions, fundamental questions regarding what is the root of *SW*, what makes work meaningful, and how our work connects us with others and with our ultimate end are left open. In contrast, both textual traditions relate work with the notion of calling or dharma that entails ethical obligation and imposes a set of values on workers. Work is a duty to ourselves to develop our humanity and God-given talents or natural qualities. Work is also our duty (dharma) to God who deserves our best efforts. By means of our work, we praise God and glorify Him. Because the emphasis of secular *SW* is on the beneficial effects of *SW* to organizational outcomes, some are apprehensive that *SW* may eventually become a mere management instrument for increased profit. "If spirituality is ultimately about nonmaterialistic concerns, is it appropriate to focus on the material gains to be reaped by integrating spirituality into organisational life?" (Benefiel 2003, p. 384) Most business ethicists agree that ethical principles are end in themselves and while they are not opposed to firm's profitability, ethics takes priority over the latter. Both *BG* and *CST* express the view that maximization of self-interest without any regard for the wellbeing of others has no place in *SW*. They manifest a positive outlook when it comes to the creation of wealth (*artha*), but they teach that this is not the ultimate goal. They reject a purely utilitarian or materialistic understanding of work. This is because in the words of *LE* work is an act of a person, while for *BG*, work (*Karma*) is inseparable from self-knowledge (*Jnana*) and devotion (*Bhakti*). The meaning and value of work are intrinsic to it irrespective of its economic/external outcomes. This is the source of the dignity of work that management ought to respect.

Another limitation of a secular SW according to Gotsis and Kortezi (2008, p. 583) is its tendencies to treat SW as if it were a panacea to all organizational problems. What must be considered is that SW does not translate into any specific or even morally good way of organizing work. Even though *BG* and *CST* express religiously inspired and rationally supported ethical teachings regarding work, these can be misinterpreted or misappropriated. A case in point is the historical practice of *Varna* where “work subordinates man and man is made for work.” (Peccoud 2004, p. 36)¹⁹ There is always a gap between faith and action, theory and practice, or belief and lived experience. Theoretical discussion should not be confused with descriptive account of actual practices and historical reality. However, actual practices are oftentimes unintelligible unless related to normative teachings that not only guide people’s actions, they can also motivate change.²⁰ Because work is a dimension of our embodiment as taught by *BG* and *CST*, it is conditioned by material realities. A Hindu-Catholic SW involves ethical analysis of concrete situations as human workers are affected by technological, economic, and organizational aspects of their employment, including concerns for alienation, injustices and exploitation. They both recognize that SW is a lived experience connected to our historical existence in our society and in the workplace.

While a secular SW addresses the concerns of workers who are spiritual but not religious, it fails to connect spirituality with the lived experiences of many workers who belong to their respective faith communities, and to the interfaith processes that are taking place in the world today. It cannot adequately deal with religious diversity, which is one of the causes of workplace discrimination and harassment. It cannot shed light on potential religious conflict in the workplace and in intercultural encounters in the global economy. With its negative stand on the presence of religion in the workplace, secular SW may even reinforce religious discrimination/harassment as it advocates for the concealment, if not elimination of religion in the workplace. A minimalist and generic treatment of spirituality by the secular approach fails to capture the nuances and substantial differences among religions. Instead, what it frequently emphasizes is the potential of SW to create unity in the workplace by overlooking complex conceptual issues. (Benefiel et al. 2014, p. 181) In the case of the two religions under consideration, the Hindu teaching on *karma* and reincarnation does not have exact equivalence in *CST* while the salvific mystery of Christ’s crucifixion is unique to the latter’s SW. The notion of workers’ rights is not well-articulated in Hindu ethics tradition and while both religions affirm the spiritual dimension of the person and its primacy, their teachings are rooted in distinct philosophical anthropologies. Because there are genuine differences between the two religions, religion itself can be a source of conflict in the workplace especially if those differences are emphasized and left unexplained, while similarities are neglected. As far as this research is concerned however, we see more convergence than divergence between Catholicism and Hinduism in SW. “Convergence means respecting each tradition.” (International Labor Office 2012, p. 2) This suggests that while there are challenges associated with religious diversity that make it both beneficial and problematic in the workplace, not all of these challenges are insurmountable.

Interreligious SW builds on the contributions of religions to SW discourse. While a religion-based approach considers how work is compatible with the spiritual and ethical teachings

¹⁹ See *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2428, “Work is for man, not man for work.”

²⁰ In interreligious dialogue, “religions are challenged not simply to justify everything, but to deliver their best and most profound message.” (Kung 1986, p. 65)

of major religions, “an inherent flaw when spirituality is theoretically conceived and constructed with the framework of a specific” religion, according to Gotsis and Kortezi (2008, p. 582), is that the concept is “deprived of its universalistic nature.” Currently, many business ethicists are searching for global ethics. “[T]he current globalization and the existence of an increasingly interconnected world seem to require a common ground to promote dialog, peace, and a more humane world.” (Mele and Sanchez-Runde 2013, p. 681) It is essential to compare and contrast the findings that come from investigations on SW from the perspectives of specific religions, otherwise researchers and practitioners in the field may continue to hold a relativist, exclusivist and fragmented view of SW. Dialogue between *BG* and *CST* shows that work is viewed as a vocation, a divine participation that has both social and subjective dimensions, and a path to salvation. Finding such common grounds on how different religions regard SW would enable business professionals and managers to truly value diversity and inclusiveness and respond ethically to expressions of religions in an increasingly pluralistic workplace.

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