# Interreligious Spirituality of Work. *Bhagavadgita* and Catholic Social Teaching

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**Abstract:**

This essay is an interreligious study of spirituality of work. It considers the normative/doctrinal teachings on work in *Bhagavadgita* and Catholic Social Teaching. It will begin by exploring a Hindu spirituality of work based on *Bhagavadgita*. 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 Catholic Social Teaching that resonate with *Bhagavadgita*'s tenets on spirituality of work will follow. These themes will serve as analytical elements that will frame an interreligious spirituality of work from the two points of view. This study will demonstrate that, as far as spirituality of work is concerned, there is more convergence than divergence between Catholicism and Hinduism. Spirituality of work can be a unifying force, a locus for cross-cultural dialogue, and a bridge between different beliefs in the workplace.

**Keywords:** Spirituality of Work, Hinduism, Catholic Social Teaching, Work Ethic, Interreligious Dialogue.

This essay is an interreligious study of spirituality of work (SW). 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 serve as analytical elements that will frame an interreligious SW from the two points of view. Inasmuch as the focus of this study is SW, it does not present an in-depth 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 salvation/liberation. Similarities and differences between the texts under consideration will be examined but such examination will be limited to the most critical and relevant points. The choice of Hinduism fills in the current gap in investigating SW outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition, which has been the predominant focus of attention. Hinduism is one of the major religions

comprising 15% of the world population. *BG* is one of the most important texts in Hinduism, known to most Hindus and many recite daily by heart "Many are convinced that the *Bhagavadgita* is the key book for the re-spiritualization of humankind in our age." (Klostermaier 1994, 99)

**A Hindu Spirituality of Work in *Bhagavadgita***

It is well known that the teachings of *BG* are contained in the dialogue between Arjuna, and Krishna. Prior to the start of the decisive battle, as the two opposing armies of the princely cousins Pandavas and Kauravas face each other, Arjuna experiences a profound crisis as he wonders about what will be the outcome of this fratricidal war. He questions whether proceeding with this conflict is the right thing to do. Arjuna is conflicted between his obligation to protect his family and his duty to fight as a member of the warrior class (*kshatriya*). It becomes clear, however, that the problem of Arjuna is not only moral but also existential, as it involves *moksha,* i.e. the state of release from the bondage of reincarnation.

Various systems in Hinduism have different prescriptions on how to attain *moksha*. It is in *BG* where one can find an attempt to synthesize these diverse and competing accounts. While it does not reject ascetic renunciation per se as a means to attain *moksha*, *BG* 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 or karma.[1] "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 agree that three major paths can be discerned: *Jnana*, *Karma*, and *Bhakti* Yogas. The path to *moksha* includes all three, they are not mutually exclusive as no yoga is sufficient by itself. In applying them into daily life, they are to be practiced simultaneously. 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.

**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 the 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 one's true nature. Comprehending the nature of self leads to wisdom in action. Shideler (1960, 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 *prakriti*, *purusha* is the conscious and unmanifest part of oneself that is enduring and immovable, 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 variations of things 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, *purusha* 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, 64).

*BG* claims that the individual is a single entity. *Prakriti* and *purusha* both comprise the person. But because *purusha* is unchanging, it is *prakriti* 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, 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 the confusion of *purusha* with the ego or I-maker, resulting into the entanglement of the former with the latter when in reality the I-maker 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 transcend 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. Ordinarily, we 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, 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 self from the embodied one. This form of intellectual discipline provides new insights for action and centered living. One becomes indifferent to the external outcomes of her actions. Happiness and sorrow, gain and loss, success

and failure are all regarded with an even eye. Freed from worries, one achieves peace of mind and tranquility that enables her to act effectively.

*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, which are activities of the lower self. When the mind is fixated on sense objects, it loses sight of *purusha* and gets absorbed with the empirical self and how the latter is affected by actions and passions. By distinguishing *prakriti* from *purusha*, one is freed from the trappings of sensual pleasures. She realizes that her higher self is not the doer her 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, 348). It is not enough to do our actions with correct mind set, we must do only those actions that are right. Proper action is that which is in accord with *dharma*, improper action is contrary to it. *Dharma* stands for duty, ethics, law, righteousness, 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, 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 a 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. *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, 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, 86). In this context, *Dharma* is one of the four objectives (*purushartas*) that define the aims of Hindu way of life.[2] 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 *Asramas*.

"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, 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 tranquil 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 outcomes of the action. Krishna advises Arjuna to focus on his action with indifference to external results, consequences or extrinsic rewards.

If *Asrama* is a model of ordering individual life, *Varna* is a system of ordering society. Both institutions ensure the application of ethical, social and spiritual values of all work. Krishna tells Arjuna to set aside his personal relationship and look into his class duty (*varna dharma*). The *Varna* system already existed as early as the Vedic period. "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, 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 (Klostermaier 1994, 334). *Jati* is the actual social group where one is born. No one knows the origin of *jati* and how it gets related to *Varna* in practice. "The traditional view is that the jatis represent a proliferation of social groups from the varna system" (Flood 1996, 60). Unlike *Varna*, *jati* suggests no divine origin. *BG* (4, 13) declares the four classes as creation of Krishna. Class differentiation is based on the different functions rooted in human 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, 77). All achieve their perfection by actualizing their natural abilities.

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. *Varna* 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, 3). The classification is not only hierarchical but 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" (Desai 1946, 102). The *Upanishads* (Chandogya 4, 4.1-5) states that the ultimate basis of social class is not birth but virtue, character and ability. As known to many, this teaching is unfortunately contrary to the historical reality. When birth acquired greater significance than qualification and hierarchy took priority over function, *Varna* degenerated into casteism, racism, gender inequality and exploitation that plague India for thousands of years and cause many of its social ills.

**Yoga of Love and Devotion- *Bhakti***

*Bhakti* is ontologically based on the nature of our higher self. Like other paths, *Bhakti* involves detachment, i.e. 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, 284) comments, "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 devotion to 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 which is the final stage of deliverance.

Several passages in *BG* give emphasis on *Bhakti*. If these lines are separated from the rest of the text, they give the impression that one is saved 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 salvation. Blind performance of devotional ceremonies, without understanding their meaning, does not lead to *moksha*. Thus, *Bhakti* should be not separated from the other paths. One cannot practice *Bhakti* without overcoming self-centered habits (Loy 1988, 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" (Desai 1946, 95). When prayers and rituals are performed correctly, *Bhakti* becomes a way of knowledge and selfless action (Koller 2006, 195). In addition, *Karma* and *Jnana* are both forms of devotional worship. Since *purusha* is one with God, *Jnana* includes devotion to Krishna (*BG* 4, 9-11). When duties are performed for their own sake, without any attachment to their outcomes, they become acts of devotion to Krishna (*BG* 18, 46). Conversely, devotional offerings must be performed in the spirit of non-attachment, similar to *Karma*yoga. Otherwise, they will only result in continual rebirth due to the influence of desire and ignorance.

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 all actions in the world. *BG* (6, 11) tells 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 worlds should come to an end, but nothing that He does affect or disturb Him (*BG* 3, 24; 4, 6-8).

Love of Krishna does not only entail performing specific actions or doing rituals or sacrifices. Krishna says (*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 for His creatures. All comes from God. Seeing God everywhere, one is freed of any negative feeling toward anything. Krishna tells Arjuna to 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 eliminates any form of internal conflict in the performance of *dharma*, as one attains peaceful oneness with Krishna.

**Dialogue with Catholic Social Teaching**

Catholicism's SW has its roots in the scriptures, both the Old and the New Testaments. Genesis 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 (John 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. "The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it." (Genesis 2, 5-15) In working, the person participates in God's activity. 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 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 the believers with opportunities to exercise virtues and practice God's commandments. 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 as a Vocation**

Beginning with *Rerum Novarum* (1891), 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 fulfils 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, 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 *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.

Human vocation is both supernatural and temporal. "The Christian who neglects his temporal duties," as stated in Vatican Council II (1965, 43) *Gaudium et Spes* (*GS*), "neglects his duties toward his neighbor and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation." This calling requires thoughtful response and steadfast commitment, for seeking fulfillment is a responsibility and 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, 106) 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, 48).

*Laborem Exercens* (*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. *Gunas* in *BG* represent our 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 ones 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, 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 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 competence. CST and *BG* acknowledge and value the natural differences that exist among peoples. CST scholar Holland (2003, 181) comments, "These natural differences actually aided the whole community, for different people needed to play different parts in community life". Muniapan and Satpahty (2013, 182) describe *Karmayog*a as dexterity in action. "When one is in a profession that suites one's talents and temperaments he is peaceful, balanced and equanimous." 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 beings in His image and likeness. The person is composed of body and soul substantially united to form one nature. According to Fiorenza (1980, 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, 230) notes that although it never uses the term "'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, providence, and redemption. "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, 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, 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. 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, 116-117). As a cooperative or participative activity with God/Krishna, human work needs to be modeled to Divine work – productive, good, and valued for its own sake. Hence, *BG* (18, 41-49) declares that all work has intrinsic worth, for 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, 137). The pursuit of work as a vocation implies concern with other's welfare. Excellence in one's profession is not enough. To discern one's vocation/*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. 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, 36). The completion of human vocation and the welfare of society as a 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, 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 we work in. Work is a social need, it is a human reality as well as divine. Work is sanctified as a path toward a relationship with God and with 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, 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 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 Krsna's servant, and accepting the fighting of the war as his service" (Theodor 2010, 105).

The search for Christian fulfillment or Hindu *moksha* does not mean negation of social concerns. In his reflection on CST's view of work, Fiorenza (1980, 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." Devotion to God is not in opposition to social engagement, for in both religions, persons are called by God to care for all. A Hindu-Catholic SW enforces a set of values to workers. 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, 31). We need to foster a spirit of cooperation for the maintenance of common good and solidarity with all workers, so that everyone will benefit from God's creation. Part of the notion of profession, as *dharma* in *BG* in the commentary of Easwaran (2011, 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.

Individual work "is naturally interrelated with the work of others. More than ever, work is work with others and for others: it is a matter of doing something for someone else" (*CA* 31). 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. It 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, 178). To fully comprehend the reality of work, we need to understand the spatio-temporal setting in which it takes place.

Society is the realm in which we assume our obligations to others – this is what the system 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, 95). Today, it is obvious that we are situated in our respective communities in different ways, not only by birth or occupational groups but by religion, economic status, extended family, cultural heritage etc. In India's history, *Varna* has been wrongly interpreted and practiced, which leads to the marginalization of those who have less power in traditional Hindu society (e.g. women and the poor). But this is contrary to *BG*, which states that *Varna* is for the sake of prosperity and world order (Doniger 2014, 168; Koller 2006, 94). It ought to be about service to 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 as his capacity goes" (Radhakrishan 1940, 368). The fact 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 – historical and economic realities influence its organization. Because of our embodiment, we live a conditioned existence. The work that we do and the social organizations we establish are oftentimes marked with sin and 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 it is concretely organized.

The historical 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, 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 but as persons with rights and dignity, whose participation in management is not only welcomed but encouraged.

*LE* states that work is the foundation of human solidarity. 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, 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 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, 8).

**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, 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 and Han 2013, 64). The embodied/lower self is not meant to be negated in *BG*. What the text denies is the absoluteness of *prakriti*, for it is only a limited part of who we are. While the two texts differ in explaining how the self/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 spirit. The person is an embodied being, 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 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. 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. 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 exercising responsibility and value judgement, reflection, and active involvement.

**Work as Path to Salvation**

It is not only in the creative aspect of work that we can find its spiritual dimension but also in its redemptive aspect. "Christianity and Hindu religion have a sense of the world as alienated, fallen, and in *in need of redemption*" (Kung 1986, 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 individual desires and sensual experiences. 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.

In the same vein that *BG* strives for the integration of knowledge, action, and devotion, 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, 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 motives and level of awareness until one reaches the point when 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 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), and to pursue this topic further, is to go beyond the scope of this essay. 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 a 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, 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 collaborators with His redemption for humanity.

**Conclusion**

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. A Hindu-Catholic SW strive for work-worship integration and regard secular profession as a vocation/*dharma* 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. Lastly, work is also a source of connection to our community and fellow humans. The task that lies ahead is for business leaders to develop a model of work organization that will respect and promote SW, so that spirituality becomes a dimension of corporate culture and an integral part of organizational functioning.

## Endnotes

1. Although the term action (karma) in *BG* applies to all kinds of activities including their moral consequences as well as human thoughts, we are concerned here with action in a specific sense, i.e. professional work or paid employment, and it is in this sense that *BG* speaks highly of it (Nadkarmi 2013, 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 of the action of Arjuna as a *kshatriya*, i.e. action in relation to his social function.
2. As referring to social 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, 164).

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