Human Dignity and The Dignity of Work: Insights from Catholic Social Teaching

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ABSTRACT: What contributions could we expect from Catholic Social Teaching (CST) on human dignity in relation to the dignity of work? This article begins with an explanation of CST and its relevance for secular audiences. It then proceeds to identify the main features of human dignity based on the notion of imago Dei in CST. Next comes an analysis of the dignity of work in CST from which two normative principles are derived: the precedence of duties over rights and the priority of the subjective dimension of work over the objective dimension. Afterwards, the “right to work” and the “rights of workers” are engaged with from this normative perspective, particularly within the context of globalization.

KEY WORDS: human dignity, Catholic Social Teaching, dignity of work, right to work, globalization

“Where there is no work, there is no dignity.”

Pope Francis on Twitter, June 11, 2015

INTRODUCTION

According to the Pontifical Yearbook of 2014, there were 1.228 billion Catholics by the end of 2012, 17.5% of the world population. They also multiply faster than the global growth rate. Certainly, they do not all hold exactly the same religious beliefs or walk lock-step in observing all moral principles. But it provides an idea of the potential breadth and depth of the influence of Catholic Social Teaching (CST). As Huntington (1991) observed, after the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church became one of the strongest champions of human dignity, human rights and democracy worldwide.

In the Church’s own understanding, CST emerges from the encounter of Gospel teachings with social problems (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986: 72). Its purpose is “to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly” (Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est (DCE), 2005: 28). CST represents a collection of writings whose final goal is the realization of social justice. CST seeks eminently practical aims.

As part of moral theology, CST contains the official doctrine or “magisterium” of the Church on social issues (John Paul II, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, (SRS), 1987: 41).
It can be distinguished from “Catholic social thought or tradition,” which brings together valuable but unofficial reflections of Catholic authors (Schuck, 1994; Himes, 2005). Despite not forming part of the magisterium, this tradition provides an inestimable service to Popes and other members of the hierarchy (official establishment) in the drafting of CST documents. In the strict sense, CST began with Leo XIII’s encyclical or circular on capital and labor, Rerum Novarum (RN), in 1891. Since then, the scope of CST has broadened to include, besides papal encyclicals, letters, messages and addresses, documents from the Second Vatican Council, especially the Constitution Gaudium et Spes (GeS), on the Church in the modern world.

Among CST documents, a special place belongs to the “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church” (CSDC) (Pontifical Council Justice and Peace, 2004) resulting from a mandate to produce an “approved synthesis of Catholic social doctrine” (John Paul II, 1999: 54). The Compendium is not a mere summary, but an authoritative account of CST to date, presented “in a complete and systematic manner” as “the fruit of careful Magisterial reflection” (CSDC: 8). Since then, Popes have quoted the Compendium in official documents (Benedict XVI, DCE, Caritas in Veritate (CiV), 2009; Francis, Evangelii Gaudium (EG), 2013) and scholars have followed suit, using it as a source on various issues (Santos and Laczniak, 2009; Costa and Ramus, 2012; Melé, 2012; Klein & Laczniak, 2013). As a sign of its importance, the Holy See has ensured official translations in sixteen different languages, three more than the translations of Benedict XVI’s encyclicals, for instance.

Is not the accomplishment of CST’s goal, the realization of social justice, hampered by its forming part of Catholic Moral Theology, ultimately grounded on authority and faith-based claims? What specific contributions could CST make to the understanding of human dignity and the dignity of work? What is their value in a largely secular and democratic society and for people who do not adhere to the Catholic credo?

Firstly, we cannot ignore that Catholics account for almost a fifth of the world’s population. By sheer numbers, their beliefs and practices are influential in the global arena. Even if we set this aside, the Pope is the head of the Vatican City State, and above all, a moral and spiritual leader. His teachings possess moral force because he is not beholden to earthly powers or economic, political and ideological interests. His pronouncements reach far beyond Catholic followers. CST’s goal “is simply to help purify reason and contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgment and attainment of what is just” (DCE: 28). It is able to “purify reason” not only because it is free of material and partisan interests, but also because it is guided by faith. This is not as strange as it may seem. Even in ordinary affairs—such as the identity of one’s parents, for instance—human beings depend on faith or trust; they accept knowledge which they themselves have not verified, yet which they take as true, based on the credibility or authority of who reveals it. Faith, therefore, like trust, is not contrary to reason, but another, often complementary way of knowing.

CST addresses “all men of good will” (John XXIII, Pacem in Terris (PiT), 1963: 1) regardless of beliefs and “argues on the basis of reason and natural law, namely, on what is in accord with the nature of every human being” (DCE: 28). CST speaks also to followers of other religions. Its message appeals not to faith alone, but also
to reason and a normativity inscribed in nature itself, known as the “natural law”
tradition (CSDC: 138-143). However, CST does not attempt “to impose on those
who do not share the Catholic faith ways of thinking and modes of conduct proper to
faith” (DCE: 28). It respectfully proposes what it deems to be cogent explanations,
from the perspective of reason in harmony with faith. We present this study with
this same mind (Tinder, 2003: 12).

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the field of spirituality and
management, borne from the recognition of the non-material or spiritual dimen-
sion of human beings (Fagley & Adler, 2012; Miller, 2007; Cash & Gray, 2000;
Mitroff & Denton, 1999; McCormick, 1994). Our research could also contribute
to this new area, insofar as religion is a form of spirituality, and business ethics, an
aspect of management (Guillén, Ferrero, & Hoffman, 2015).

CST makes use of perennial principles as practical guidelines for judgment and
action (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986: 72). Since an accurate
knowledge of circumstances is necessary, CST adopts an interdisciplinary approach
and “avails itself of contributions from all branches of knowledge, whatever their
source (…). In view of that particular part of the truth that it may reveal, no branch
of knowledge is excluded” (CSDC: 76-77; John Paul II, Centesimus Annus (CA),
1991: 59). At the same time, although the principles rooted in human nature are
perennial, social change prompts CST to revise some specific judgments (SRS: 3;
CSDC: 85). For instance, a “just wage,” the salary sufficient for the maintenance
and wellbeing of a worker and dependents, varies with time and place. Thus, CST
is subject to certain evolution in particular judgments, although not in principles,
as scholars point out (Hollenbach, 2014; Rhonheimer, 2010). In summary, CST
represents a body of moral reflection forged through centuries on social issues; it
seeks rational and faith-harmonious solutions in accordance with the characteristics
of human nature within changing historical contexts.

After this introduction on the origin, scope and methods of CST, we shall out-
line the subsequent sections of this article. First, we shall deal with the notion of
human dignity in CST, followed by a similar account for the dignity of work. Next
comes an analysis of the “right to work” and the “rights of workers” based on CST
premises. We shall then explore how CST principles regarding human dignity and
the dignity of work respond to challenges in business and economic life, within
the context of globalization. Lastly, we shall present our conclusions, as well as
avenues of future research.

HUMAN DIGNITY IN CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

This section begins with a statement on the meaning of human dignity, followed by
an exploration of its defining features in CST. We identify its ultimate justification in
the faith-claim that all human beings are made in God’s image and likeness (imago
Dei) and offer arguments why this constitutes a reasonably valid contribution. Based
on three different, non-exclusive interpretations of imago Dei, for which we cite
“secular warrants,” we delineate an equal number of distinguishing characteristics of
human dignity. We end by explaining how the interrelation between human dignity
and other constitutive principles of CST leave their mark on the understanding of these notions.

Dignity means many things in common language (Dan-Cohen, 2012; Sulmasy, 2008). Among others, it refers to the intrinsic worth or value of every human being that distinguishes him from any other creature. This worth or value is often associated with the capacity for reason and autonomy or “self-determination” through free choice. It also implies the need for consensus or mutual recognition among fellow human beings. Dignity demands respect. In sum, dignity refers to an exalted social rank, which has come to be attributed universally to all human beings (Dan-Cohen, 2012: 5-6).

John XXIII (MeM, 1961: 219-220) establishes human dignity as the “one basic principle” of CST: “individual human beings are the foundation, the cause and the end of every social institution.” Insofar as human beings are accorded dignity by virtue of their personhood, this is known as the “personalist principle”: “The person represents the ultimate end of society” (CSDC: 105, 132). Indeed, there are several other aspects of human personhood apart from dignity, such as unity of body and soul, openness to Transcendence, uniqueness or unrepeatability and freedom (CSDC: 124-148).

This principle of dignity is not meant to be taken isolatedly, but together with other principles: the common good, subsidiarity and solidarity (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988: 35-43). Among these principles is an interrelatedness, reciprocity and complementariness as befits a doctrinal body or “corpus” (SRS: 1); and to take them apart would be to misinterpret them. They comprise an organic unity that expresses the truth about society; they are proposed as a universal and timeless normative standard to which individual consciences are encouraged to refer (CSDC: 163).

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of CST’s understanding of human dignity is its ultimate basis on the belief that all human beings are made in God’s image and likeness (imago Dei): “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Bible: Genesis, 1: 27). Since this is a faith claim grounded on revelation, of what use is it to one who is secular or who does not share this belief? We think that the CST concept of human dignity is relevant, for similar reasons that the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights, for example, is considered binding, despite the lack of agreement among framers regarding its foundations or paramount meaning (Maritain, 1949: 9-17). Just like the UN Declaration, the primary purpose of CST is not to achieve a theoretical consensus regarding the meaning and justification of human dignity, but to effectively prevent actions, which trample upon it. What is sought is a practical goal; that human dignity be upheld, albeit for different reasons. Likewise, it is not necessary to be Moslem to work in Islamic finance. One only needs to follow the rules, without having to believe in the principles on which they are based. Therefore, notwithstanding conflicts on metaphysical interpretations and justifications, CST can still be a valid guide for action given its eminently practical aim.

In biblical language, the condition of human beings as imago Dei implies being “sacred,” “holy” or “set apart” (Kraynak, 2003: 84-94). Dignity requires
that humans—like God and unlike anything else—be accorded respect; to do otherwise would be “sacrilegious.” Aquinas interprets this theologically to mean at least two things. Providence guides human beings as rational creatures firstly, for their own sakes, and secondly, with a view to their own individual realization and fulfillment (Summa Contra Gentiles, l. III, c. 112-113) (Kraynak, 2003: 98-108). Kant formulates this idea philosophically when he states that human beings are “ends in themselves,” the flip-side of which is that they should never be treated merely as means or instruments (1996: 430). The Second Vatican Council revisits this in declaring that the human being is “the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake” (GeS: 24).

Having accepted CST’s proposal on human dignity for practical motives, we can find “secular warrants” for the notion of imago Dei, similar to the rational arguments used in the “natural law” tradition (Hollenbach, 2014: 253-255). By “secular warrants” we mean reasons accessible to non-religious persons because they do not presuppose belief in a Transcendent Being. As long as one rationally understands the notion of “human being” and a Christian “God”, he could draw the inference of a similarity between the two, without needing to express belief. In like manner, for instance, it would be sufficient for us to understand what “human beings” and “horses” are to affirm that both are partly similar to “centaurs”, without necessarily affirming belief in “centaurs.” Let us now examine three ways in which imago Dei may be predicated of a human being.

**Triple interpretation of “imago Dei”**

Firstly, there is a “substantialist” interpretation, according to which this image is inherent in the very substance of the human person (Hollenbach, 2014: 253-255; PrT: 89, 158; SRS: 47). Dignity is an attribute of the human person, affecting the substantial unity of body and soul. Present in each and every human being, it remains the same regardless of accidental changes of time and place. Rational indicators or signs of this aspect of dignity are the transcendence of the mind (the ability to think beyond the material universe), the inviolability of conscience (the capacity to search for a moral standard and adhere to it) and the excellence of freedom (autonomy or the power of self-determination through choices) (GeS: 15-17), all of which were already known to philosophers of the ancient Greek enlightenment. This lends support to the conviction that, indeed, human beings are made in God’s image in this “substantial” aspect of their being.

In second place comes the “relational” interpretation (Hollenbach, 2014: 253-255; Middleton, 2005; CSDC: 149; CiV: 55; John Paul II, Evangelium Vitae, 1995: 19). In the same way that the Christian God—as a Unity in a Trinity of persons—is “relational,” so too are human beings. To call human beings “persons” is to assert that each of them is an “individual substance of a rational nature” (Boethius). Aquinas (S Th I, q. 29, a. 2-3) adopts this definition and adds that intrinsic to persons or “rational natures” is an openness and a relationship with others through knowledge, such that they become “in a way, all things” (SCG III, 112, 5). Thus, in everything that persons are and do is a double dimension of individuality and relationality or sociality. There is no such thing as a person with a solitary or monadic existence.
Hence, both in God, who is a Trinity, and in human beings, we find a relational and rational multiplicity as condition for personhood. Because of the relational aspect of dignity, human beings are capable of entering into a unique personal relationship with God. We find “secular warrants” of this relational aspect of dignity and personhood in the Aristotelian account of human nature as a “social” or “political animal,” a “rational animal” that “communicates through words” (Politics, 1253a). Due to this, a purely individualistic ethic would be an inappropriate guide for human flourishing, because it does not take into account the relational or social dimension of human nature (GeS: 12).

Third is the “functional” interpretation, in which human beings resemble God by exercising dominion and care over creation (Hollenbach, 2014: 253-255; Middleton, 2005). Just as God, in the biblical narration, brought the world into existence and continues to rule and maintain it, human beings take responsibility over the material world, expressing dignity through their actions. As we have seen, dignity resides in this functional unit of body and soul; it does not pertain exclusively to the mind. Human beings are not mere passive parts of nature, as it were, through their bodies, but they are also able to exercise control over nature through the use of their mental faculties and whole being. The development of technology is an important evidence of this distinctive human ability which renders them “God-like” (GeS: 23). A consequence of this aspect of human dignity is the care, not only of nature in general, but also of the human body in particular. “By virtue of our unique dignity and our gift of intelligence, we are called to respect creation and its inherent laws” (Francis, Laudatio Si, 2015c: 68-69). Thus, stewardship over nature and the environment is not indifferent to human wellbeing and moral fulfillment (Benedict XVI, 2010).

Features of the notion of human dignity in CST

From this triple interpretation of imago Dei, accessible through “rational warrants,” we derive certain features of human dignity in CST. The “substantialist” interpretation indicates that dignity is inherent or intrinsic to every human being, a basic condition or irreducible principle of humanity. All human beings enjoy this dignity by belonging to the human species. In this “natural dignity,” all human beings are “equally noble,” with no difference on account of the political communities to which they belong (PiT: 89). This dignity of the human person is “identical in each one of us” (SRS: 47). Regardless of what happens to a person or what he does, despite intellectual and moral errors, one “never loses the dignity of being a person” (GeS: 28). Because we can always distinguish between the person and the error, one “never forfeits his dignity” (PiT: 158). This leads Pope Francis to affirm, “Nowadays the death penalty is inadmissible, no matter how serious the crime committed. It is an offense against the inviolability of life and the dignity of the human person, […] It does not render justice to the victims, but rather fosters vengeance” (2015b).

The “functional” interpretation of imago Dei points to another feature of human dignity, its need to be developed or elevated to a state of moral excellence or virtue: “the true worth and nobility of man [veram hominis dignitatem atque excellentiam] lie in his moral qualities, that is, in virtue” (RN: 24). This means that the basic, “substantialist” dignity that human beings possess is necessary, but insufficient;
a moral requirement exists that dignity be raised to the level of excellence or virtue. A healthy tension exists between what we call a “basic dignity” and a “full dignity”. Dignity displays an infl orescent character through which an inherent or intrinsic principle undergoes internal transformation, growth or development until it reaches perfection. This “functional” or “developmental” dynamic towards virtue does not demean anyone, because it forms part of “the common inheritance of men, equally within the reach of high and low, rich and poor” (RN: 24). Although basic dignity cannot be lost, nevertheless, it should be developed. And not everyone achieves this nor achieves it to the same degree, because it depends on free choices and actions, through the practice of the virtues (Ferrero & Sison, 2014).

Dignity can be developed to fullness when human beings exercise reason and free choice “through effective and skillful action,” instead of following external pressures or blind passions (GeS: 17). However, not all instances of rational agency perfect human dignity, only those in consonance with the law in the depths of conscience. No one imposes this law upon himself, yet it holds everybody in obedience: “to obey it is the very dignity of man” (GeS: 16). Dignity moves toward plenitude when human beings exercise dominion over material creation; even more so when they work together to establish a political, social and economic order: thus they “develop the dignity proper to them” (GeS: 9). This perfect state is eudaimonia, the flourishing or happiness to which everyone aspires, the end or purpose of human life. It is conditioned upon the attainment of virtue as a reward (RN: 24). The Church has always seen this effort of elevating and enriching human dignity as part of its mission (CA: 55; GeS: 40). There is no contradiction between affirming a dignity basic to all and a full dignity, which though open to everyone, is not achieved by everyone due to the misuse of freedom.

Through the “relational” interpretation of imago Dei, we infer another dimension of human dignity: the demand for mutual recognition or acknowledgment in social and political life. “For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates to others he can never live nor develop his potential” (GeS: 12). “Relationality” is an essential element of what it means to be human (CiV: 55). It is not just “something added on to man” (GeS: 25), who is never a “solitary being,” but always a “social being” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 1986: 32). Human freedom is “inherently relational,” such that when one uses it in an “individualistic way, […] its very meaning and dignity are contradicted” (EV: 19). Relationality serves as foundation for acts of solidarity and subsidiarity leading to the attainment of the common good and human flourishing (GeS: 25).

This relational aspect of dignity provides the social and political context within which persons exist. Because of their “essential dignity,” people are able to transcend the social order; however, they are conditioned by the “social structure” (education, environment), which helps or hinders their lives (CA: 37). The reciprocal affirmation of dignity—“everyone must consider his every neighbor without exception as another self, taking into account first of all His life and the means necessary to living it with dignity” (GeS: 27)—constitutes the foundational act of the social or political community. “[I]t is fundamental for our human development that our dignity, freedom and autonomy be acknowledged and respected;” that is, for our
nature as “relational beings, meant to find fulfillment through interpersonal relationships inspired by justice and love” to be recognized (Francis, 2015a: 1). After the “relational subjectivity” of the human person is accepted, one proceeds in integrating himself with others in a free and responsible way (CSDC: 149). In the absence of this relational frame or context, there could be no dignity, because there would be no persons to begin with. This relational condition allows for the development of dignity to perfection, in oneself and in others.

The relation between human dignity and the principles of CST

We shall now explain the links between human dignity and other core principles of CST for their proper understanding.

The principle of the common good, which “stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all people,” represents the “fullest meaning” of “every aspect of social life” (CSDC: 164). It is defined as “the sum total of the social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more easily” (GeS: 26). However, it is not “the simple sum of the particular goods of each subject of a social entity,” because “belonging to everyone and to each person, […] it is indivisible and […] only together is it possible to attain it, increase it and safeguard its effectiveness” (CSDC: 164). Hence, it is better understood as “the social and community dimension of the moral good” (CSDC: 164) or “the good of all people and of the whole person” (CSDC: 165). The common good consists of three essential elements: respect for the person, the social wellbeing and development of the group and peace, the stability and security of a just order (Catechism of the Catholic Church: 107-109). Not only does the common good derive from the basic dignity of human beings, but it is also the goal or objective of the integral development of dignity (Sison & Fontrodona, 2012). Individual flourishing can only be achieved together with the flourishing of others.

Corollary to the common good is the principle of the “universal destination of goods” (CSDC: 171). God created the earth for everyone “so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity” (GeS: 69). Human dignity guarantees each person a right to wellbeing necessary for his development. Yet this does not entail that everything be at the disposal of all, because rights have to be exercised in an orderly fashion (CSDC: 173). Hence, the institution of “private property,” by which human beings stake claim over part of the earth through work (CA: 31), precisely to ensure a sphere of autonomy and safeguard social order. Work, too, as a free act, arises from human dignity. This is the best way to avoid the “tragedy of the commons” by which what “belongs to everyone” is laid to waste, sooner than later. The right to private property is never viewed as absolute; it always has a “social function” (MeM: 430-431) and is subordinated to the “universal destination of goods” (John Paul II, Laborem Exercens (LE), 1981: 14). An offshoot of this is the “preferential option for the poor,” the marginalized living in conditions incompatible with growth and development (John Paul II, 1979: I/8).

Next comes the principle of subsidiarity: “Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and, at the same time, a great evil and
disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help [subsidium] to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them” (Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno (QA)*, 1931: 203). The defense and promotion of human dignity is best served when higher-order entities, such as the State, provide assistance to lower-order entities of civil society, instead of absorbing or substituting them. To do otherwise would be to supplant personal freedom, initiative and responsibility, constituting an affront to dignity: “Subsidiarity respects personal dignity by recognizing in the person a subject who is always capable of giving something to others” (CiV: 57).

In close connection with subsidiarity is the principle of participation (Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 1971: 22, 46). This imposes on every individual the right and duty to contribute to the cultural, economic, political and social life of the community, with the common good in view (*GeS*: 75). Although it applies to various areas, in the political sphere, it often translates into upholding the democratic process; for this reason, totalitarian and dictatorial regimes are a major cause of concern (*CSDC*: 190-191). Human dignity, therefore, is a premise for participation in different forms of social life and institutions; and this, in turn, is what elevates basic dignity to a superior level.

Last but not least, we find the principle of solidarity, also known as “interdependence” or “socialization” (*MeM*: 49; *GeS*: 42; *LE*: 14-15). This means awareness of a deep bond in humanity: “the intrinsic social nature of the human person, the equality of all in dignity and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples towards an ever more committed unity” (*CSDC*: 192). Solidarity ought not to be reduced to a “feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress” at the misfortunes of others, but grow into a “firm and persevering determination” to work in favor of the common good (*SRS*: 38; *LE*: 8; *CA*: 57). Solidarity is, perhaps, what most immediately follows from the relational aspect of dignity.

The purpose behind affirming the principle of human dignity is eminently practical, to serve as a guide for action. For this reason that the CST notion of dignity rests on a faith claim—the human being as imago Dei—does not invalidate it. Moreover, we find secular warrants in support of the different explanations—substantalist, functional and relational—of the concept of imago Dei. From these we derive unique features of human dignity in CST: it is an inherent, intrinsic, irreducible and indestructible quality equally found in all human beings; it requires development or elevation through free and thoughtful action to a state of moral excellence, perfection or virtue; and it necessitates a context or frame of mutual acknowledgment or recognition in social and political life and institutions. Another distinguishing mark of human dignity in CST is its essential connection to other core principles of the common good, the universal destination of goods, subsidiarity, participation and solidarity.

**THE DIGNITY OF WORK IN CATHOLIC SCHOOL TEACHING**

In this section, we establish, firstly, how work has evolved into something clothed with dignity in Western intellectual tradition, particularly within the Catholic milieu.
Afterwards, we again focus on the characteristics of the dignity of work in CST: the precedence of the duty or obligation to work over the right and the preeminence of the subjective dimension of work over the objective dimension. Lastly, we consider how the features of human dignity in CST—its intrinsic, developmental and social qualities, together with its interdependence with other principles—lend texture to the dignity of work.

The evolution of the concept of work

Although the dignity of the human being was recognized fairly early, not so with work. From Classical Antiquity into the Middle Ages, work and productive activity was always viewed as beneath the dignity of a pervasive aristocratic ideal (Wisman, 1998). Work was something slaves and artisans did, because they were obligated. The best life for human beings consisted in not having to work, in avoiding it as much as possible. Certainly, there was some basis for thinking of work as a “curse” and “undignified” in biblical religions. However, early Christian thinkers known as the Church Fathers (John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Ambrose and Irenaeus, among others) did not share the belief that work was an “opus servile” (servile act); rather, it was as an “opus humanum” (human act) worthy of honor (CSDC: 265). Without denying that toil was difficult, it was still an “arduous good” (bonum arduum): “something worthy, […], something that corresponds to man’s dignity, that expresses this dignity and increases it” (LE: 9).

Beginning the High Middle Ages, due to a controversy between secular clergy and the Mendicant Orders (such as the Franciscans and the Dominicans) on the obligatoriness of manual labor, new ways of understanding work were introduced (Sison, 1992). Work was any productive activity which involved the whole human being, not only the body but also the mind or soul, in accordance with the notion of “opus humanum.” Work, therefore, gained entrance into the sphere of dignity insofar as it was acknowledged to be a “human act,” an act of the rational and free person, which reflected his intrinsic worth. The worker begins to identify with his work, bringing inherent or intrinsic dignity to it as something “personal, inasmuch as the energy expended is bound up with the personality and is the exclusive property of him who acts” (RN: 13).

Attached to work was an instrumental value (bonum utile), implying that it was not valuable in itself. Aquinas spoke of three instrumental values of work: a means to avoid idleness (ad otium tollendum), to submit one’s body to superior faculties (ad corpus domandum) and to obtain sustenance (ad quaerendum victum) (Aquinas, 1902: p. II, c. 4, ad 8). Because of all these, and especially the third, work was obligatory, as a point of natural law and not only as a divine injunction (Bible: Genesis 3:19; Thessalonians 3:10). In these instrumental values we find a reflection of the developmental or dynamic aspect of human dignity. Work serves as a channel through which human dignity is brought to plenitude: “Work thus belongs to the vocation of every person, indeed, man expresses and fulfills himself by working” (CA: 6).

For Aquinas, there was a distinction among natural precepts: some were motivated by a collective need, others, by an individual need (Aquinas, 1902: p. II, c. 4, ad 1).
Human Dignity and The Dignity of Work

Work as a way of earning one’s sustenance seemed to respond to a collective need. We can imagine cases in which individuals can justly or honestly live off the work of others. Besides children, the aged and the infirm, this also seemed to be true for the Mendicant Orders. Dedicating their lives to study and preaching, they earned a “right” to receive alms (Aquinas, 1902: p. II, c. 6). Implicit was the broadening of the concept of work, from labor or manual work to other forms of production, which made use of the body differently. This included the liberal arts, teaching, administering justice and other spiritual tasks for the good of the community, such as the recitation of the breviary (the “liturgy of the hours”). These are instances of what we now call “intellectual” work or “white collar” work. Intellectual activities for the community now qualified as “work” and exempted one from manual labor or “blue-collar” work. Undoubtedly, this signified an important step in raising the stature of work to something befitting human dignity. It also underscored that human dignity and work depend on a sociopolitical context. They cannot be properly understood or engaged with solipsistically: “work has a ‘social dimension’ through its intimate relationship not only to the family, but also to the common good” (CA: 6).

Lastly, albeit for theological reasons, work acquires dignity because Jesus Christ himself worked with his own hands, and taught his followers that when offered to God, human work can be associated with his redemptive effort (GeS: 67).

The process of elevating the status of work and bestowing dignity on it through association with intellectual work was somewhat derailed during the Protestant Reformation. Think of Luther’s diatribes against Mendicant Orders and followers of the religious life as “idle hands”. For him, they had to work just like everyone else, not only if they wish to eat, but also if they wish to be saved. Manual work was an obligation equally pending on everyone and “intellectual work,” such as preaching, was a flimsy excuse (Sison, 1992). Furthermore, Calvinist and Puritanical offshoots of the Reform added a twist by affirming that success at work was a sign of divine favor or predestination. Hence there came a certain withdrawal of Catholic Tradition from the topic of work and a reinforcement of biases in favor of prayer, contemplation and other spiritual activities. This was to reiterate the superiority of the spiritual over the material, of activities that are ends in themselves (“autotelic”) over instrumental ones such as work.

After several centuries, the founding document of CST, Rerum novarum (Leo XIII, 1891) took the theme of work head-on. In face of rapid industrialization, and its socioeconomic, cultural, historical and political consequences, the Church raised its voice in defense of the dignity of workers (Abbott, 2008). It moved from the traditional perspective of the morality of work (what’s right or wrong with work) to the theology of work (what one can know about God and how one can respond to a divine calling through work) (Chenu, 1963; Naughton & Laczniak, 1993). The encyclical has since proven to be “prophetic,” not only denouncing injustice, but also foretelling social ills. In this respect, CST made a distinctive, pioneering contribution to articulating and defending the dignity of work.
Next we focus on two defining features of the dignity of work in CST: first, the duty to work precedes the right to work; and second, the pre-eminence of the subjective dimension of work over the objective dimension.

**The duty to work, the right to work and their implications**

With the creation account, the first chapter of Genesis becomes the original “gospel of work, for it shows what the dignity of work consists of: it teaches that man ought to imitate God, his Creator, in working, because man alone has the unique characteristic of likeness to God” (LE: 25). “Everyone who works is a creator” (Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (PP), 1967: 27) and through work, man imitates God in the task of creation (Zigarelli, 1993). In this scriptural source, we discover not only the basis of human dignity (*imago Dei*), but also the way in which dignity and likeness are developed through work, “because the Creator has commanded it” (LE: 16). This could not be otherwise, since in respect to God, human beings cannot claim “rights.” If work were a right before God, then human beings could choose to work or not to work without penalty. But that is not the case. God’s will could only be received as an obligation or duty. A consequence of being made in God’s image is the task of living up to that likeness through work.

In imitating God’s task of creation through work, man was not to behave despotti cally but lovingly, for creation was given to him as a gift and placed under his responsibility (CSDC: 255). This divine injunction to work took place before the Fall and forms part of man’s original state. Hence, work is not a curse or punishment, but the toil and hardship, which, because of original sin, began to accompany it (CSDC: 256).

No longer in relation to God, but among fellow human beings, CST acknowledges both a duty and a right to work inscribed in nature: “Nature imposes work upon man as a duty, and man has the corresponding natural right to demand that the work he does shall provide him with the means of livelihood” (PiT: 20, citing Pius XII’s broadcast message, Pentecost, June 1, 1941). CST affirms, “work, in all its many senses, is an obligation, that is to say, a duty, […] on the part of man. This is true in all the many meanings of the word. […] All this constitutes the moral obligation to work, understood in its wide sense” (LE: 16). Moreover, “work is a fundamental right and a good for mankind, a useful good, worthy of man because it is an appropriate way for him to give expression to and enhance his human dignity” (CSDC: 287, 287-300; GeS: 26).

None of this denies that work is also a right, but the insistence supports that it is, firstly, a duty. This is a position consistent with most religious morality and pre-modern ethics, which center on divinely-imposed obligations on human beings (Anscombe, 1958; Gelernter, 2008). If the duty to work precedes the right, how to explain the numerous references to the “right to work” and the “rights of workers” in the Compendium? They pertain to “a new branch of law, wholly unknown to the earlier time [that] has arisen from this continuous and unwearied labor to protect vigorously the sacred rights of workers that flow from their dignity as men and as Christians” (QA: 28). Teachings on work-related rights came later than those on duties (which trace back to Genesis); they originated in response to abuses in early industrialization.
This does not mean that work-related rights—“everything which pertains to the condition of wage workers, with special concern for women and children” (QA: 28)—are less important. But moral primacy belongs to the duty to work, “nature’s categorical imperative for the preservation of man” (PiT: 20).

To what goods or ends is the duty to work directed? What goals and objectives does the “right to work” protect? While Aquinas had a more “negative view” of the purposes of work (“to avoid idleness” and “to bring the body into submission,” as opposed to “acquiring sustenance”), CST documents insist on more positive aspects: “Work is a good thing for man—a good thing for humanity—because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes ‘more a human being’” (LE: 9).

The primary reason for working is obedience to a divine command. This divine command extends to transforming nature or the environment, such that it becomes a worthy home for human beings, and to endeavoring to reach personal perfection. These two aims are intimately related. In first place, our fulfillment or perfection as human beings requires keeping ourselves alive and satisfying basic needs. We achieve this mainly through work in close contact with nature, such as farming, fishing and so forth. By engaging in these activities for our sustenance, we learn and improve our skills, progressing not only technically and materially, but also culturally, socially and even spiritually (GeS: 67). Work provides the means to do all this: to increase and advance in our knowledge, skills or productive habits, attitudes and meanings in different life spheres. Furthermore, we are able to attain these goals for ourselves and our dependents, families, societies and succeeding generations (LE: 16). Work possesses an intrinsic relational dimension linking it to the common good.

Despite the divine command and the need, human beings will only work if they want, if they freely choose to. Thus, work never ceases to be an invitation or calling (CA: 6). In the Christian view, the value of work culminates in its connection with Christ’s redemptive mission (GeS: 67; CSDC: 263, 266).

The pre-eminence of the subjective dimension over the objective dimension

The other defining feature of CST is the pre-eminence of the subjective dimension of work over the objective dimension. Work in the objective sense is “the sum of activities, resources, instruments and technologies used by men and women to produce things;” the subjective sense, “the activity of the human person as a dynamic being capable of performing a variety of actions that are part of the work process and that correspond to his personal vocation” (CSDC: 270). The objective dimension represents the “contingent aspect,” which varies with particular technological, cultural, social and political conditions (Finn, 2012); the subjective dimension, the “stable aspect,” grounded exclusively on the dignity of human beings. Two different results are expected from work: one external (furniture, in the case of a carpenter) and another internal (increase in carpentry skills, for instance). External results correspond to the objective dimension and internal results to the subjective dimension. CST argues the superiority of the subjective (“intransitive”) over the objective (“transitive”) dimension (Gaburro & Cressotti, 1998).
Prioritizing the subjective dimension over the objective dimension—its “human significance” over its “professional significance” (CA: 32)—is consistent with CST’s understanding of human dignity. The “image and likeness of God” is found more in the workers than in the external result of their work. The rational nature and exercise of moral choice and practical reasoning by human beings are more evident in subjective work than in objective work. Work represents a privileged means through which basic human dignity is developed. The relational, social and political aspects of human beings are also better reflected in the productive activities they carry out than in the resulting artifacts. Work acts as a “social glue” keeping people together.

This teaching is equally in accordance with the primacy of the “personalist principle.” The subjective dimension is the source and measure of the dignity of work (LE: 6) because work is an act of the person (actus personae) (LE: 24) and inseparable from the subject. CST rejects that the human being is just “labor force,” another material instrument or economic resource for production. It affirms that work not only proceeds from the person, but also must be directed as well to him: “work is for man and not man for work” (LE: 6). Any productive activity derives its main value from the person, not from the kind of activity or the objective results. All work is dignified insofar as a means for the self-formation or self-transformation of free, rational and dynamic persons (Finn, 2012). By virtue of this subjective dimension, human beings improve on their “basic dignity” and achieve “full dignity” or perfection in virtue (Gaburro & Cressotti 1998; Perricone 1999).

Moreover, work possesses an intrinsic social dimension; it is done “with others and for others,” an “occasion for exchange, relationship and encounter” (CA: 31). This is evident in business organizations. For this reason, it is necessary that work be under social, legal and political supervision, since it takes place within a context of interdependence.

By introducing the subjective dimension of work and establishing its pre-eminence over the objective dimension, CST rectifies the common understanding of work as a productive or transformative activity, heavily influenced by the Aristotelian categories of poiesis and praxis (Politics, 1254a). For Aristotle, on the one hand, praxis and poiesis are similar in that both indicate forms of bringing something into being or production. On the other hand, “praxis and poiesis are different, since poiesis aims at an end distinct from the act of poiesis, whereas in praxis, the end cannot be other than the act itself” (Nicomachean Ethics, 1140b). The purpose of praxis, therefore, is the very performance of the praxis, such as in the case of a moral action, while the purpose of poiesis is the production of something other than the poiesis itself, such as an object of art or craft. This does not preclude, however, that praxis be accompanied by physical activity, such as when an act of generosity is carried out through the giving of alms, or that poiesis be accompanied by mental activity, such as when basket weaving entails the choice of patterns and colors. Nonetheless, the point in praxis is the act of generosity, not the physical movement of extending one’s hand to give out some coins, while that of poiesis, the basket, not the deliberation over patterns and colors (in fact, even machines, incapable of deliberation or choice, can produce baskets). In this sense, poiesis (roughly equivalent to manual work) becomes a productive activity identified more with slaves and working classes,
while *praxis* (generally assimilated to intellectual activity), with full-fledged citizens (land-owning Athenian gentlemen) of the political community. In a change of tack, CST interprets *poiesis* (arts and crafts) as production where an external object, made in accordance with a codifiable set of rules, becomes the purpose of the activity and its more important result; whereas *praxis* (ethical, economic and political action) indicates a transformative activity where the acquisition of knowledge, skills and habits by the subject or agent himself becomes the purpose of the activity and its more valuable output. By extending the notion of work from manual to intellectual work, CST integrates *poiesis* and *praxis* and tears down the class-divide between these two. Every human being now has the capacity to engage in both *poiesis* and *praxis*, regardless of socioeconomic class and work performed. CST upholds the superiority in all kinds of work of the subjective dimension (akin to *praxis*), encompassing the person and the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned, over the objective dimension (akin to *poiesis*), referring to the external products, outputs or results.

**Implications of the dignity of work in business**

In the foregoing, we focused on specific features of the dignity of work in CST to identify possible contributions to ethical theory and practice in business and organizations. Although one may not subscribe to its ultimate foundation, the human being as *imago Dei*, nevertheless, we believe it represents a logical, insightful and cogent account. More importantly, it remains useful in practice. After all, in daily life, we abide by an enormous amount of behavioral norms and customs without agreeing or even inquiring about philosophical justifications.

Catholic intellectual tradition has helped elevate work into an object of dignity and a good through the notion of *opus humanum*. It has widened its scope from manual to intellectual work, through considerations regarding obligatoriness for the species and for the individual. In CST work is understood primarily as a duty, not a right. This derives from a divine command in Genesis. In relation to other human beings, however, work is presented both as a duty and a right inscribed in nature, with emphasis on the latter after the emergence of wage earners in the industrial age. In response to a divine command or to a demand of nature, work serves a double aim: to transform the environment and to achieve fulfillment as human beings. Another distinguishing mark of the dignity of work is the primacy of the subjective dimension (person) over the objective dimension (things). The worker, with everything he learns in the course of work (knowledge, skills, attitudes, virtues) is more valuable than the external and material results. Human beings should not be reduced to mere economic or mechanical resources, as units of labor-force.

These findings are consistent with and enrich previous discoveries regarding human dignity. The intrinsic or inherent quality of human dignity not only extends to all human beings, but also to everything human beings do, including work. Human beings are possessors of dignity as *imagines Dei*; similarly, all of them are addressees of the divine command to work. This does not mean that they are all required to perform the same work, since this admits different kinds, with varying degrees of obligatoriness. Primarily, this is an injunction to develop oneself and the
surrounding environment while procuring all sorts of goods, for oneself and others. Dignity is a gift that needs to be developed and work is the means for this.

The relational or sociopolitical context of human dignity applies to the dignity of work as well. Firstly, because the worker is a social being and everything he does, including work, has a social impact. While working for one’s own good, he should also consider the good of others. In this sense, work can be a “common good,” one that exists only insofar as it is shared, a coordinated and collective effort. Participation in the common good of work implies solidarity and subsidiarity. The “duty to contribute” (principle of participation) does not require that everyone does the same thing. One’s contribution to the common good becomes effective by doing what he does best, considering resources and limitations (principle of subsidiarity), and by taking into account possible contributions by others (principle of solidarity). Finally, this concern for others sometimes involves providing them with means to make their contribution possible (principle of universal destination of goods).

THE “RIGHT TO WORK” AND THE “RIGHTS OF WORKERS” AS EXPRESSIVE OF HUMAN DIGNITY IN CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

In CST, work is primarily a duty or obligation, not a right, and the subjective aspect of work precedes its objective aspect. This gives rise to distinctive ways of understanding the “right to work” and the “rights of workers.” How such rights stand up in the context of globalization will also be examined.

“Right to work”: bases, content and subjects

The “right to work” is a consequence of work being necessary to “form and maintain a family, to have a right to property, [and] to contribute to the common good of the human family” (CSDC: 287; LE: 10, 14 and 16). The “right to work” stems from the duty to contribute to the common good through work. As seen from Aquinas, work constitutes a duty or obligation as the means established by nature for human beings to obtain sustenance, while developing self-control or mastery and avoiding idleness. Work guarantees the means for one’s subsistence and for his family and dependents. One cannot uphold the dignity of the family without upholding the dignity of work (Guitián, 2009). Work, too, provides a legitimate title to private property, taken from the store of natural resources available to all, in consonance with the universal destination of goods. While families ensure the perpetuation of the human race, private property guarantees the maintenance and wellbeing of families. Work is an opportunity for an individual to improve his surroundings making use of technology, a channel for man “to give expression to and to enhance his human dignity” (CSDC: 287).

In CST, the duty and right to work must be balanced with the duty and right to rest: “The apex of the biblical teaching on work is the commandment of the Sabbath rest […] the experience of the Sabbath constitutes a barrier against becoming slaves to work” (CSDC: 258, see also CSDC: 284; LE: 19; CA: 9). Rest takes precedence over work. It is man’s being (which he retains at rest) that gives dignity to work,
not work that gives dignity to his being. This position is entirely supportive of the primacy of the subjective dimension of work over the objective dimension. Man is ultimately destined for rest, leisure and contemplation, since these are ends, while work is a means or instrument (Perricone, 1999). Because of this, rest or free time dedicated to the family as well as to social, cultural and spiritual needs is “not negotiable.” Given that “work is for man and not man for work” (CSDC: 272; LE: 6), public authorities must ensure that workers have time to fulfill their other obligations, including religious ones, by acknowledging holy days of obligation, for example (CSDC: 286). Before the “right to work” comes the duty to acknowledge one’s dependence on God through worship.

Who is the subject of the “right to work”? CST cannot be more universal: “all who are capable of engaging in it” (CSDC: 288, Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2433; Hennigan, 2012). Here is a reflection of the inherent or intrinsic character of the dignity basic to all human beings. People have a right to the things they need to survive, and work, ordinarily, is the means by which they obtain them; therefore, people have a right to work (Finn, 2012). Everyone who is able has a right to work, because everyone has a duty to contribute to the common good.

Since in general, adult males, especially those married with families, are acknowledged as primary subjects of the “right to work,” CST seeks to defend this right in others in risk of exclusion, such as young people, women (CSDC: 295), immigrants (CSDC: 297), agricultural workers (CSDC: 299) and marginalized groups (the disabled, ex-convicts, the illiterate and so forth). “Full employment” is a paramount objective for the State and civil society (CSDC: 291; LE: 18), the sociopolitical context of dignity. The opportunities for growth and the sense of accomplishment work brings are very important for people’s sense of self-worth and social esteem. If, despite being able and possessing the right to work, one decided not to (say, because of a huge inheritance and because work is no fun), he may be putting obstacles to the development of his dignity. Remiss in the duty to contribute to the common good, he fails to perfect his own dignity in an essential aspect. Parallel to this right is the duty to acquire requisite human and technological formation to improve one’s professional capabilities; one must assume responsibility for keeping himself updated in knowledge and skills (CSDC: 290). In this regard, the need to receive, first, a proper education is what makes child labor so appalling: it deprives children of the chance to sufficiently develop their bodies and minds, before engaging in economically productive activities (CSDC: 296; RN: 42).

“Rights of workers”: bases, content and relation to property rights

In fleshing out the “rights of workers,” CST displays the consequences of the subjective sense of work prevailing over the objective sense. The entire list of rights—to a just wage; to rest; to a working environment and manufacturing processes not harmful to physical health or moral integrity; that one’s personality be safeguarded without affront to conscience or personal dignity; to appropriate unemployment subsidies; to pensions and insurance for old age, sickness and accidents; to maternity-related social security; and to assemble and form associations (CSDC: 301; LE: 18-19; CA: 15)—flows from the principle of human dignity. They look after the person,
first and foremost. Human dignity implies that the person is above everything he produces or possesses. The rights to fair wages, a healthy working environment, unemployment benefits, old-age and disability pensions and so forth are demanded for the sake of the working person (subjective dimension), not because that way, the worker will produce more or better goods (objective dimension). Nothing is farther from the understanding of workers’ rights in CST than a utilitarian or instrumentalist conception in search of greater productivity or wealth.

A significant development is found in *Caritas in veritate*, focusing on features of “decent work”: “work that expresses the essential dignity of every man and woman in the context of their particular society; work that is freely chosen, effectively associating workers, both men and women, with the development of their community; work that enables the worker to be respected and free from any form of discrimination; work that makes it possible for families to meet their need and provide schooling for their children, without the children themselves being forced into labor; work that permits the workers to organize themselves freely, and to make their voices heard; work that leaves enough room for rediscovering one’s roots at a personal, familial and spiritual level; work that guarantees those who have retired a decent standard of living” (*CiV*: 63). These conditions of “decent work” enable human beings to respond to their call or vocation to self-giving (*CiV*: 16-18). In this manifestation of universal solidarity through the practice of the virtues is where the ultimate meaning of work and all human activity is found.

Labor (as “human capital,” or man in his capacity to engage in labor through knowledge and creativity, and “social capital,” or the capacity of a group to work together bound by trust, dependability and respect for rules) has intrinsic priority over capital (the material means of production, especially financial resources) (*CSDC*: 276-7; *CiV*: 32). Labor is the “primary efficient cause of production,” while capital, an “instrumental cause” (*LE*: 12). Hence, labor should be considered the “principal resource” and “decisive factor” in production (*CSDC*: 278; *CA*: 32). Exploitation and alienation take place when capital takes precedence over labor (*CSDC*: 279-280) and workers are unjustly deprived of the fruits of their labor. Curiously, there could also be cases of “self-alienation,” when one willfully engages in over-work or gives in to careerism, granting more importance to work than family life, for instance (*CSDC*: 280). This is an inversion of means and ends, because work and property should serve the wellbeing of individuals and families.

One may infer certain similarity between Marx and CST in upholding labor over capital. The relationship between labor and capital in CST, however, is not couched in terms of antagonism and dialectical conflict, but in complementarity (Wisman, 1998). “The integral development of the human person through work [subjective sense] does not impede but rather promotes the greater productivity and efficiency [objective sense] of work itself” (*CA*: 43). Furthermore, unlike Marxism, CST is not materialist.

The pre-eminence of the subjective dimension of work over the objective dimension also has repercussions on the way labor relates to private property. Firstly, private property is a form of capital and subordinated to labor. Moreover, the right to private property is not absolute and must be subject to the duty
to observe the universal destination of goods (CSDC: 282). Private property acquired through work must also be placed at the service of work as means of production (material, financial, technological, knowledge and other resources) (Sandelands, 2009). Rights of ownership are not an excuse to prevent private property from being used at the service of mankind: “they too must be placed in a context of legal norms and social rules that guarantee that they will be used according to the criteria of justice, equity and respect of human rights” (CSDC: 283). The right to private property loses legitimacy when one fails to recognize this universal destination, impeding the work or development of others. That’s why, in Judeo-Christian tradition, farmers were prohibited from harvesting the corners of fields and vinedressers from picking grapes which ripened late; these fruits should be left for the poor and needy (Finn, 2012). Their right to survival trumps the property rights of farmers and vinedressers.

The superiority of the subjective dimension of work over the objective dimension implies the workers’ right to participate in the ownership, management and profits of an enterprise (CSDC: 281; MeM: 92; LE: 14; Naughton & Lacznia, 1993; Sison & Fontrodona, 2013). Firstly, CST encourages corporate forms, which associate labor with capital ownership, preventing the separation of the worker from the fruits of his labor, which is a form of alienation. Secondly, participation in management ensures a degree of autonomy from the State, which allows workers to carry out economic, social and cultural initiatives for the benefit of society, as subsidiarity demands. Workplace participation and subsidiarity or decentralization are key to preserving democratic values (Chmielewski, 1997). Whether one engages in a managerial or a shop-floor position should not really matter, so long as participation is carried out in accordance with practical wisdom (Timming, 2014). Participation guarantees that workers contribute their genius and creativity, not mere muscle-power, to business. And thirdly, participation in profits is logical, if one recognizes that work, knowledge and creativity (subjective aspect) are more important than ownership of the means of production (objective aspect). This has increasingly become the case in post-industrial, service-oriented and knowledge-based economies (McCann, 1997): “In our time, in particular, there exists another form of ownership which is becoming no less important than land: the possession of know-how, technology and skill. The wealth of industrialized nations is based much more on this kind of ownership than on natural resources” (CA: 32).

The challenges of globalization

Let us examine how the right to work and worker rights in CST stand up to the challenges of globalization.

CST understands globalized production and organization as morally neutral (CiV: 42); it could be beneficial if essential rights and equity are safeguarded (CSDC: 310). Globalization brings a host of ambivalent effects: the fragmentation of production to promote greater efficiency and profits (CSDC: 311); increased labor flexibility to cope with market liberalization and stiff competition (CSDC: 312); the shift from an industrial to a service economy, with new professions taking the place of old ones due to technological changes (CSDC: 313); the transition from stable
employment to a series of jobs or a “portfolio life” (Handy, 1990) with great variety and fluidity (CSDC: 314); the decentralization of production and the advance of small and medium enterprises (CSDC: 315); and the growth of the informal sector, especially in developing countries (CSDC: 316). They could be viewed negatively, as threats, or positively, as opportunities. They are threats since they can promote “disconnectedness” or alienation between firms, on the one hand, and employees, communities and nature, on the other, destroying the ideal of communion (Naughton & Cornwall, 2006). Or they can become opportunities, for instance, when technology is employed to rid work of routine and drudgery through job enrichment (McCann, 1997).

Instead of succumbing to deterministic and economistic thinking, in which business has no choice but to “depress wages, cut-down benefits, fire workers (Radin & Werhane, 2003) and relocate in order to survive,” CST reminds us that the human person must be the “decisive factor and ‘referee’” of these changes (CSDC: 317-318; LE: 10; CA: 32). Not that termination should be absolutely prohibited; sometimes, it is a “necessary evil.” But even then, moral safeguards should be kept, such as “unemployment benefits” or “severance pay,” for termination to be “decent” (Kim, 2014). The “business of business” should not be to maximize shareholder value, but to serve human beings (Sandelands, 2009). Moreover, because human beings are open to Transcendence, it would be wrong to limit their horizons to material things. “Economic and social imbalances in the world of work must be addressed by restoring a just hierarchy of values and placing the human dignity of workers before all else” (CSDC: 321); this includes respect for the inalienable rights of workers (CSDC: 319).

The key to properly managing globalization is to uphold the fundamental rights of workers and protect their dignity, granting priority to the subjective dimension of work over the objective dimension. Rights must be ensured to help human beings fulfill their duties and obligations to the common good. Only then the greatest promise of globalization, the possibility of “giving expression to a humanism of work on a planetary scale” (CSDC: 322), the realization of global solidarity (CiV: 42) can be fulfilled.

We have seen how the duty to contribute to the common good through work precedes the right to work. Work is the means established by nature for human beings to acquire food and property for themselves and their families; it also serves to develop them and to exercise dominion over their surroundings. The duty and right to work should be balanced by the duty and right to rest, because the human being, at rest or at work, is superior to whatever he produces or fails to produce. Worker rights derive from the dignity of workers and reflect the priority of the subjective dimension of work over the objective dimension. The universality of worker rights hints at the inherent or intrinsic nature of basic human dignity; their exercise implies the need for such dignity to be developed; and their dependence on political communities refers to the social recognition dignity requires. All the different worker rights should be practiced in accordance not only with the common good, but also with the other CST principles of participation, the universal destination of goods and respect for private property, subsidiarity and participation, and solidarity. Globalization could
be a force for the good so long as human dignity and worker rights are protected. Then, it could contribute to the achievement of a worldwide common good.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article is to explain human dignity and the dignity of work from the CST perspective, based on the notion of *imago Dei*, together with “secular warrants” for their credibility. Three main inferences are drawn: an identical, basic dignity is inherent or intrinsic to all human beings; such dignity requires development through appropriate actions; and dignity calls upon a sociopolitical context for recognition. Furthermore, CST insists that the personalist principle of human dignity be applied together with other fundamental principles, such as the common good, the universal destination of goods, subsidiarity and solidarity.

The article then focuses on eminently Catholic contributions to the dignity of work, bearing in mind that certain strains in Western intellectual tradition deny this. CST has distilled two unique doctrines. The first is that the duty to work derives from a divine mandate impressed on human nature, as a means of developing oneself, not the least, by striving to satisfy the needs of one’s family and exercising dominion over the environment. The second is the normative precedence of the subjective sense of work over the objective sense. Each of these gives rise to a cascade of consequences regarding the right to work and the rights of workers, tearing down the class divide between manual labor and intellectual work as equal opportunities for virtue and self-perfection. Finally, the article expounds on how the two principles serve as guides to face the challenges and opportunities of globalization. They help avoid “disconnectedness” or alienation between workers, on the one hand, and firms, communities and the environment, on the other, by encouraging participation and subsidiarity. They also promote enriched jobs and meaningful, “decent work,” eschewing alienating toil and tedium. They help guard against the idolatry of profit and short-termism, reminding us that human beings should occupy the front and center of all productive efforts. Most importantly, they make us recall the social nature of human beings and their ability to relate, not only to others like themselves in solidarity, but also to Transcendence.

Future lines of research could include a study of the evolution of the notions of human dignity and dignity of work within CST, in parallel to changing views regarding democratic participation in politics. Another would be an exploration of the mutual influences between the CST concept of human dignity, on the one hand, and secular sources, such as Stoïcism, Kantian philosophy and modern constitutions and international declarations, on the other. But all this would gain interest only to the extent that we have been reasonably successful in presenting the case for CST as a valid source for the notions of human dignity and the dignity of work.

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NOTE

1. CST sources use “man” in a generic sense, referring to both males and females of the human species. To avoid confusion, this article follows the same usage.

REFERENCES


https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/beq.2016.18


**List of abbreviations**

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