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Dignity at Work: Integrating Christian Social Teachings and Sustainable Development Goals in the Labour Landscape of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of _work with dignity‘ in Sri Lanka through an interdisciplinary integration of Christian Social Teaching (CST) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8.5, which targets full and productive employment, decent work, and equal pay for all. Drawing on foundational CST encyclicals such as Rerum Novarum (1891), Laborem Exercens (1981), and Fratelli Tutti (2020), it posits work as a divine vocation that affirms human dignity, critiques exploitative systems, and promotes solidarity, subsidiarity, and the common good. In Sri Lanka‘s labour landscape - marked by colonial legacies, ethnic conflicts, the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2022 economic crisis, and persistent inequities in plantations, garments, and informal sectors - these principles address structural challenges like gender wage gaps (20 - 30%), informal employment (over 60%), and minority discrimination. By synthesising theological ethics with empirical data and International Labour Organization (ILO) frameworks, the analysis identifies convergences between CST‘s moral imperatives and SDG 8.5‘s policy targets, proposing pathways for ethical reforms: community cooperatives for full employment, rights-based protections for decent work, and justice-oriented audits for equal pay. This holistic approach transcends economic metrics, envisioning labour as integral to human flourishing. Ultimately, the integration offers Sri Lanka a transformative agenda, enriching SDG implementation with CST‘s prophetic vision to foster just, sustainable economies rooted in the inherent worth of every worker.

Keywords: Christian Social Teaching (CST); Dignity of Work; Sri Lankan Labour; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Decent Employment;

Introduction

Work transcends mere economic utility; it constitutes a cornerstone of human identity, fostering personal fulfilment, communal solidarity, and intrinsic dignity. Across civilizations, philosophical and religious traditions have understood work not solely as a means of survival but as a moral and social act contributing to the flourishing of both individuals and societies. Karl Marx famously posited that work defines the human person, describing humanity as *homo faber* - the maker - whose alienation from labour erodes the very core of personhood.[1] Yet, Christianity offers a distinct theological perspective: it interprets work not merely as self-realisation but as *vocation* (*vocatio*), a sacred participation in God‘s creative and redemptive mission.[2] This vision elevates labour from the sphere of necessity to that of calling, affirming that through work, human beings cooperate with the divine in sustaining creation and building just communities.

Rooted in Scripture, where God labours in the act of creation (Genesis 1 - 2) and where Jesus embraces work as a carpenter, Christian Social Teaching (CST) affirms the sanctity of labour and the dignity of the worker. Foundational encyclicals such as *Rerum Novarum* (1891) by Pope Leo XIII, *Laborem Exercens* (1981) by Pope John Paul II, and *Fratelli Tutti* (2020) by Pope Francis articulate a consistent moral vision: that economic structures must serve the human person rather than subjugate them to profit or efficiency.[3] As

ethicist Domènec Melé observes, the moral essence of work lies in its potential to advance the common good while safeguarding human dignity, countering any reduction of workers to mere commodities.[4] Thus, within CST, work is simultaneously a right and a responsibility - an avenue through which human beings express freedom, creativity, and solidarity.

In parallel, the global community has embraced the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015 as a blueprint for equitable progress and environmental stewardship by 2030. SDG 8, titled *Decent Work and Economic Growth*, promotes sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic development while ensuring full and productive employment. Specifically, Target 8.5 aspires to ―full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value,‖ addressing systemic inequities that persist in global labour systems.[5] This normative framework complements CST by translating moral principles into actionable global commitments.

This paper integrates CST's theological insights with SDG 8.5 to examine *work with dignity* in the Sri Lankan context - a nation marked by postcolonial legacies, ethnic tensions, and ongoing economic instability. By bringing these frameworks into dialogue, the study reframes labour not as an isolated economic indicator but as a moral imperative grounded in justice, solidarity, and sustainable human flourishing. Drawing upon theological documents, international labour policies, and empirical analyses of Sri Lanka's labour landscape, it highlights areas of convergence, exposes gaps in implementation, and proposes ethically grounded pathways forward. This interdisciplinary approach, that is bridging theology, economics, and sociology, demonstrates how CST can enrich the practical pursuit of SDG 8.5, transforming labour policies into vehicles of integral human development.

The context of contemporary Sri Lanka is particularly poignant. A tropical island with a rich Buddhist heritage and a Christian minority comprising roughly 7% of the population, the country faces acute labour challenges amid postcolonial recovery and global market integration. Christianity in Sri Lanka, especially through the Catholic Bishops' Conference and its Social Apostolate initiatives, has long advocated for the dignity of workers, aligning universal CST principles with local realities such as plantation exploitation, wage inequality, and the precarious conditions of migrant labour.[6] These engagements reveal that the moral questions surrounding work are inseparable from the social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of development. This study, therefore, contributes to broader discourses on ethical development in the Global South, where the pursuit of economic progress is inseparable from the affirmation of human dignity.

The Sri Lankan Labour Landscape: Historical Roots and Contemporary Challenges

Sri Lanka's labour history is a complex narrative of exploitation, adaptation, and resilience, shaped by centuries of colonial domination and domestic upheaval. British rule (1815 - 1948) restructured the island's economy through the introduction of plantation capitalism, particularly in tea, rubber, and coconut. This transformation depended heavily on imported Tamil labour from South India, recruited under indentured systems that entrenched ethnic and class hierarchies.[7] The colonial administration cultivated a divided labour market: Sinhalese workers gravitated towards urban administration and subsistence agriculture, while Tamils and Muslims were relegated to plantation and trading sectors.[8] Post-independence policies, notably the 1948 *Ceylon Citizenship Act*, further marginalised the plantation Tamils, rendering many stateless and exacerbating socio-economic divides.[9] These fractures deepened during the 1983 - 2009 civil war between the Sinhalese-majority state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which displaced millions and devastated the

northern and eastern economies.[10] The legacies of this conflict continue to shape patterns of employment, migration, and social exclusion.

The twenty-first century has introduced new economic and social trials. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the 2008 global financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the 2022 sovereign debt default successively eroded livelihoods, triggering inflation, fuel shortages, and mass protests.[11] These cascading crises have revealed deep vulnerabilities in Sri Lanka‘s labour structures, intensifying precarity among low-income and informal workers.

Sri Lanka‘s contemporary labour landscape reflects a delicate interplay between formal and informal sectors that collectively sustain the livelihoods of nearly half the population. According to the *Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey*, the employed population comprises approximately 8.49 million persons aged fifteen and above, within a total population of around twenty-two million.[12] The garment and apparel industry remains the most significant formal employer, contributing about US$ 5.4 billion in export earnings in 2021 and employing roughly 350,000 workers - over 80% of them women - mainly concentrated in export processing zones and urban manufacturing clusters.[13] Despite this industrial prominence, more than 60% of Sri Lankan workers remain engaged in the informal economy, in occupations such as street vending, domestic work, and smallholder agriculture.[14] Informal workers often operate without written contracts or access to legal protections, earning below the statutory minimum wage of roughly LKR 27,000 per month.[15] Consequently, informality persists as both a buffer against unemployment and a conduit of structural poverty.

A crucial but frequently overlooked component of Sri Lanka‘s economy is migrant labour. Over one million Sri Lankans, predominantly women employed in domestic and service sectors, work across the Gulf region and East Asia.[16] Their remittances, totalling around US$ 7 billion annually, represent one of the country‘s largest sources of foreign exchange and a vital lifeline for rural households.[17] However, migrant workers often endure precarious employment, contract substitution, and exploitation under restrictive sponsorship systems such as *kafala*.[18] The vulnerability of both internal informal workers and overseas migrants intensified during the pandemic and the 2022 economic crisis, when border closures and economic contraction led to wage losses, return migration, and food insecurity.[19] These dynamics underscore the fragility of Sri Lanka‘s labour system - characterised by high participation but unequal access to security, dignity, and opportunity.

Persistent structural challenges impede the realization of dignified work. While unemployment officially hovers between 4% and 5%, underemployment affects roughly 40% of the workforce, and youth aged 15 - 24 face rates nearing 20%, reflecting skill mismatches and spatial disparities between rural and urban economies.[20] The garment industry, a cornerstone of export-led growth, illustrates this tension: many factories in free trade zones impose long working hours, piece-rate wages, and unsafe conditions, exemplified by the 2019 Kimbulapitiya fire that claimed three workers‘ lives.[21] Plantation labour, employing approximately 150,000 Tamils, perpetuates colonial-era bonded practices, with families residing in *line rooms* that often lack adequate sanitation, water, and educational access.[22] These conditions highlight the persistence of socio-economic marginalization despite legislative reforms and corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Gender inequalities further compound labour injustice. Women constitute about 35% of the workforce yet earn between 20% and 30% less than men for comparable roles, a disparity driven by occupational segregation and patriarchal norms that confine women to

unpaid domestic and care work.[23] Following the COVID-19 pandemic, female labour force participation dropped to around 32%, reflecting heightened childcare burdens and workplace harassment.[24] Ethnic minorities, particularly Tamils and Muslims - together accounting for roughly one-quarter of the population - remain disproportionately concentrated in hazardous sectors such as fishing, construction, and low-skilled manufacturing.[25] Caste-based discrimination persists among Indian Tamils in the plantation regions, despite constitutional guarantees of equality.[26]

Migrant labour adds a further layer of complexity. Over 1.5 million Sri Lankans now work overseas, primarily in the Middle East. While their remittances sustain the economy, workers frequently experience abuses including wage withholding, debt bondage, and gender- based violence.[27] The economic collapse of 2022 exacerbated this crisis, with mass return migration contributing to rising domestic unemployment.[28] These trends expose the moral paradox of an economy that depends on human mobility yet often fails to protect the dignity of those who sustain it. As Pope John Paul II cautioned in *Laborem Exercens*, any economic system that ―treats the worker as a mere instrument of production rather than as a person‖ subverts the divine purpose of work.[29] In Sri Lanka, where Christianity has played a modest yet significant role in social advocacy, particularly through Caritas Sri Lanka, the principles of solidarity and the preferential option for the poor offer a moral counter-narrative, calling for policies that reconcile economic efficiency with human dignity.[30]

Theological Foundations of Work in Christian Social Teaching

Christian Social Teaching (CST), evolving since the late nineteenth century, offers a rich theological anthropology of labour, grounded in the belief that humans are created *imago Dei*, as bearers of divine creativity and co-workers in God‘s ongoing act of creation (Genesis 1:26 - 28). Work, in this view, is not a curse or punishment - as certain interpretations of Genesis 3 have suggested - but a participatory vocation that enables personal fulfilment, social communion, and stewardship of creation.[31] Through labour, the human person both shapes the material world and realises their own potential within it, mirroring God‘s creative activity. The modern articulation of CST began with *Rerum Novarum* (1891), Pope Leo XIII‘s response to the injustices of the industrial age.[32] The encyclical affirmed workers‘ rights to just wages, rest, and association, rejecting both unrestrained capitalism and revolutionary socialism as distortions of human dignity. Leo XIII asserted that ―the labour of the working man himself… has a special pre-eminence‖ because it arises from the person‘s rational and moral nature, not merely from economic utility.[33] This vision established a Christian humanism in which the worker‘s dignity takes precedence over the accumulation of capital, introducing an enduring moral principle: the economy must serve the human person, not the reverse.

Pope Pius XI expanded this foundation in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), introducing the principles of subsidiarity and social justice.[34] Subsidiarity holds that decisions should be made at the most local and participatory level possible, respecting the agency of individuals and communities. Social justice, in turn, requires the state to intervene where necessary to ensure equitable distribution and protect the vulnerable. These principles resonate powerfully in contexts like Sri Lanka, where decentralised cooperatives and community-led enterprises often achieve greater inclusion than top-down economic reforms that marginalize rural labourers.

A major theological and philosophical advance came with Pope John Paul II‘s *Laborem Exercens* (1981), which articulates a holistic vision of work.[35] He distinguishes between its ―subjective‖ dimension - how work forms and fulfills the person - and its

―objective‖ dimension - its economic and technological outputs. John Paul II affirms that ―work is a good thing for man… because through work man not only transforms nature… but he also achieves fulfilment as a human being.‖[36] This perspective inverts Marxist materialism by prioritizing the person over production, declaring that economies exist for workers, not vice versa. The encyclical also expands the moral horizon by introducing the concept of ―indirect employers‖: those whose policies and global economic decisions affect labour conditions. It thus calls for an ethic of international solidarity to counter structural exploitation in global supply chains—a notion acutely relevant to developing economies such as Sri Lanka's.

Recent Catholic thought has deepened these commitments through ecological and global perspectives. *Laudato Si'* (2015), Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment, links the dignity of work to care for creation, denouncing how extractive and profit-driven industries degrade both the environment and human labour.[37] In the Sri Lankan context, this insight applies poignantly to resource-based sectors such as gem mining and fisheries, where environmental harm and labour exploitation intersect. *Fratelli Tutti* (2020) extends the vision further, situating work within a culture of universal fraternity that rejects ―throwaway economies‖ discarding the vulnerable.[38] The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences' 2018 volume, *The Future of Work: Labour after Laudato Si'*, reflects this evolution, insisting that automation and globalization must serve the integral development of workers, rather than reduce them to obsolescence.[39] It is a warning especially pertinent amid Sri Lanka's expanding gig economy and digital labour platforms such as PickMe, UberEats, etc.

Theologians have elaborated CST's social and moral dimensions. David Hollenbach conceptualises ―social sin‖ as the collective perpetuation of injustice embedded within economic and cultural systems.[40] In the Sri Lankan setting, such social sin manifests in entrenched ethnic hierarchies, gendered labour divisions, and caste-based exclusions, which together obstruct integral human development. Charles Curran, reflecting on CST's evolution, advocates for an economic conversion'. It is a transformation of economic life that shifts its *telo*s from profit maximization to the common good and integral human flourishing encompassing body, mind, and spirit.[41] Likewise, Domènec Melé's work on business ethics argues that corporations must adopt a― humanistic management‖ model rooted in the common good, solidarity, and subsidiarity.[42] This approach situates business not merely as a profit-seeking enterprise but as a moral community oriented towards the flourishing of all its members.

In Sri Lanka, these theological principles acquire a concrete moral urgency. The Catholic Bishops' Conference has criticised governmental responses to the 2022 economic crisis for neglecting the plight of workers and the poor.[43] Echoing *Laborem Exercens*, the bishops reaffirmed that just wages and stable employment are prerequisites for family life and social peace. CST thus provides not only a theoretical framework but also a prophetic moral critique: labour injustices are not inevitable by-products of development but violations of divine order, demanding both structural reform and personal conversion towards justice, solidarity, and hope.

The Sustainable Development Goals and the Imperative of Decent Work

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) constitute a comprehensive and morally resonant framework, uniting 193 nations in the shared pursuit of eradicating poverty, reducing inequality, and promoting environmental sustainability.[44] Though formulated in secular terms, the SDGs carry an implicit ethical vision, one grounded in justice, human rights, and the dignity of every person. Within this agenda, Goal 8

emphasizes the promotion of sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines *decent work* as productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.‖[45] This definition encapsulates four pillars: employment creation, rights at work (including freedom from forced and child labour), social protection (such as access to healthcare and pensions), and social dialogue through union participation and collective bargaining.[46] SDG 8 also seeks to achieve at least 7% annual GDP growth in the least developed countries, linking macroeconomic performance to the well-being of workers.

Target 8.5 operationalizes these aspirations by mandating that, by 2030, all women and men, including youth, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups, should enjoy full and productive employment and equal pay for work of equal value.[47] Yet, global progress remains uneven. The ILO's *Asia - Pacific Employment and Social Outlook* notes that approximately 60% of regional workers remain in informal employment, with only modest reductions in gender pay gaps.[48] In South Asia, cultural and institutional barriers persist: as Khan and Islam observe, patriarchal norms and weak labour enforcement perpetuate gender-based pay disparities averaging 23%.[49] Similarly, Rubery and Grimshaw attribute the enduring wage gap to—institutional stickiness‖, the persistence of discriminatory practices and occupational segregation despite formal legal reforms.[50]

In the Sri Lankan context, SDG 8.5 aligns with policy frameworks such as *Vision 2025* and the *National Policy on Decent Work*, which aim to promote inclusive growth and social justice.[51] However, major challenges remain. According to the ILO, over 62% of Sri Lankan workers are employed in the informal economy, while underemployment affects roughly 42% of the labour force, rising to nearly 48% among women.[52] The 2022 economic crisis exacerbated these vulnerabilities, driving poverty rates to nearly 25% and eroding gains achieved during the pre-pandemic growth period.[53] Migrant labour, which sustains national income through remittances, remains a site of profound exploitation; a 2022 United Nations report described the conditions faced by Sri Lankan domestic workers in the Gulf as tantamount to modern slavery, in contravention of SDG Target 8.7, which seeks to eradicate forced labour.[54] While the SDGs advance a pragmatic and measurable framework, Christian Social Teaching (CST) complements them by restoring a deeper moral and theological dimension. CST interprets work not merely as economic activity but as a vocation—a participation in divine creativity and service to the common good. *Fratelli Tutti* (§168) explicitly acknowledges the SDGs' global significance but warns that development divorced from fraternity risks becoming technocratic and soulless,‖ lacking genuine concern for human persons.[55] The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences similarly emphasises the need for —ethical artificial intelligence‖ and —human-centred digital economies,‖ insights especially pertinent to Sri Lanka's expanding platform-based work sectors, including ride-hailing and freelance digital services.[56] Thus, the integration of CST with SDG 8 offers a holistic paradigm: one that tempers economic targets with moral purpose, ensuring that work is not merely decent in form but dignified in essence. Without this ethical grounding, the SDGs could risk reducing human labour to an instrument of productivity rather than a sacred expression of human dignity and solidarity.

Integrating CST and SDG 8.5: Pathways for Dignified Work in Sri Lanka

The interplay between Christian Social Teaching (CST) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8.5 offers a holistic moral and developmental framework for Sri Lanka, one that unites theological ethics with socio-economic policy. Both paradigms

prioritize human-centred development: CST's emphasis on the common good corresponds to the SDG's focus on inclusivity and justice, while the principle of subsidiarity complements localized implementation and participatory governance.[57] Together, they advance a model in which economic growth serves the person, rather than reducing the person to a function of growth.

Full Employment as a Moral and Developmental Priority

Full employment, as envisioned under SDG 8.5, encompasses not merely the availability of jobs but the creation of *meaningful work* that sustains dignity and social participation.[58] In Sri Lanka, where nearly one-quarter of the population is under twenty-five,[59] the persistence of youth unemployment and *brain drain* reflects structural inefficiencies and social inequities. CST's vocational perspective, understood as *work as self-gift*, offers a counter-narrative to casualization and underemployment. As *Laborem Exercens* (§6) teaches, unemployment is not only an economic deficiency but a form of ―social marginalization‖ that undermines human flourishing.[60]

Applied locally, this principle encourages the strengthening of church-run vocational training centres and faith-based educational initiatives that align spiritual formation with employability, thus integrating CST's humanism with SDG-driven capacity-building. Empirical studies confirm that regional disparities persist in labour participation, particularly among women and rural youth.[61] Educational gaps, limited access to credit, and spatial inequalities contribute to these outcomes, suggesting that CST-inspired cooperatives, which are grounded in solidarity and subsidiarity, could empower small-scale entrepreneurs, enhance collective bargaining, and promote inclusive participation.

Decent Work: Safeguarding Rights and Solidarity

Decent work entails the assurance of safe, equitable, and dignified labour conditions. Yet Sri Lanka's plantation sector continues to exemplify systemic shortcomings: persistent child labour, bonded indebtedness, and inadequate housing remain widespread among Tamil estate communities.[62] Reports by the Department of Labour (2021) reveal exploitative wage cycles that contravene both national law and SDG targets.[63] CST's principle of *solidarity*, as articulated in *Fratelli Tutti*, calls for reconciliation across ethnic and social divides and the protection of those excluded from formal economic systems.[64] Applying this to Sri Lanka implies the recognition of estate communities as citizens with full land and labour rights, echoing the subsidiarity principle, which promotes empowerment through community ownership rather than dependency. Partnerships between the ILO and the Ministry of Labour have begun to address such disparities,[65] but CST adds a vital moral depth, interpreting labour reform as an act of justice and restoration of human dignity.

The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences' report *The Future of Work: Labour after Laudato Si'* envisions integration between ecological sustainability and labour rights, urging economies to link productivity with care for creation—a perspective particularly relevant to Sri Lanka's post-war tourism and agricultural sectors.[66] Gender-sensitive labour interventions also remain pivotal. Advocacy for maternity protection and the expansion of childcare provisions, as supported by the Department of Labour, demonstrates how faith-based actors can bridge cultural norms while advancing SDG Target 8.5.[67.] Through such initiatives, decent work becomes both a developmental and a theological imperative.

Equal Pay: Justice as Theological Imperative

Equal pay for equal work stands at the intersection of CST's moral theology and the SDGs' justice framework. In Sri Lanka, the gender wage gap—estimated at 28% —remains a persistent obstacle to equity, driven largely by occupational segregation and unequal access

to senior roles.[68] Studies reveal that bonus and incentive structures in the garment sector disproportionately favour men, exacerbating inequalities and undermining female empowerment.[69]

CST's teaching provides a profound ethical response. *Rerum Novarum* (§45) affirms that wages must offer ―honest comfort‖ and ensure the sustenance of the worker's family,[70] while Pope Francis has denounced unequal pay as a ―social sin‖ that offends the divine image in every person.[71] Consequently, policy implementation in Sri Lanka should extend beyond formal compliance with the *Equal Remuneration Ordinance (2023)* to embedding CST's concept of equality *in dignitate* - equality in dignity - into labour governance frameworks.

Ethnic wage disparities also demand moral reckoning. Tamil and Muslim workers continue to face systematic pay penalties compared with their Sinhalese counterparts, as shown in World Bank analyses.[72] CST's *option for the poor* compels affirmative interventions to protect such marginalized groups. Yet, structural corruption and socio-religious tensions remain barriers to reform.[73] Interfaith dialogue, such as programmes led by the National Peace Council, illustrates how collaboration between Buddhist and Christian communities can strengthen ethical solidarity in the labour domain.[74]

A forward-looking approach must therefore embed CST principles into Sri Lanka's labour law, education, and social dialogue structures. Legislation should include explicit dignity clauses that affirm the intrinsic worth of every worker, ensuring that labour justice transcends economic utility. Moreover, curricular reforms can promote an understanding of work as vocation, fostering a generation that perceives employment as service to society and the common good. At the community level, partnerships between the Church and international organizations such as the ILO can support migrant worker protections, bridging global standards with local realities. Finally, sustained longitudinal research on CST-informed labour practices would provide empirical grounding for policy, demonstrating how moral theology enriches sustainable development.

Comparative South Asian experience reinforces these insights. India's caste-based labour inequalities parallel Sri Lanka's estate hierarchies, while Dalit theology and faith-inspired activism offer instructive examples of dignity restoration through praxis.[75] Similarly, Bangladesh's post-Rana Plaza garment sector reforms, including legally mandated worker safety and unionisation, demonstrate how integrating ethical principles with SDG goals can reduce exploitation and human cost.[76]

Conclusion

The integration of CST and SDG 8.5 offers Sri Lanka a transformative and ethically grounded framework for advancing work with dignity, one that unites theological vision with socio-economic policy. From *Rerum Novarum*'s affirmation of workers' rights to *Fratelli Tutti*'s call to universal fraternity, CST provides a moral compass that critiques structural injustices such as informality, inequality, and exploitation, while also inspiring solidarity, participation, and reconciliation. SDG 8.5, in turn, translates these ethical imperatives into measurable commitments, such as full employment for stability, decent work for security, and equal pay for justice, thereby bridging spiritual anthropology with pragmatic development planning. Within Sri Lanka's fragile yet resilient socio-economic landscape, marked by ethnic division and economic vulnerability, this synthesis speaks directly to the root causes of injustice: ethnic hierarchies are challenged through inclusive growth, gender disparities are confronted through empowered participation, and systemic vulnerability is reduced through sustainable and participatory labour models. It reconceives work not merely

as an economic activity but as a form of co-creation with God, oriented towards the common good and ecological stewardship. In this sense, progress must be evaluated not solely by economic metrics, but by the measure of human flourishing, where workers are recognized as subjects of dignity and communities are strengthened as networks of justice and solidarity. Ultimately, this vision calls for a moral conversion across all sectors of society: policymakers, employers, and citizens alike must rediscover the sacredness of work as vocation rather than burden. As Pope John Paul II reminds us in *Laborem Exercens* (§9), ―through work man must earn his daily bread,‖ yet this must occur in conditions that affirm human worth and participation in creation. For Sri Lanka, realizing this integration between CST and SDG 8.5 thus unites developmental ambition with divine justice, forging a labour economy rooted in dignity, solidarity, and hope - an economy where every person is empowered to contribute meaningfully to the common good.

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