

Article

The Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Attitude to Work—A Comparative Perspective

Amir Mashiach

School of Education, Ariel University, Ariel 40700, Israel; amirma@ariel.ac.il

Abstract: The major aim of the religious person is to obey God’s injunctions and follow His ways. If he or she shall do so, he or she will attain success in this world or in the world-to-come. Thus, the Abrahamic religions have come to center on precepts involving man’s relationship with God and an occupation with spirituality. Accordingly, the central figures and those who head the religious hierarchy are rabbis (in Judaism), priests and monks (in Christianity), and Imams (in Islam), who are practiced and proficient in religious spiritual life. This means that the religions are primarily occupied with spirituality. In addition, monotheism portrays an abstract God, such that those who wish to resemble Him must necessarily strive for spirituality. As a result, the occupation with material matters was completely marginalized. Due to the prime place given to “spirituality”, this article seeks to examine the attitude to corporeal work in the Abrahamic religions. The conclusion - in contrast to the initial-intuitive outlook—the religions are not occupied exclusively with spirituality. In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the worship of God includes corporeal work, both as a subsistence need and as a religious value.

Keywords: Judaism; Christianity; Islam; Abrahamic religions; work; spirituality; religious value; Ancient Greece



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1. Introduction

The western world defines religion as a social or cultural framework that encompasses beliefs, rituals, and worldviews associated with spirituality and ethical principles. The Abrahamic religions (Abulafia 2019), i.e., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are monotheistic religions that identify their origins with Abraham, the forefather of monotheism. According to the various Scriptures, the Abrahamic religion derives from God, who revealed Himself to humanity either directly—on Mount Sinai, in the Jewish version, or according to Christianity in His human embodiment in Christ, or through his prophecies to Muhammad according to Islam.

The major aim of the religious person is to obey God’s injunctions and follow His ways. If he or she shall do so, he or she will attain success in this world or in the world-to-come. Thus, the Abrahamic religions have come to center on precepts involving man’s relationship with God and an occupation with spirituality. Accordingly, the central figures and those who head the religious hierarchy are rabbis (in Judaism), priests and monks (in Christianity), and Imams (in Islam), who are practiced and proficient in religious spiritual life. This means that the religions are primarily occupied with spirituality. In addition, monotheism portrays an abstract God, such that those who wish to resemble Him must necessarily strive for spirituality. As a result, the occupation with material matters was completely marginalized.

Among many believers of all faiths, the worship of God centers on spiritual work, where the ultimate aspiration is to be worthy of the World to Come. Lorberbaum described the transition in Judaism, which from a faith occupied with Jewish law and the religious precepts shifted to an engagement in spirituality, mystery, and transcendence, to the extent of refusing to attach meanings and justifications to the precepts, as they transcend our

perception. The precepts must be obeyed without understanding their meaning (Lorberbaum 2018). In a paraphrase of the words of Augustine, who said that a comprehensible God is not God (Augustine, Sermons cxvii 3,5), the halakhic religiosity of mystery and loftiness contends that a comprehensible precept is not a religious precept. If religion is lofty spirituality, then the world of matter contradicts it. Corporeality is not considered part of the religious experience, and it is negative in essence.

This led to a rise in the status of the World to Come, while rejecting this World. Rotenberg claimed that “Judaism indeed took advantage of belief in the World to Come in order to promote studying and spirituality in this World” (Rotenberg 2008, p. 16). This is true not only of Judaism, but rather of all faiths. Thus, also “in the Greco-Christian world, the separation between body and soul formed a distinction, whereby lust and abomination are associated with the body, and in order for one to be spiritual it must be repressed” (Guide for the Perplexed, p. 74). Similarly, the attitude to all material endeavors is that they interfere with spiritual uplifting. It is necessary to ignore the material-physical and even to suppress it.

For instance, Maimonides (12th century) wrote that the corporeal interferes with one’s spiritual efforts. “The corporeal element in man is a large screen and partition that prevents him from perfectly perceiving abstract ideals . . . However great the exertion of our mind may be to comprehend the Divine Being . . . we find a screen and partition between Him and ourselves” (Guide for the Perplexed, 3:9). Therefore, in his view, it is necessary to reduce our corporeal-physical occupations as much as possible. “Those who desire to be men in truth, and not brutes, having only the appearance and shape of men, must constantly endeavor to reduce the wants of the body . . . and feel ashamed of them” (Guide for the Perplexed, 8). The corporeal-physical occupation is a source of shame, as in this man is no different from animals, as he sees it.

As stated, the ultimate aspiration of the believer is to reach the World to Come. In contrast to occupying oneself with the matters of this World, all efforts must be aimed at achieving eternal spiritual pleasure. There are several statements to this effect in Judaism, for instance: “This world is like a vestibule before the world to come; prepare yourself in the vestibule, so that you may enter the banqueting-hall” (Pirkei Avot 4:16); Maimonides stated: “The good that is hidden for the righteous is the life of the world to come . . . This is the reward above which there is no higher reward . . . This was desired by all the prophets” (Mishneh Torah, Repentance 8); and the Ramchal (18th century) declared: “that man was created solely to delight in God . . . for this is the true delight and the greatest pleasure that can possibly exist. The place of this pleasure is, in truth, in the World to Come” (Mesilat Yesharim 1).

Christianity focused on hell more than heaven and the dread of the approaching Day of Judgement was a major component in Jesus’ preaching. His calls for purification and repentance were aimed at saving mankind from punishment for their sins, and the Christian prophecy of the Day of Judgement determines that non-Christians will be doomed to hell, as they are tainted by the sin of the First Man. In time, Dante’s “Divine Comedy” (14th century) and its colorful descriptions of hell became a major component of Christian consciousness.

In Islam, the common approach to describing heaven is through physical descriptions of the food, drink, and virgins available to the believers, in addition to the punishments in hell which appear, among other things, in Sura 56, verses 12–44. At the end of his life, man will stand in judgment, with the good angel perched on his right shoulder presenting his good deeds and the bad angel on his left shoulder presenting his bad deeds. Radical Islam has made considerable use of the concept of the virgins in heaven to be awarded to the shahid as a reward for his deeds (Koran, 3:13). The belief in the World to Come and the multiple rewards that await the believer is a major tenet of Islam.

“Indeed, the righteous will be in a secure place, amid Gardens and springs, dressed in fine silk and rich brocade, facing one another. So it will be. And We will pair them to maidens with gorgeous eyes . . . There they will never taste

death, beyond the first death. And He will protect them from the punishment of the Hellfire". (Sura 44:51–56)

It is for good reason that the focus on spirituality in order to receive a reward in heaven or alternately to avoid the bitter punishments of hell caused many to concentrate on spirituality rather than corporeality in their Divine worship.

As mentioned, revelation is a main element of the monotheistic religions, whether to Moses, Jesus, or Muhammad. The capacity to attain prophecy was predicated on reaching a high spiritual level. This led to the development of a disconnection between the spiritual-religious sphere and the corporeal-physical sphere. In the phenomenology of religion, particularly the Kantian or Protestant, the holy is the 'Wholly Other' (Otto 1923, chp. 5). Hence, matter and spirit were distinguished. Also the statement "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Matthew 22:21) created a disparity between spirituality and corporeality. Priests and monks, the Christian role models, strive for separation from the material world while focusing on spirituality. William James too claimed that neglecting human responsibility is a mark of religion (James 1961, p. 229), a statement that suits parts of the Christian faith and the Jewish ultra-Orthodox sector.

Among the Jewish ultra-Orthodox, the customary conception is that Torah study and observation of the commandments are the only way to rectify the world (*Tikun olam*. for example, *Nefesh Hachayim* by R. Chaim of Volozhin). As they see it, scientific occupations and technological improvements are not a true act of creation. Wurzburger claims that this approach stemmed from the period of exile. Jews were relegated to an inferior social class and prevented from participating in the cultural and political life of their countries. Human activism was perceived negatively, or even as heresy, as everything is in God's hands (Wurzburger 1989).

It is precisely due to the intensive focus on "spirituality" that the current article seeks to examine the attitude to corporeal work in the Abrahamic faiths. Was corporeality indeed removed from the religious agenda in the Abrahamic faiths or is it perhaps an inseparable component? Can work be considered part of Divine worship or is it indeed merely a need and not a religious value and therefore not included in the religious experience? The order will be: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, following their chronological emergence.

Methodological note—This study will address the fundamental texts of the Abrahamic religions, namely, in Judaism the Bible and the rabbinical literature, in Christianity an emphasis on the New Testament, and in Islam the Quran and the Suna. Each of the faiths has indeed developed since then, But that's for future research.

And another general note—the article refers to the believer in the male form, however it equally relates to females.

2. Ancient Greece

Before addressing the attitude of the religions to corporeal work, we shall elaborate on the attitude to work in the Greco-Roman culture that was central to the Middle Eastern geopolitical sphere at the time rabbinical literature and the Christian faith were developing in the first centuries AD.

In Greece and Rome, manual work was treated with disdain, as it was entrusted to the slaves and lower classes. The higher classes aimed for a military or literary career and subsisted on revenues produced by estates manned by helots. This reality subsequently influenced medieval European nobility.

The Greek philosophers too treated physical work disparagingly (Okyere Asante 2017). Plato divided the population into three classes: the philosophers, the warriors, and the workers (Plato, *The Republic*, Book II). He scorns the laborer class, disrespectfully called "banausic" (βάνανσοι), whose designation is to support the upper classes, the warriors, and the philosophers. "And why do you suppose that 'base mechanic' handicraft is a term of reproach? Shall we not say that it is solely when the best part is naturally weak in a man so that it cannot govern and control the brood of beasts within him but can only serve them and can learn nothing but the ways of flattering them" (Plato, *The Republic*, 590c). As when

performing manual labor the mind, which is the most important human part, is not active, and it gradually weakens.

Aristotle too saw work as inferior (Angier 2016). He claimed that there is an intrinsic good and an instrumental good aimed at achieving the true good, happiness. For instance, money is an instrumental good, as it is used to purchase food and other needs, but it is not an intrinsic good. Thus, work too is an instrumental good aimed at achieving the intrinsic good (Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 7).

In his book “Nicomachean Ethics”, Aristotle investigates whether a life of study (*vita contemplativa*) is the ultimate purpose, or perhaps the goal is a creative life (*vita activa*). He discerns four aims in the life of people who attempt to achieve happiness. The first is to be wealthy. He finds it hard to believe that that is the supreme aim of life, as money is an instrumental rather than an intrinsic good. The second is honor. He finds it hard to see how honor makes one happy, as honor originates from others rather than from oneself. The third is a life of pleasure. Aristotle regards these people as “brutish”. Physical pleasures, like beasts, do not require intellect. The fourth, a life of study (*vita contemplativa*), is the ultimate goal of human life, the supreme happiness, man’s use of the intellect.

Hence, it was clear to him that work is not the ultimate goal. The laborer merely carries out a plan that he does not understand: “For that reason, foremen of each type of labor are considered more honorable and more understanding and smart than the laborers, because they know the reason that things are done; the laborers themselves are lone individuals who act without knowing what they are doing” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 980a).

In sum, Greco-Roman culture saw work as inferior and derisive, associated with slaves and the lower classes.

3. In Judaism

3.1. To Work It and Take Care of It

Beginning from man’s initial presence in the Garden of Eden, the Scriptures emphasized work. “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15). Work in the Garden of Eden appears to have been easy, but when Adam sinned it became hard. “Cursed be the ground because of you; by hard labor shall you eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you. But your food shall be the grasses of the field. By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat” (Genesis 3:17–19).

When the people of Israel are given the Torah, right before the commandment to abstain from work on the Sabbath, man is commanded to work. “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath” (Exodus 20:8). Just as it is a religious precept to abstain from work on the Sabbath, it is also a religious precept to work on weekdays. The Scriptures describe the nation’s forefathers as people of labor who worked as shepherds and farmers. Moses too is described as a shepherd (Genesis 13:13–15; Genesis 26:12; Genesis 30:31; Exodus 3:1), indicating that work is an important value.

The Bible has many verses in praise of laborers and work, for example: “Man then goes out to his work, to his labor until the evening” (Psalms 104:23), “You shall enjoy the fruit of your labors; you shall be happy and you shall prosper” (Psalms 128:2), “He who tills his land shall have food in plenty” (Proverbs 12:11), and so on. Some verses relate to the satisfaction that results from work, for instance: “A worker’s sleep is sweet” (Ecclesiastes 5:11). Work is also part of the vision for the end of days, when weapons will be transformed into agricultural implements: “And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (Isaiah 2:4).

3.2. Work as a Religious Value

The sages too praised work as a religious value rather than only as necessary for purposes of subsistence (Arazi 1964; Neuwirth 2015). Work is one of the foundations of the world: “The world stands upon three things: the Torah, the Temple service [*avoda*, also: work], and the practice of acts of piety” (Mishna, Avot 1:2). Consequently, they ridiculed

the Hellenistic outlook that derided work and perceived it as foolishness: "If a man were to say . . . it is beneath me to perform labor and to humiliate myself, [they] say to him: Fool, your Creator preceded you, as He performed labor even before you appeared in the world, as it is written: from doing any of the work" (*Midrash Hane'elam*).

Because the sages perceived work as an important value, they obliged the father to teach his son a trade, and "any who does not teach his son a trade teaches him banditry" (B. Kiddushin 29a). Elsewhere they explained: "'Choose life' (Deuteronomy 30:19), that is a trade" (J. Kiddushin 1:7). Engaging in work means opting for the good and for life.

3.3. Torah That Is Not Accompanied by Work, Ends in Vain and Leads to Iniquity

The sages encouraged the combination of Torah and work. "Torah which is not combined with a worldly occupation, in the end comes to be neglected and becomes the cause of sin" (Mishna, Avot 2:2). They called for the love of work and considered it a religious precept. "Love work . . . For just as the Torah was given in a covenant, so work was given in a covenant, as it says: 'For six days you shall labor and do all your work, and the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Eternal your God'" (Avot D'Rabbi Natan, version A, 11).

And they also said in praise of labor: "Labor is important, as even Adam did not eat . . . until he engaged in labor". Even God did not inspire Israel with his Divine spirit "until they engaged in labor". And in general: "Anyone who does not engage in labor is accountable for the loss of his life" (Avot D'Rabbi Natan, version B, 21). It is so crucial.

Some contend that it is work rather than piety that ensures one a part in the world to come:

One who benefits from his hard labor is greater than a God-fearing person. As with regard to a God-fearing person it is written: "Happy is the man who fears the Lord" (Psalms 112:1), while with regard to one who benefits from his hard work, it is written: "By the labor of your hands you will live; you are happy and it is good for you" (Psalms 128:2). "You are happy" in this world, and "it is good" for you in the World-to-Come. And regarding a God-fearing person, "it is good for you" is not written about him. (B. Berakhot 8a)

The sages learned the extent of the entitlement earned by labor from Jacob, who said to his father-in-law Laban who pursued him in order to kill him: "Had not the God of my father—the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac—been with me, you would have sent me away empty-handed. But it was my plight and the toil of my hands that God took notice of—and gave judgment on last night" (Genesis 31:42). The sages learned from this:

Labor is appreciated more than ancestral merit, as ancestral merit spared money but labor spared lives. Ancestral merit spared money as it is written: "Had not the God of my father . . . you would have sent me away empty-handed" [without money], but labor spared lives, as it is written: "it was my plight and the toil of my hands that God took notice of—and gave judgment on last night [as He said to Laban: "Watch yourself, speaking to Yaakov good or bad"]". (Genesis Rabbah 74:12)

The sages were disputed on the issue of combining Torah and work. R. Yishmael argued that Torah should be combined with work and R. Shimon ben Yohai argued that all one's time should be devoted to the study of Torah (B. Berakhot 35b). The sages ruled that: "Many have acted in accordance with Rabbi Yishmael and were successful. Many have acted in accordance with Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai and were not successful." Torah and work should be combined.

Not only the sages ruled in this dispute; God too saw work in a positive light. It is related that after R. Shimon and his son spent 12 years in a cave, they emerged from the cave (B. Shabbat 33b). "They . . . saw people who were plowing and sowing. [They] said: [These people] abandon eternal life and engage in temporal life! Every place that [they] directed their eyes was immediately burned. A Divine Voice emerged and said to them: [Did] you emerge to destroy My world? Return to your cave!". God himself criticized

R. Shimon's rejection of work and supported R. Yishmael's method of integration. God's world is this world, the corporeal, and it must be improved through work.

3.4. Halachic Meaning

Engaging in work has halakhic meaning as well. I shall bring two examples. The first is that gamblers are disqualified from serving as witnesses in court since they do not engage in labor and in "settling the world", but if they have a trade and engage in "settling the world" then their testimony is accepted (B. Sanhedrin 24b). The second is that the Scriptures say: "... and show deference to the old" (Leviticus 19:32), i.e., the sages should be honored by standing up when in their presence. If one is occupied with work, however, he or she is exempt. "Craftsmen are not permitted to stand before Torah scholars when they are engaged in their work" (B. Kiddushin 33a). Work is a value that receives preference over honoring scholars.

It is for good reason that throughout rabbinical literature we find descriptions of sages who engaged in work, for example Samuel, Abaye, and R. Assi were farmers (B. Hulin 105a); Hillel was a woodchopper, Shamai was a construction worker (B. Shabbat 31a); R. Joshua was a blacksmith (B. Berakhot 28a); R. Meir was a clerk (B. Sotah 20a); R. Jodah was a baker (B. Bava Batra 113a); R. Hanina and R. Oshaiah were shoemakers (B. Pesachim 113b); and so on.

In summary, Judaism considers work a religious value, both for purposes of subsistence and for rectifying and "settling the world".

4. In Christianity

4.1. Whatever You Do, Work Heartily

The Christian scriptures are significantly occupied with the relations between man and God, however they also contain statements espousing the importance of corporeal work as part of their religious outlook (Palmer 2012; Veith 2012; Shigematsu 2013; Keller 2014; Wellman 2019).

The New Testament portrays Jesus as a carpenter (Mark 6:3), as was his father, Joseph (Matthew 13:55). The very mention of his occupation attests to the importance of work.

A general directive on work as having religious meaning was uttered by Paul: "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men" (Epistle to the Colossians 3:23).

Work has moral and religious meaning and involves responsibility regarding one's relations with friends and family: "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). One who does not work—is not a believer; furthermore, it is written: "Whoever is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys" (Proverbs 18:9). One who is idle not only does not build, but destroys. There is no neutral ground. One is either positive or negative, work is positive and idleness is negative. Paul too said about the obligation to work: "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). The idler loses his right of existence.

4.2. Work as a Tool for Social Correction

In Christianity, work is an instrument for social rectification, as earning a livelihood allows one to give. "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need" (Ephesians 4:28). Work allows one to give and thus rectifies the thief and society in general. Giving is one of the "seven virtues" defined by Plato and Aristotle and adopted by the church fathers, Ambrose and Augustine. Of the seven, four are cardinal, the Greek Arete (ἀρετή) (Kerferd 1967)—prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude, and three theological—faith, hope, and charity. The seven virtues are utilized in order to overcome the undesirable "seven sins". That is why work has religious value.

4.3. Work as Giving

Work as giving relates to people and to God. One who gives to human beings, gives to God:

Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me drink’ . . . Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?’ . . . And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me’. (Matthew 25:34–40)

Giving to others entitles one to receive the reward of “true life”.

4.4. Walk in His Ways

One is instructed to follow in God’s ways, “Walk in His ways”. Therefore, if God works, man should work too. When Jesus was chastised for curing a person on the Sabbath he answered that God too works and cures on the Sabbath: “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working . . . whatever the Father does the Son also does” (John 5:17–20).

Overall, Paul instructs his followers: “to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you” (1 Thessalonians 4:11). This, further to the human mission “to work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15). This instruction is given not only regarding the Garden of Eden, rather for the entire world. Human beings must work and take care of the world, and in this way transform it into a Garden of Eden, the kingdom of God.

Further to man’s mission in the Garden of Eden and in the world, Paul says: “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). God has given man the ability to rectify the world, and he or she does this through work.

4.5. Tikkun Olam

The different types of work have different social ranks, some are more respectable and others less. According to the Christian view, however, all types of work are equal before God. God gives each person qualities that he or she must utilize in his work in order to carry out his mission.

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. (The Epistle to the Romans 12:6–8)

In this way, work and the qualities of the believer become part of building the world, part of building Christ: “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (I Corinthians 12:28). And elsewhere, Paul said:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesian 4:11–13)

4.6. Max Weber and Human Endeavors

Max Weber, as we know, saw human efforts and work as the Protestant view and the foundations of capitalism (Weber 1930; Anthony 1977). This is already evident, however, in the New Testament, whereby making an effort at one’s job grants one the right to increase his wealth, as he or she makes an effort to utilize God’s gift and the opportunities he or she

encounters. He or she who is lazy will lose that which he or she received, as the opportunity will be lost due to his indolence.

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

“After a long time, the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master’, he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more’.

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

“The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master’, he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more’.

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

“Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master’, he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you’.

“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned, I would have received it back with interest.

“So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’. (Matthew 25:14–30)

Work is part of the rectification and building of the world, part of the worship of the Creator; there is no room for indolence.

In sum, Christianity views work as a value aimed at rectifying the world, giving, and performing benevolence, among the Christian theological virtues. This is how one observes the injunction to “walk in His ways” and this is how one is granted business opportunities, when one fulfills his designation in both the spiritual and the corporeal sphere.

5. In Islam

5.1. *Earning a Living Is a Binding Obligation*

Work has considerable place in Islam (Bayat 1992; Ali and Al-Owaihian 2008; Dhib 2014; Kheyamy 2018). The different suras include 360 mentions of work (*amal*). In addition, Prophet Muhammad served as a shepherd. At age 25 he married Khadijah, a wealthy merchant, and joined her caravans on trade journeys. She asked him to marry her because she saw his good virtues, and particularly his industriousness (Armstrong 2002). The Quran notes that the prophets and Allah’s messengers all worked (For instance: Saba, 11).

It is the duty of all Muslims to work: “Earning halal livelihood is binding (*wajib*) on every Muslim” (Majma’uz Zawaid, vol. 10, p. 291 & Targhib, vol. 2, p. 546). Though work

is not one of the five pillars of Islam, it is a type of worship (*ibadah*). Prophet Muhammad said: “Work and Allah will see your work” (Quran 09:105).

Work allows financial independence, and this is a supreme goal in Islam. Prophet Muhammad said: “Nobody has ever eaten a better meal than that which one has earned by working with one’s own hands. The Prophet of Allah, David used to eat from the earnings of his manual labor” (Sahih al-Bukhari 2072, Book 34, Hadith 25). Work and earning a livelihood keep one from becoming needy. Prophet Muhammad stressed that this has meaning not only in this world but also saves one from hell:

It is better for anyone of you to take a rope (and cut) and bring a bundle of wood (from the forest) over his back and sell it and Allah will save his face (from the Hell-Fire) because of that, rather than to ask the people who may give him or not. (Sahih al-Bukhari 1471, Book 24, Hadith 74)

5.2. Work and Charity

Work and financial independence are associated with the obligation to give charity: “Every Muslim must give charity (*sadaqah*)”. And when Prophet Muhammad was asked what one should do if or she he has nothing to give, he replied: “He said that he should labour with his hands to earn benefit for himself and give sadaqah from that”. Hence, one who works helps rectify society. When asked what to do if one has no such ability he answered: “He should help one who is in need and distressed” (Adab al Mufrad: 225). Charity can be given by means of either psychological or financial support.

Work makes one worthy of resurrection: “It is He who made the earth tame for you—so walk among its slopes and eat of His provision—and to Him is the resurrection” (Al-Mulk, 15). Furthermore, “The prophet said: The believer dies with his sweat on his brow” (Ahmad, 22513; al-Tirmidhi, 980; al-Nasaa’i, 1828). Sweat indicates hard work and persistence, which are taken into account by Allah at one’s death and entitle the working-believer to retribution.

Allah divided the day into day and night, the night for sleep and the day for work. “And made the night as a cover, and made the day for livelihood” (An-Naba, 10, 11). Therefore, one’s first obligation in the morning is prayer, followed immediately by work: “And when the prayer has been concluded, disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah” (Al-Jumu’ah, 10).

Even in man’s last hour he or she should persist in his work (Compare to the Jewish statement: “If you have a sapling in your hand and they tell you ‘The Messiah is coming!’ first plant the sapling and then go to greet him” (Avot d’Rabbi Natan, version 2, 31)). Prophet Muhammad said: “If the Final Hour comes while you have a palm-cutting in your hands and it is possible to plant it before the Hour comes, you should plant it” (Sahih (Al-Albani), Book 1, Hadith 479).

5.3. Work and Love of God

Muhammad urged one to do everything fully and to merit the love of God. “Verily, Allah loves that when anyone of you does something he or she does it perfectly” (Tabarani, 901–Hathami, 98/4–Al-Siyouti, 5232). And this is particularly true of work. “Allah loves when one of you does a work that he does it with perfection” (Narrated by abu Yala through Ayesha, and al-albani authenticated this hadith). It is related of the daughter of Jethro who asked her father to employ Moses: “O my father, hire him. Indeed, the best one you can hire is the strong and trustworthy” (Surah 28 verse 26). Perfection and industriousness are so important that they are compared to the quality of trustworthiness.

When Prophet Muhammad was asked about the best deeds he answered: “Believe in Allah and Jihad in His cause . . . help an industrious person in accomplishing his job” (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim, by Abu Dharr). Note that faith, war, and work appear together (See also: Tabarani, Mujam ul Kabir:282; Bayhaqi Shuaab ul Iman: 4853). Work is so important that the Quran compares the laborers to those who fight for Allah: “Others will be travelling in the land to look for Allah’s bounty and (still some) others will be

fighting in the way of Allah" (Quran 73:20). Umar, the second Caliph, saw the laborer as more important than the warrior: "To die while striving in my work hoping for the bounty of God is even better to me than being killed in the Holy war for the sake of God" (Al-Shaibani).

5.4. Work as an Equalizer of Men

More is told of work:

Al-Maroor ibn Suwaid says, I met Abu Dhar . . . and observed both himself and his servant wearing the same cloth. I asked him about that. He said, [long ago] I quarreled with a servant and called his mother by names. The prophet said: "O Abu Dharr . . . Surely you are a person still clinging to some values of dark ages! Your servants are your brothers whom Allah made them at your service and under your mercy. If some of you have such brothers under you, then make sure to feed them as you eat, and dress them as you wear, and never impose labor on them beyond their ability. If you have to impose burden on them, then help them in carrying such labors. (narrated by Bukhari and Muslim)

Work equalizes people, slaves, and masters.

The believer could claim that because he or she is occupied with spirituality and asceticism, he or she does not work or engage in material matters. It is related that Prophet Muhammad saw a person who prayed at length and did not work. He asked: Who supports him? And people answered that some of them help him. The prophet said that those people who help him are better than the person himself (Musnad Ahmad). There is no spirituality without corporeality.

5.5. Work as a Way of Settling the World

Work in Islam is aimed at settling the world. This is one of man's missions as perceived by God. "O my people! Worship Allah . . . He is the One Who produced you from the earth and settled you on it" (Quran 11:61). Hence, work is part of a Divine task to rectify the world through human beings and their work on the land (Compare to the Jewish outlook: "He did not create it a waste, but formed it for habitation" (Isaiah 45:18)).

In sum, Islam sees work as an important religious value. Work is not only a source of subsistence but rather also of giving charity, rectifying society, settling the world, and conquering the desert.

6. Conclusions and Discussion

I have shown that the Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, related to work as inferior, as the workers were slaves or people from the lower class. In addition, as they saw it, one who does manual work utilizes his hands rather than his mind and thus loses his advantage and definition as a human being, a "thinking animal". Therefore, work in general was perceived as a humiliation for an educated or high class individual. However unlike the Greek philosophers, who scorned work, the Abrahamic faiths had a positive attitude. Work is part of the worship of God.

In Judaism, the importance of work is emphasized already in the Garden of Eden. Man's role is "to work it and take care of it". The Ten Commandments instruct: "Six days you shall labor". The sages saw work as a religious value, one of the foundations of the world. "The world stands upon three things: the Torah, the Temple service [*avoda*, also: work], and the practice of acts of piety". They also said: "Torah which is not combined with a worldly occupation, in the end comes to be neglected and becomes the cause of sin". No religiosity can be solely spiritual.

In Christianity, work serves as a tool for social rectification, facilitated by giving. When one works he or she observes the injunction "Walk in His ways". God works, hence man should work. In his work he or she improves the world and transforms it into a Garden of Eden, a kingdom of God.

Islam sees work as a religious obligation that grants man financial independence, the capacity to give, rectify society, and settle the world. Work entitles the worker to receive retribution in the world-to-come and to eventually be resurrected.

It is for good reason that all the Scriptures relate that the founders of the faiths worked: Moses was a shepherd, Jesus was a carpenter, and Muhammad was a shepherd and merchant. These are not mere biographical facts but rather a message; this is how the founding fathers conducted themselves and so should you.

As stated, the motivation for working is financial independence, social rectification of the world, benevolence and charity, love for the world, and its settlement. The Abrahamic religions see work also as physical rectification of the world. The story of the Creation ends with the words: “On the seventh day God finished the work that had been undertaken . . . that God had done (lit. ‘to do’)” (Genesis 2:2–3). Why “to do” if he had already done it? Rather, the world was originally created in its raw form and man must complete the Creation through work. “Anything created in the first six days, needs further actions” (Genesis Rabbah 11:6). “When God began to create heaven and earth . . .”. God only began to create, it is up to man to complete the creation.

Loving the world, its improvement and settlement, are reminiscent of the Biophilia, “love of life or of life systems”. According to the Biophilia hypothesis, there is an innate natural human inclination to seek a connection with nature (Wilson 1984). If we expand the hypothesis to form a theology, love of nature stems from the fact that nature is a Divine creation. Hence, Biophilia is Theophilia. Therefore, the Abrahamic religions preach integration with nature and improving the world via work.¹

In Judaism, the importance of work diminished over the years in favor of the halakhic-spiritual occupation. The reason was the exile and the sages’ responsibility for the nation’s survival.

I shall explain. Rabbinical literature developed after the failure of the Great Revolt (66–73), the Kitoš war (115–117), and the Bar Kochba revolt (132–135) against the Roman Empire. The Temple and the Jewish settlement in the land of Israel were destroyed as a result of the offensive ethos. The sages made a strategic decision to shift the Jewish ethos from offensive to defensive. Changing the biblical-Jewish identity and ethos to a rabbinical-Jewish identity enhanced the study of Torah as a supreme and nearly exclusive value, culminating in the clear-cut statement, “And the study of the torah is equal to them all” (Mishna, Peah 1:1), the study of Torah is the equivalent of all the precepts together. The value of work was marginalized. Statements praising work appear in rabbinical literature, but they are less central than the theoretical-textual study of Torah (Mashiach 2014; Mashiach 2016; Mashiach 2020).

In summary, in contrast to the initial-intuitive outlook—the religions are not occupied exclusively with spirituality. In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the worship of God includes corporeal work, both as a subsistence need and as a religious value.

A last note—This article focuses on the fundamental scriptures. Since then and on in the timeline there were many interpretations, but this belongs to other additional future studies. I have now laid the foundation for an inter-religious comparison on the issue of attitude to work. In the future, I hope, I will be able to expand on the various interpretations given to these sources, in the different religions.

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- ¹ Hannah Arendt in her book *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), addressed the concepts of work, labor, and action, as part of the “original action” principle based on Heidegger’s “original thinking”. However, I saw no association between her conceptions and how the faiths perceive work.

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