

The Dignity of Work and the Silent Voices of the Unemployed Youths

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Corresponding Author Blazio Mahaso Manobo (PhD) Catholic University of Zimbabwe Article History Received: 12 / 09 / 2025 Accepted: 30 / 09 / 2025 Published: 07 / 10 / 2025	Abstract: The African youths have been subjected to massive Eurocentric narratives depicting them as unfortunate and destined for perennial life of want and pain due to their colour of skin. The continent of African has been depicted in negative terms and the leadership portrayed as beyond redemption. Young people see themselves as unfortunate to be born in Africa and hence the skills flight into diaspora. Neither the missionary theology of self-denial in order to win heaven nor the theological rhetoric of the Gospel of prosperity have the capacity to satisfy the 21st century youth. Frustrated by the burden of an education system that no longer provides opportunities for employment, African youths have found solace in drug and substance abuse, crime, sex, and violence among others vices. Using a phenomenological approach, this paper justifies the adoption of an African spirituality of work in the pastoral care of the unemployed youths. We argue in this paper that the silent voices of the unemployed youths is no longer the preserve of governments, private organizations or lay leaders, but an invitation for religious institutions to adopt approaches rooted in the solid African spirituality of work. Keywords: <i>Human dignity, Dignity of work, Youth unemployment, meaningful work.</i>
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How to Cite in APA format: Manobo, B. M. (2025). The Dignity of Work and the Silent Voices of the Unemployed Youths. IRASS Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 2(10), 59-68.

Introduction

The world of work has gone through massive transformation since the 18th century Industrial Revolution. In pre-colonial Africa, work was generally subsistence and organized along social classes (Mtata, 2011). The Industrial revolution ignited the emergence of capitalism and the commercialization of labour (Kumar, 1984). What used to be a daily routine work for subsistence living among people turned to organized labour for a salary. A division between work under employment and domestic work developed resulting in preferential value given to work under employment. Employers began to maximize profit through cost reduction strategies like division of labour, specialization, and span of control (Emilio and Omar, 2018). Labour as a factor of production was efficiently managed with little regard for the dignity of the human person involved in the production process (Miller, 1953). Advances in technology and scientific discoveries made production easier and improved the quality of goods and services. However, these developments came with little concern on the sanctity of human life.

It is estimated that Zimbabwe has a youth demographic dividend of about 76% out of which 35% (5.4 million) fall between the ages of 15 to 35. The Zimbabwe Statistical Survey (ZIMSTAT) results showed an expanded unemployment rate of 41.7% among youths between the ages 15-35 (ZIMSTAT, 2023). Prevalent vices like drug and substance abuses, robberies, prostitution, and early marriages testify to the helplessness that these young people are being subjected to due to lack of meaningful engagements (Maulani & Agwanda, 2020). While acknowledging other constraints arising from governance challenges, economic sanctions imposed on the country, impacts of neo-colonialism, and corruption, the colonial education systems adopted in Zimbabwe impressed upon the young people that the object of work as a job and a career is remuneration, prestige, and exploitation for financial gains. Now, in the absence of a just and conducive environment for remunerated work, many youths are falling into a state of dehumanizing hopelessness. The government's goal of This is an open access article under the [CC BY-NC](#) license

attaining Vision 2030 of an Upper Middle-Income society will most probably remain elusive. The solution in my view lies in the proper understanding of the meaning of work as an end (co-creation) and not a means. We argue in this paper that work is natural to human beings and that idleness or unemployment is a travesty to human ontology.

This paper looks at how work dignifies the human person from the perspectives of source and purpose. It argues that unemployment that is rampant among the youths in Zimbabwe is a dehumanizing phenomenon. In the absence of conducive environment for paid employment, the paper advocates for youth empowerment grounded on a change of attitude through a theological approach to the meaning of work as the basis for youth ministry. Theologically, work is meaningful in so far as it is understood as a participation in God's work of creation. Unemployment and forced labour are an affront on the dignity of the human person.

Conceptual Framework

The understanding of the concept of work is impacted by an intricate and changing social context (Brief and Nord, 1990). Different societies attach different meanings to work. Some definitions are broad, encompassing the social, psychological, and spiritual elements of work while others are specific to contexts like work under employment. The Online Encyclopedia Britannica (2020) defines work scientifically as "a measure of energy that occurs when an object is moved over a distance by an external force at least part of which is applied in the direction of the displacement." This means, work is an activity that involves an exertion of force and that results in some form of a change in its original state or position. Concurring, work is also defined as "an expenditure of energy through a set of coordinated activities intended to produce something useful" (Morin 2008, p. 1). Budd (2013, p. 985) defines work broadly as "purposeful human activity involving physical or mental exertion that is not undertaken solely

for pleasure and that has economic or symbolic value.” Of significance in all these definitions is the acknowledgement that work brings about something new, change, meaning, and/or self-actualization.

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), employment “comprises all persons of working age who during a specified brief period, such as one week or one day, were in the following categories: a) paid employment (whether at work or with a job but not at work); or b) self-employment (whether at work or with an enterprise but not at work).” (ILO 2013). The ILO definition makes a distinction between paid employment and self-employment where paid employment includes all employees, trainees, and apprentice. Self-employment includes owners of businesses, entrepreneurs, informal traders, and those making goods for own use. The ILO definition is broad-based and encompasses all labor activities that has the potential to create value in the form of goods or services irrespective of whether the individual get remuneration or not. However, the definition is oriented towards formal engagement than task oriented. It leaves out the work performed by unpaid domestic workers and women’s reproductive roles which are essential to a society’s continued existence. (Kruppe et al. 2007).

The United States of America, Bureau of Labour Statistics has defined unemployment to refer to an individual who “does not have a job, is available for work, and has looked for work within the four weeks” (Appelbaum 2013, p. 907). This definition resembles the International Labor Organization’s definition that defines an unemployed person as one who has reached the age of employment according to national statutes, one who has never been engaged for the past week and has been looking for employment. The individual must be available for the job to be considered unemployed. Both the American Bureau of statistics and the ILO definitions suggest that individuals whose circumstance do not allow them to actively seek employment cannot be categorized under unemployed. Neither is unpaid domestic work falling under the category of unemployed. Unemployment is a dehumanizing condition (Freire, 1970). Therefore, Jackson & Crooks (1993) concluded that an unemployed person does not live but merely exists.

Biblical Foundation of Work

The first chapter of Genesis demonstrates the true vocation of human beings as created in the image and likeness of God. God is presented as the creator and work is portrayed as an indispensable quality of the human person’s divine image (Genesis 1:1-28). In the first 25 verses of the first chapter of Genesis, God began His work by calling creation into existence. Contrary to the metaphysical dualistic philosophy of matter and spirit, Holy God and sinful world, or good and evil (Wee and Pelczar, 2008), each time God completes an activity, the product of his creation is qualified as ‘good’ (Genesis 1: 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). The material world as the product of God’s imaginative word is ‘good’. This puts to question the anthropocentric assumption that only human beings matter (Matthews, 2017). The creation narrative testifies to the holiness of the material world as a deliberate product of God’s creative Word.

In the observation of Cosby, “as image bearers of God, humanity was made to be sub-creators, to rule, to work, and to worship, continuing the creative process... God works and pairs His image bearers with the structure of work. God works and we work” (Cosby, 2016, p. 2). It can be intimated that the creation

story in the book of Genesis attests to God as a thoughtful and creative worker par excellence (Nelson, 2011, p. 20). It is evident that when God revealed Himself in History, He revealed himself as a worker and His work was manifested in the act of creating. After creating inanimate matter, God brings forth life, “Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it. And it was so” (Genesis 1:11). The created reality is willed into cooperation to bring forth fruits. The created inanimate become co-creators with God to bring forth life. God calls what he has created to cooperate with Him in the work of creation.

In revelatory terms, the creation story demonstrates how the cosmos was called into being as a manifestation of God’s creative power. Nothing subsists that was not called into existence by God. Genesis 1:2 says, “The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters”. By His creative work, the immaterial void was turned into material subsistence. This demonstrates that human and cosmic existence is not an accidental phenomenon. Neither is this world a product of chance. Through this creative process, God works to manifest His very self through the material world. He communicates His being through His creative works. The crowning of God’s work is the creation of the human person demonstrated by God when He said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth” (Genesis 1:26-28 NRSV)

The Work Orientation: ‘means’ and ‘ends’

Work as an activity of man can be viewed as a ‘means’ or an ‘end.’ The choice of which view to take shapes one’s attitude to work and the level of meaning that work will bring to the person. According to Victor Frankl, “Man’s main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in his life” (Frankl, 1959, p. 115). As a ‘means’, work can only be dignified when it points towards meaningful ‘end.’ Nevertheless, meaning is not synonymous with happiness for a work can be meaningful even under sacrificial and painful circumstances. One can find the meaning of life after accomplishing a task worth a purpose (Nielsen 1964). Conversely, an activity that fails to accomplish a choice-worthy purpose may be considered undignified.

The terms ‘work’ and ‘labour’ are often used interchangeably without paying much attention to contexts. The distinction between work and labour has roots in alienation theory of Karl Marx. Work is that activity that is carried out in the advancement of human nature and where humanity realises its potential (Ollman 1976, p. 76, McFadden, 2016, p.55). This means work shapes the world and the people in it (McFadden 2016, p. 53). On the contrary, labour from the perspectives of Marx are those activities undertaken in a capitalist environment and whose object is the maximization of profit. From a Marxist perspective, work becomes labour when it is carried out in a commercial environment with the aim of making profit.

Meda (2017) identifies three significant factors that characterize work dimensions which he classifies as, ethical dimension, instrumental dimension, and the expressive dimension. The ethical dimension of work are the activities that an individual undertakes as an obligation towards contributing to societal needs. According to Meda, this dimension is particularly important but

fast wading away. The second dimension which is the instrumental dimension of work are the extrinsic benefits that comes with undertaking an activity. This dimension, for Meda, is the most common understanding that individual perceive work today. The third notion of expressive dimension is a post-materialistic perception that considers work as a means of self-fulfillment. This dimension is gaining traction and several studies have shown the utility of self-fulfillment as the goal of every person's work.

For this reason, the dignity of the human person is best understood within the context of work. The intersection of means' and 'ends' of work find expression in Robert Bellah's (2012) three work orientations of: work as a job, work as a career, and work as a vocation. A persons' work orientation shapes the meaning they give to their work and influences the kind of jobs they seek when they become unemployed, as well as the general values they endorse in life and work (Rosso et al., 2010).

Defining work as job entails putting emphasis on the economic and extrinsic benefits of an activity in the form of salaries, allowances, and good working conditions among others (Naughton, 1991). This perspective takes job to imply some form of employment where there is an arrangement in which a person perform activities on behalf of another person or company in exchange for money or agreed benefits. The object of a job is not the work itself but benefits accruing from the work. Consequently, "the work is not an end in itself, but instead is a means that allows individuals to acquire the resources needed to enjoy their time away from the Job" (Wrzesniewski et al, 1977, p. 22). The traditional thinking that financial rewards are key to employee motivation is under attack as several studies seem to suggest that financial reward is not among primary employee motivators for job satisfaction (Agbenyegah, 2019).

Work as a job addresses the basic needs of an individual but does not provide intrinsic motivation and has little meaning to a person's ontological existence. Given a choice, many people would not opt to pursue work as job (Rosso et al, 2010). Workers can attempt to find meaning, challenge, and autonomy in financial rewards like pay, but in the final analysis, the work will defeat the worker when the motivation is limited to financial benefit alone (Schartz, 2015). There is no dignity in a job that alienates the worker from the product, process and the common good. To work without relating to the work being done relates to well to Marxist concept of worker exploitation

The second category in Bellah's typology is work as a career. In this category, the individual cherishes the social and psychological achievements brought by work. It elevates the social standing of the worker and increases the worker's self-esteem. In turn, the worker invests time and effort leading to greater productivity (Bellah *et al.*, 1985, p. 66). In his seminal book *Why We Work*, Barry Schartz (2015) claims that a satisfied worker is one who feels challenged by his work. The worker finds work stretching beyond comfort zones and provides some fun. As Naughton (1991, p. 2), observed, "work as a career ought to contribute to the development of one's psychological health by being creative, autonomous, and fulfilling."

Work as a career is directed towards a greater end which is the common good. While attaining a psychological object is good for a worker, a career goes beyond personal satisfaction to include the humanizing effect of an activity and a contribution to society's general welfare (Schartz 2015, Naughton 1991). A career signifies some form of total progression of an individual's professional life.

Sometimes, a carrier consists of various jobs carried out over several years and has some form of long-term goals. Dignity of work as a career emerges out of the relationship established between the individual and the works' product, processes, and the society at large. In this regard, every work has the potential to be satisfying and to move from being just a job to being a career and finally a vocation (Schwartz, 2015). The difference between a job and a career lies in the work environment and the individual's attitude towards the work. Ultimately, the dignity of work follows the individual's attitude towards work and the way the work environment is organized.

As a vocation, work goes beyond the relationship with the product, process, and the community. It transcends the economic, social, and psychological benefits of the job and career into the essence of the human person (Bellah *et al.*, 1985). As a vocation, work and life are inseparable and the object is fulfilment of a higher calling. To a religious person, work as a vocation takes on a religious significance like, a participation in God's co-creative mission thereby transforming the "worker and the object the worker produces by God's grace" (Naughton, 1991, p. 3). At this level, the worker assimilates the divine in the process of work and transform work from a means to an end. According to Oprah Winfrey (2018), sometimes a person can use a job to find out a vocation. In this instance, the job is used to figure out the purpose of life which is one's calling. For Oprah, once an individual has figured out one's purpose and vocation, that person might even work for no financial rewards.

People whose work is a calling do not separate what they do from who they are. Seen from a Christian tradition, work is the vocation of man since man was created in the image of God to have dominion over the whole world and to relate to God and others (Logan, 2005). Unlike work as a career where one uses one's skills to accomplish a task, in a vocation, a person uses spiritual gifts that transcend mere mortal skills. A vocation is not like a task that a person 'can' do but one that a person 'must' do. According to Allen Parr (2016), Jesus' career was to be a carpenter while his vocation was to be a saviour. Paul's career was to be tent maker while his vocation was to be the Apostle to the gentile. Work as a calling is a pathway for expressing one's purpose in ways that can make the world better (Dik, 2016).

At its highest level, work as a vocation means fulfilling the purpose for which God created an individual. It assumes that when God created the world, he had a plan for each individual and that each person's life has meaning to the degree that one cooperates with God in realizing this plan (Affolter, 2007). As a vocation, work is an end and demonstrates the full expression of the dignity of the human person. It provides purpose and meaning to the individual's life. Naughton (1991) exclaimed that, work, as a human activity, is an inherently value laden activity because in its organizational dimensions, work is a formative activity.

Human Dignity and Meaningful Work

In this section, the word 'meaning' is used to unpack the value that human beings attach to their work. The assumption of this section is that meaningful work is synonymous with dignified work. A meaningless work that is dignified is a contradiction in terms. Historically, the dignity of work has gone through a transformation of meanings and finding greater attention during the industrial revolution's emphasis on routinized and specialization work schedules (Donkin 2001, Baldry et al. 2007). There is an abundance of literature on how work should be organized for

maximum production. Several research studies were carried out to identify and promote a work environment that supports employee commitment for maximum productivity. Little is documented about the meaning of work outside employment. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that the meaning of work is found in the part that work plays in the totality of one's life (Baldry et al. 2007).

The belief that peoples work for pay has led employers to consider work as means to earn a living. Since people work for pay, Adam Smith tried to increase the incentive motive by organizing work into simple, repetitive task. Frederick Tylor went further and designed good compensation schemes for employees so that they can increase productivity (Schartz, 2015). This was later taken up by the behaviourist Skinner who introduced the concept of reward and punishment. All these attempts were aimed at creating an environment for productivity but did not promote work meaningfulness. The worker remained a 'means' to the capitalist's profit maximization motive while leaving the worker alienated from the product, process, species being, and others (Marx, 1844). The employer's profit motive and the employee's incentive or pay motives have downplayed the real significance of work.

The meaning of work can be explained as "the significance, beliefs, definitions and the value which individuals and groups attach to working as a major stream of human activity" (MOW 1987, p. 13). It relates to that which is "both significant and positive in valence meaningfulness" (Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012, p. 2). This means, meaningful work has something to offer to the worker and is worth undertaking. Meaningful work provides better psychological adjustment, promotes individual well-being, job satisfaction. It becomes meaningful when it serves a great communal good and gives a worker the feeling that it is important and is serving a higher purpose.

According to Meda (2017), work constitute the essence of humanity. It is a cultural phenomenon that is inherently meaningful. Through work, humans can creatively "transform the world, reorganize it, make it habitable, leave their mark on it" (p. 2). It is like the work of art that produces order out of chaos. Through art, the artists express who she is and is one with her work. Following Platonic philosophy of art, Paolo Fresu contended that art, "penetrates man and the world, weaving the threads that interlace the deepest and most secret parts of ourselves, thus reversing the traditional concepts of seeing and feeling" (Fresu 2013, p. 16). In Marx view, work viewed from the perspective of art is no longer alienating because the worker (who is the artist) and the product (which is the art) are united in the process (Marx 1979).

The current challenge of meaningful work is its transmission. According to Bendassolli and Tateo (2018, p. 140), culture is the medium by which the value and dignity of work is transmitted from one generation to the other, "By a process of unilateral communication, symbols, values, meanings and so on are passed from institutions to individuals." Institutions like homes, schools, churches, and colleges are vital in proffering the meaning and value of work as the essence of humanity. This means, the meaning and value of work is acquired from both the society and personal experience.

Meaningful work has a social dimension. Work is meaningful when it serves the common good. This does not mean all work that has a social dimension like assisting in social work is meaningful. As Schwartz observes, "You don't need to be working for an organization that saves lives to find meaning and purpose in

what you do. You just need to be doing work that makes people's lives better" (Schartz, 2015, p. 16). This suggests that work is dignified when it promotes the dignity of others. Consequently, the lack of work may spell meaninglessness for most people.

Dehumanizing Effects of Unemployment

The sections above have analyzed the meaning and significance of work to the individual. This section seeks to find out what happens to an individual who wants to work but cannot get the opportunity. It looks at the impacts of unemployment given the observations that work gives meaning to life. The dignity of work goes beyond a good employment environment which has been the focus of many studies. Self-employment, domestic, and voluntary work are presented as avenues by which an individual can find meaning in life. On the contrary, the impact of unemployment, which is the motivation of this section, finds relevance when reflected from the perspective of individuals who are willing to take up employment for economic, social, or personal reasons, but failing to get one. This extends the concept of unemployment to such categories of people based on the assumption that individual may be constrained to engage in paid work due to various reasons like the 2020-2021 COVID 19 pandemic lockdowns.

The problem of unemployment is not a recent phenomenon and current projections suggest that more people will be unemployed in future due to technology, globalization, and pandemics (Fray and Osborne 2017). This will have some adverse physical and psychological effect since employment which was traditionally conceived to serve latent and distinct functions. The distinct function of work is the economic provision for living while the latent function is "identity definition and connection to important social institutions and associations" (Achdut and Refaeli, 2020, p. 3). The impact of unemployment can be divided into four categories of economic, social, psychological, and spiritual impacts. These impacts arising from lack of work, militate against living a life of dignity.

John Hope Bryant (2018, p. 1) defines a dignified life as, "an opportunity to fulfill one's potential, which is based on having a human level of health care, education, income and security." Borrero (1980) emphasizes the dissimilarity between poverty and unemployment. A study by Thompson, Wells and Coats (2012), showed that there is a correlation between unemployment and poverty. Unemployment causes economic vulnerability which in turn leads to poverty. Poverty reduces access to income resulting in increased vulnerability to diseases and other economic and social ills.

The United Nations Human Rights Commission has described poverty primarily as a violation of human dignity and secondarily as a deprivation of economic and material resources (UNHRC, 2020). Speaking at the 5th Universal of the Declaration of Humans Rights to honour the 'Human Rights Defenders' at Paris on the 10th December 1998, Kofi Annan who was the UN Secretary-General said, "Wherever we lift one soul from a life of poverty, we are defending human rights. And whenever we fail in this mission, we are failing human rights (United Nations, 1998). "When unemployment leads to poverty, it undermines the dignity of the human being. On the contrary, decent work creates income that mitigates against poverty, thereby enhancing the dignity of the human person (Baum, 2018).

At the individual level, the lack of work leads to loss of income to sustain life and meet basic needs of the family. It also means loss of sense of value and the individual realizes she has not contribution to self, the family and society at large. The individual misses out on personal development that comes with experience and job skills (Pettinger 2019). At the national level, unemployment decreases the demand level of an economy due to the decreasing purchasing power of its citizens and finally resulting decrease in the economic well-being of the people. When citizen cannot meet the basic necessities of life, community development suffers increasing the poverty of the affected community (Mafiri, 2005). Ultimately, the community enters collective stress.

Unemployment means more people are not working and contributing to the economic development of the community. Among the several economic impacts at the national level is; less government revenues through tax, the loss of human capital, and inefficient use of resources. It also means less disposable income that often support products and services coming from self-employed individuals. This increases the collective poverty of the community. Steinmann (2017, p. 4) says, “to acknowledge inherent human dignity, the state is progressively required to provide existential minimum living conditions which are embodied in the second-generation social and economic human rights.” It can be concluded that work does not just affect an individual’s intrinsic needs, but that its absence affects the dignity of both individual as well as the community.

Community is indispensable to the individual, especially in the African context. The dignity of the society is measured by the dignity of its individual members. Among the several social impacts of unemployment that militate against the dignity of the human person are “poverty, debt, homelessness and housing stress, family tensions and breakdown, boredom, alienation, shame and stigma, increased social isolation, crime, erosion of confidence and self-esteem, the atrophying of work skills and ill-health” (McClelland and Macdonald 1998, p. 3). It also impacts negatively on the values of society in terms of the obligation to assist vulnerable individuals (Danciulescu and Mergeani, 2015). As the community experience an upsurge in uncontrollable surge in the number of unemployed, it loses the sense of collective security.

Unemployment affects an individual’s social networks since work creates opportunities for interaction and socialization with peers. When a person fails to join peers in social gatherings for a prolonged time due to low income, there is loss of friends resulting in isolation (Furaker, 2010). A study by Duncan, Serge, and Sheila (2003) concluded that there is close association between poverty and a vicious cycle of exclusion. Another research by Lars Kunze and Nicolai Suppa (2017) found out that unemployment has a direct impact on the social participation of spouses leading to spousal isolation as well among social groups. There is no dignity in isolation as it contradicts the relational nature of human beings as created in the image and likeness of God.

In societies where there is high unemployment, stigma is low as compared to societies where unemployment rate is low (Furaker, 2010). Stigma has been described by Skinner and Mfecane as resulting in “discrediting and loss of dignity and value and tends to label people as being unfortunate, inferior depending on the way it is applied” (Skinner and Mfecane 2004, p. 1). The unemployed suffers both economic and social stigmatization which often results in isolation. It occurs when unemployment creates a gap between who the individual think she is and how others see her

(Goffman 1963). The unemployed might feel that the society looks at her as a failure, lazy or of bad character that excludes her from employment. This often leads to low self-esteem, loss of hope, antisocial behavior, and psychological distress.

Unemployment has also been linked to domestic abuse, marriage breakdowns and loss of respect (Furaker 2010). Dignity abounds where human beings treat each other with respect. The outbreak of COVID 19 pandemic that forced companies, institutions, and all forms of trading to suspend operations has demonstrated the significance of work as cases of domestic violence increased significantly (Kumar, 2020). The pandemic which has already increased the number of people losing their jobs is threatening an even more cases of joblessness in future (Haq, Raza, and Mahmood, 2020). The World Health organization has warned countries to stay guard against domestic violence during the COVID 19 pandemic lockdown (WHO, 2020). Several researchers have testified to the increase in the number of domestic violence during the lockdowns of the first half of 2020 (Abramson, 2020, Simonovic, 2020, Lancet, 2020). This demonstrates how work provides avenues for socialization and in its absence, the feeling of meaninglessness finds expression in domestic violence among families.

Unemployment affects people psychologically at the individual, family, and societal levels more than anything else. Employment is more than a means of meeting the basic needs of the individual. It can also “satisfy creative urges, promote self-esteem, and provide an avenue for achievement and self-realization” (Linn et al. 1985, p. 502). On the contrary, unemployment produces adverse effects like anxiety, depression, lower self-esteem, and weak physical health consequences. Like Achdut and Refaeli (2020) observed, loss of job or inability to find a job can affect person’s psychological ability to manage challenges of life resulting in reduced well-being. Innovation and creativity are latent, God given potentials of all human beings created in the image and likeness of a creative and Innovative God of the Genesis story (Genesis 1-2). Unemployment is a deprivation of a person’s vocation to co-create.

There is general tendency for individuals who are out of work for a prolonged time to develop a negative attitude towards life (Achdut and Refaeli 2020). Individuals with a negative attitude towards life exhibit destructive feelings towards themselves and others. On the contrary, positive feelings bring confidence in the individual’s power to influence outcomes around one’s surroundings. Optimists have strong coping strategies against stressful situation (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). They possess a positive perception of their ability to take charge of stressful situation together with the capacity to generate positive outcomes that improves their sense of well-being. Unemployment brings about negativity which in turn prevents hope for a better future. It is the hope for better future that lies at the heart of faith and once it is destroyed, life appears meaningless.

Unemployment causes poverty and poverty is associated with ill-health (Watkins 1992). The feeling that one gets from joblessness is a feeling of helplessness. It is a feeling that no matter how one can try, the situation is beyond one’s control (Goldsmith et al. 1996). This feeling puts limits into the extent of one’s motivation to initiate responses against life’s negative outcomes. Studies have also pointed out that, “when people lose their jobs, they tend to experience a significant deterioration in mental health, and when unemployed persons find new jobs, their mental health

improves significantly” (Goodman 2015, p. 4). This suggest that unemployment brings with it psychosomatic illness, psychological problems and even spiritual challenges which are essentials for a life with dignity.

An unemployed person develops feelings of rejection since acceptance by other people can improve evolutionary fitness. As noted by Leary (2015), when aroused, emotions express individual personal feelings and drive to react in some manner to a threat or opportunity. A feeling of rejection brings about humiliation and degradation to the individual. Hence, Borero posits that, “Humiliation and degradation is a state of mind based on experiences of rejection and loss of human dignity and self-worth. Unable to find work the unemployed often feels rejected by society, unable to provide for the family and witnessing their suffering is degrading and fosters feelings of anger and inferiority” (Borero 1980, p. 920). Sometimes the feeling of rejection leads to suicide (Goldsmith et al. 1996). Rejection is contrary to human dignity as it evokes feelings of inequality in the individual. The person rejected ends up feeling sub-human which is an affront to the dignity of the human person.

Pastoral Implications

Chaplain's play a significant role in supporting broken individuals, providing counselling under very difficult circumstances, and guiding the psycho-spiritual needs of the staff, students, and/or patients. The current socio-economic situation of the country characterized by low disposable incomes has resulted in most staff looking at their occupations as mere jobs to satisfy their basic needs. In other words, most chaplains minister to dissatisfied staff and patients or clients. Yet, the chaplain must proffer words of hope to both young people in employment and out of employment. It is the contention of this article that hope for the young people can be rekindled through psychosocial activities that call for a change of attitude. There is hope in the theology of work as co-creation.

The Church has a role to play in the development of a contextual theology of work. The traditional tenets of gospel of prosperity founded on the misunderstanding of the true meaning of *sola gratia* should pave way for human participation in God's inner life. While it is acknowledged that we are saved by grace, it also important to understand that human beings must cooperate with this grace to actualize it in their lives. Our vocation to life as human beings is to cooperate with God's grace in sustaining the beauty of this divinely created world. From eternity, God has been working and continues to work every minute. It is the duty of the Church to present the vision of work as a participation in God's creative act.

Second, the Church must reclaim its position as the cradle of hope for the despondent youths weighed down by the social and economic burdens of this world. The lack of spiritual support systems among the unemployed young people is evidenced by the rise in drug and substance abuse among other vices. There is need for qualified and competent spiritual counsellors within the Churches capable of addressing the mental challenges affecting the youths. Being an elder or pastor is not adequate as the provision of counselling services require certain technical and professional skills. The Church and all institutions that offer spiritual and psychological services must ensure its pastors or agents are adequately prepared for this important task. This should be accompanied by the provision of psychosocial services.

Third, the Church must promote youth volunteerism either normatively or in solidarity. Normative volunteer work is biblical brings a feeling of satisfaction that comes because of achieving a vocational goal. Voluntary work can be motivated by solidarity which is a product of social interaction and a sense of belonging. As stated by the International Federation of Red Cross, “there is no higher calling than when a person gives his or her own knowledge, skills, time or resources to someone in need of help or comfort” (IFRC, 2011, p. 4). Again, as a calling, voluntary work “increases life satisfaction and decreases depression” (Thoits and Hewitt, 2001, p. 118). It enhances individual creativity as a human being. Unemployed youths should be inducted in serving the community through volunteerism.

Fourth, the Church must support government efforts in promoting youth empowerment initiatives. The mission of Jesus was not limited to praise and worship alone. In Luke 4: 18, we hear Jesus outlining his mission: to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the broken hearted, preach deliverance to captives, recover sight to the blind, and to set the captive free. These are empowerment services whose ultimate goal is not just spirituality but social and economic emancipation. While it is important for the Church to prepare people for heaven, it is equally important to note that in the context of a realized eschatology, the church must collaborate with other players in serving the people socially, economically, and culturally. In this case, the Church can initiate capacity development programs like skills trainings, entrepreneurs training, and income generating initiatives.

Conclusion

This study discussed the theoretical foundations on the dignity of work. The study recognized that work is conceptualized differently depending on the state of the individual. Three important categorizations were identified of work as a job, work as employment and work as a vocation. These categorizations helped to locate the most meaningful aspect of work which is a vocation. Discussion on work as employment, work under self-employment, work under domestic life and work as a voluntary exercise helped to unpack the contextual experiences of work by several groups. The chapter went further to look at the meaning of work under involuntary, compulsory, and forced labor and closed with an analysis of the impact of unemployment on human dignity. The conclusion of this chapter is that there is limited research on people's existential understanding of work. Much of the existing literature available focus on creating a good working environment from an economic perspective.

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