

## Greece Meets Reformation: Searching For The Meaning Of Work In The Lens Of Christian Education

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**Abstract.** *Many individuals feel confused in choosing a career, often without having a clear understanding of the meaning of work. Inappropriate career choices can lead to frustration and stress, even hindering their contribution to society. This article aims to provide a deeper understanding of the concept of right work based on a Christian perspective. Through a qualitative approach with a review of related literature by Christian theologians and culturalists, this article examines the relationship between work, vocation, interests, and their impact on individuals and society. By delving further, this article will help readers understand the wrong and right concepts of work, discover their calling and interests, develop the right attitude towards work as a response to God's call, and realize the importance of positive contributions in the church and society. Through a better understanding of the concept of work, readers are expected to live a more meaningful and God-pleasing life.*

**Keywords:** Career, Vocation, Work, Calling

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Research results by the Indonesia Career Center Network in 2019 showed that around 87% of Indonesian students felt that they were majoring in the wrong field (Awaliyah, 2019). Another survey revealed that the most important issue students think about is work. ("Student Opinions about the Future," 2018). This can be understood because everyone certainly hopes to get the right job in the future so that their life is effective or meaningful. In this regard, the quoted verse from the book of Matthew states one sentence of the Lord Jesus that links the call with work for Peter. The Lord Jesus called him, "Come, follow me" and also gave Peter a job, "I will make you fishers of men." What happened in Peter's life further emphasized the concept that when a person works according to God's calling, then his life becomes very meaningful because he is living his life as a full devotion to God.

Not all individuals are given a task or job similar to that experienced by Peter. Various questions about work may have arisen in our minds. For example, how can we connect our calling or purpose in life with the work we do? Is work only used to fulfill financial needs? Can work provide meaning in life? Can work be an opportunity to achieve certain satisfaction? Can we find happiness in work, even if there is sometimes a sense of compulsion to do so? Is work considered a curse in human life? Is work only considered a tedious sacrifice necessary for survival? Is work seen as a punishment that must be endured

for the sake of survival? Does work only mean taking away freedom and independence? While thinking about the answers to these questions and preparing this paper, I was inspired by the works of Os Guinness (Guinness, 2011), Lee Hardy (Hardy, 2009), John Stott (Stott et al., 2015), and Stephen Covey (Covey & Colosimo, 2013). What should the concept of work look like in our thinking as humans?

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The composition method of this article is descriptive qualitative, where the approach to literature study is carried out to obtain data. Qualitative data collection was carried out and started with Greece meets reformation: searching for the meaning of work in the lens of Christian Education. The research on this theory was carried out by reviewing ideas and findings based on the literature and the initial stages related to data analysis. Next, the author read and studied their reference book first, then examined and conducted analysis to represent theoretical information in relation with the topic; relevant references to describe about Greece meets reformation: searching for the meaning of work in the lens of Christian Education. Finally, the result of the analysis were linked and adapted to the context of the topic that shall be discussed.

## **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Britannica.com carried news about the Greek debt crisis (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023) and other media included, “Seven Years into Bankruptcy Greece Still Stricken by Poverty” (Satria, 2017). The news about Greece and its bankruptcy surprised many people; this is because Greece is the cradle of important philosophers who developed the concept of work. This condition creates stimulation to discuss the concept of work of Greek philosophers: Is there something wrong with their thinking so that Greece experiences an economic crisis? If so, what can be learned from these mistakes to avoid them in the future? The Greeks considered that work was an activity required by humans due to their physical existence, similar to animals having bodies. Humans were considered to have to work, even though the outcome of this work activity would eventually lead them to death, just as it would for animals. Therefore, work is considered a lowly activity with no deep meaning. Living like this is regarded as something of a waste. Moreover, after one dies, they will be forgotten by the next generation. Therefore, the Greeks tried to avoid work that was considered menial and involved physical labor.

For them, something very valuable or high value is if their name is remembered, therefore they strive in the field of philosophy, politics, military, or war to immortalize their name. This is what Greek luminaries like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great, and others did. If they were asked about how someone could not work but be active in politics or war to be remembered for all time, the answer was slavery. Manual labor was done by other people, i.e. slaves, so that these people could contemplate, think, do politics, fight wars, and so on. With such a view, slaves were considered a low social class because they were engaged in physical labor that was considered meaningless and at risk of being forgotten by the next generation.

Meanwhile, individuals with intellectual abilities were considered to have the opportunity to engage in political or philosophical activities. Involvement in such activities was considered more noble and was believed to make them forever remembered in history. As such, they placed a high value on thought and intellectual contributions, while physical labor was considered a less valued role in their society. With such a concept of work, one can imagine the negative impact on society. In the long run, this attitude certainly affects the work ethic and economy of a person, family, city, province or country. Can we see a link between this concept of work and the economic bankruptcy of the Greek state?

Plato, a Greek philosopher, agreed that a meaningful life is a contemplative life, which means thinking or pondering. For him, those who think a lot are considered to have the highest degree of pleasure, as they do not seek satisfaction solely through sensory or material experiences. Plato had the concept that "Man is a rational being," and therefore, the more one uses his mind, the greater his ability to be a special human being. In his view, rationality and intellectual gratification are the essence of meaningful life, which is different from the fulfillment of mere sensory desires. This view is in line with Aristotle's thought that rationality is the factor that distinguishes humans from animals, and the more a person uses his or her rationality, the more similar he or she is to a god, as the activity of thinking is considered similar to that of the thinking gods. Aristotle also valued silence and contemplation as the highest level of satisfaction. For him, the ideal human being is an individual who is less involved in practical life and more inclined to contemplate and think about deeper matters, such as philosophy and knowledge; a life focused on thought and contemplation is considered nobler than engaging in practical affairs and this contributes to the attainment of ultimate happiness.

Greek thinkers considered it unfortunate that humans have a body but that the body is considered a prison that restricts the otherworldly soul. They believed that the body could

interfere with the thinking process, as the body had physical needs and limitations, such as fatigue, the need for rest, and food; consequently, bodily activities, including work and daily physical activities, were considered to have no deep meaning and were considered an obstacle for humans to achieve an ideal life. These Greek thinkers valued intellectual activity and thought more, which they saw as a way to escape the limitations of the body and achieve a deeper understanding of the world and the meaning of life and so the contemplative life, which is a life focused on contemplation, quiet, and thought, influenced later Christian thinkers. The contemplative life of contemplating God was considered superior to the active life of working to fulfill the necessities of life. Thomas Aquinas stated, “because this contemplation is the end of the whole human life” (Aquinas, 1947a). He also wrote, “... the contemplative life is according to that which is most proper to man, namely his intellect, whereas in the works of the active life the lower powers also ....” (Aquinas, 1947b).

Conceptions of work vary and can be influenced by many factors, including culture, values and individual experiences. Here are some of the more balanced views on work:

- a. **Importance of Meaning:** Work should be linked to meaning and purpose in life. Many people seek work that allows them to develop themselves, contribute to society or achieve a greater purpose.
- b. **Independence and Empowerment:** Work can provide independence and empowerment to individuals; through work, one can gain financial independence, develop skills and achieve a higher level of self-reliance.
- c. **Creativity and Personal Growth:** Work can be a platform for creative expression and personal growth. Some people find happiness in pursuing work that allows them to develop new ideas and achieve in a field they love.
- d. **Contribution:** Work can be a way to contribute to society and the world; through work, we can help solve problems, serve others, and participate in positive change.
- e. **Life Balance:** A more modern concept of work includes a balance between personal and professional life. Ensuring that work does not take over one's entire life, and that there is time for family, friends, and hobbies, is important.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

##### **Reformers and Work**

A BBC.com news story compared the situation of Greece with Germany (Hill, 2015). Germany is one of the most economically prosperous countries in Europe and indeed the

world. As one of the leaders in the European Union, Germany has a key role in organizing the European economic community and has a great influence on various economic and political issues at the regional and international levels. In addition, Germany has a rich cultural history, including in the context of work ethic reform. Martin Luther, the 16th century Protestant reformer, had a significant influence on the work ethic in Germany. His views on work, discipline and personal responsibility played an important role in the development of the concept of work in Germany. The Protestant concept of work ethics, sometimes referred to as the “Protestant work ethic,” emphasizes values such as hard work, integrity, discipline, and responsibility in work. This concept has been considered a contributing factor to Germany's economic success and the strong work culture in German society. In modern history, Germany is known as one of the countries with strong industry, technological innovation, and quality higher education. All of these factors, along with history and a strong work culture, have helped Germany become one of the largest economies in the world.

Luther was a monk who was influenced by various traditions and thoughts of earlier times (Weber, 2003:120). He thought that a life of monasticism and contemplation was the best way to get closer to God and be saved (Kooiman, 2001:15-22). However, he later realized that humans are saved because of God's justification through the sacrifice of the dead and risen Christ. Luther also found an understanding of the concept of work that should be, he modified the meaning of vocation. Vocation in German is *beruf*. This word was originally God's call for someone to become a monk (McGrath, 2016:293). After Luther investigated the Bible, he realized that God's calling can vary and does not have to be a monk. Therefore, *beruf* is no longer just a call for someone to become a monk, but a call for everyone to perform activities in their various daily roles.

The call applies to everyone, so everyone can perform activities while recognizing them as a call from God; for example, the call to be a parent, teacher, lecturer, lawyer, doctor, merchant, and so on. Luther was called to be a monk, but for someone who is not called to be a monk, he can remain in his respective position in society, doing his duty. However, one should not equate every job (especially those that contradict Christian ethics) with a vocation (Guinness, 2011:64). God created this world very well (Genesis 1:31). As the image and likeness of God, humans are mandated to develop this world with their God-given creativity. This mandate was given by God to the first human and has never been rescinded. The task of humans is to continue God's work of creation by developing our creativity in various fields. This view reflects the idea that through work and roles in society,

we can contribute to the care and well-being of others. The work done by various individuals in society helps to provide basic needs and services to others. It is a way of being God's representative on earth, exercising a moral and social role in nurturing and serving our fellow human beings.

This thinking often reflects ideas about social service, social responsibility, and deeper meaning in work. Many religions and belief systems teach values such as care, compassion, and neighborliness as important parts of a meaningful life. When we think of reformers, we also think of John Calvin's thoughts on work. In his opinion, as the image of God, human beings closely resemble God not by avoiding work, but by actively engaging in the world. He states, "Truly God claims omnipotence to himself, and would have us to acknowledge it - not the vain, indolent, slumbering omnipotence which sophists feign, but vigilant, efficacious, energetic, and ever active..." (Calvin, 1845a). Thus, those who are actively involved in serving their community, church, society, or country are God-like. In fact, Calvin states an impressive sentence, "This, too, will afford admirable consolation, that in following your proper calling, no work will be so mean and sordid as not to have a splendor and value in the eye of God" (Calvin, 1845b).

Human needs cannot be fulfilled by ourselves alone, but through the activities of others, and we fulfill the needs of others through our activities. That is why, as God's creatures with different gifts and talents, we use these gifts and talents to be a blessing to others. These gifts and talents are not for our own benefit, but for the benefit of others (Calvin, 1845c). Thus, we should not keep our gifts and talents to sit, be silent, let alone be idle or do nothing. Instead, we must find our talents or gifts and use them for others (Calvin, 1845c). For Calvin, talents are God-given skills and abilities for Christians to perform daily activities, function effectively and be a blessing to society everywhere (McGrath, 2016:294). Work is part of God's plan, but it should not be focused on work alone. God created humans as social beings who have different gifts and talents. Therefore, it is necessary to help each other, so that others are blessed by our lives and we are blessed by the lives of others. By finding a position in life where we can develop our various gifts for the good of others, we will become effective in society. However, if life is more work-centred than worship-centred, then we miss out on a very important part of our calling as human beings. Six days of work and one day of rest or worship is a pattern that prevents humans from becoming slaves to work (Stott et al., 2015:248). The hard work and suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ has saved us from eternal suffering; influenced by God's word, we see work as God's calling to glorify Him and serve others.

## **Work and Vocation**

Matthew 4:19 reveals the call of the Lord Jesus as the most important call, namely “Come follow Me.” The most important calling in human life is to follow Him, to know God our creator through the dead and risen Christ. This is the most important call that leads us to eternity. For Peter, this most important call was followed by a special call, which is a call addressed to a specific person where God reveals His intentions and gives him a special task or job. In this case, Peter was called by God to do the work of fishing for people. While Peter's original desire may have been to become an expert fisher of fish, he was called to become a fisher of men. Is there any other calling? There is, namely the general call to work. Just as Peter was commissioned to work, we too must work. The Lord Jesus has woven together this paramount calling, special calling, and general calling into a new consciousness of work. Practical guide: How do we understand our calling in life? The first aspect is to discover personal talents (Covey & Colosimo, 2013:54). These questions are a good way to reflect on personal talents and abilities. Self-assessment is an important first step in discovering one's potential and talents. Through introspection, one can discover what makes them unique and how they can contribute to the world. Some of the talents or abilities that may emerge through such questions include:

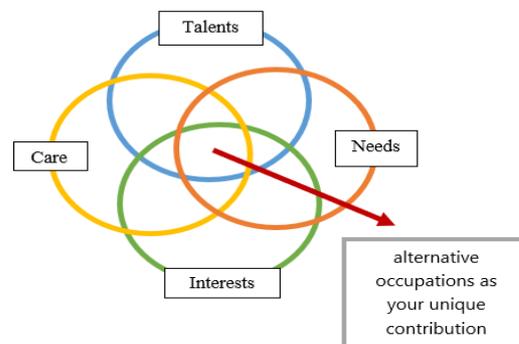
- a. Communication skills: Are you good at speaking or writing? Can you explain concepts or ideas well?
- b. Problem-solving ability: Do you have a tendency to find creative solutions to complex problems?
- c. Organizational skills: Are you excellent at planning and organizing? Can you manage time and resources efficiently?
- d. Creativity: Do you often have creative ideas and are able to come up with something new in various contexts?
- e. Social skills: Are you good at building relationships, collaborating and working in teams?
- f. Technical skills: Do you have specialized knowledge in a particular field, such as technology, science or art?
- g. Teaching and knowledge sharing: Are you able to educate and share knowledge with others?
- h. Leadership ability: Do you have the ability to lead and motivate others?
- i. Art or music skills: Do you have talent in visual arts, music or other areas of the arts?
- j. Research skills: Are you good at finding, gathering and analyzing information?

Honest introspection can help a person identify their diverse talents and abilities and enable them to live a more fulfilling and meaningful life according to their unique potential (Bradley & Carty, 1991). These questions can help one to better understand their personal interests and what they enjoy. Through introspection, one can identify specific interests that can guide career choices and activities in their lives. Some examples of aspects that may arise in answering these questions include:

- a. Childhood interests: What did you enjoy doing as a child? For example, did you enjoy drawing, playing music, playing with numbers or reading books?
- b. Dream job: If you could choose a dream job, what would you choose? What do you dream of in your career?
- c. Free time: What do you do in your free time? What activities do you enjoy and what makes you feel passionate?
- d. Memorable experiences: What specific experiences or tasks have you done that made you feel very happy and satisfied?
- e. Interest in discussion or debate: Is there a particular topic you enjoy talking or debating about? Are you involved in discussions about politics, the environment, art or other topics?
- f. Interest in reading: What kind of books or writings do you enjoy reading? Do you prefer scientific reading, fiction, literature or specific topics?
- g. Interest in skills: Do you have a particular interest in a particular skill, such as math, music, design or science?
- h. Leadership and teams: Do you prefer to work as an individual, as a team leader, or as a team member? How do you feel about being involved in organizing, training, or management?
- i. Ownership of responsibility: Would you rather have freedom at work or work in a structured situation? Would you rather have a large personal responsibility or part of a larger task?

The second aspect is investigating personal interests and inclinations; this is an important step in designing a fulfilling career and life. By better understanding your interests, you can better pursue options that match your interests and talents, but there are exceptions. Imagine if God had asked Moses, “Are you interested in working to free the Israelites?” Of course Moses' answer would have been no, but God sent him anyway. These exceptions occur where God calls someone specifically and equips them. The third aspect is to realize your care. Caring is an attitude that empathizes with others or pays attention to

the circumstances around us. Are you more concerned about health, other people's emotions, other people's spirituality, culture, or the environment? Caring can take many forms, it can make the environment cleaner and healthier and it should be based on the ethical values taught by God's word. The fourth aspect is to know the needs of the community. Community needs are everything that a group or society needs in their daily lives including food, clothing, shelter, education, health, transportation, housing, employment, entertainment, and so on. These needs are considered essential to the life of the community and must be met to ensure the well-being or survival of the community. Societal needs can include security, justice, unity and integrity, and freedom of speech. The level of community needs also varies from region to region, depending on the social, economic, cultural, geographical conditions and values of the local community.



**Figure 1.** Documentation

The image above shows the connection between your talents, interests or passions, cares, and the needs of society; center area with arrow is your calling, it is your God-given position and your unique contribution to society, the country and the world, which is irreplaceable. It is within that calling that you find the right field of work. It may take you several job moves to reach your calling until you find the right place. In this picture, the area of vocation is bigger than that of work. If you work as a doctor, then your calling is certainly bigger than that, because you could be at the same time the husband of a wife, the father of your child, a member of a community, the head of a foundation, or the founder of an important institution.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The world of work is a gift from God that we should be grateful for, therefore, we should welcome it with a new perspective. The work that God gives us is a gift and an honor. As an expression of gratitude to God, we should work with the gifts and talents He has given

us to serve others. This will lead to a joyful and meaningful life with the realization that we are doing the work that God has prepared for us (Ephesians 2:10).

Through work, we can contribute to society and fulfill our social responsibilities as individuals. It also helps to see work as more than just earning a living, but as a way to achieve higher goals, such as sharing, serving, and caring for His creation.

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