

A Theological Evaluation of Youths' Perception of Work in Machakos County, Kenya

Juliana Nzuki*

Lecturer, Theology & Biblical Studies, Kabarak University, Kenya

*Corresponding author email: jully.nzuki@gmail.com

Accepted: 21 July 2026 || Published: 22 August 2026

Abstract

The scourge of youth unemployment is indisputable and continues to gain prominence worldwide. With the youth bulge, particularly in Africa, youth unemployment is undoubtedly one of the most pressing societal issues and an impediment to all-around economic growth and development. This study aimed to theologically evaluate the youth's perception of work. The study applies the Pastoral Circle method, which utilises qualitative research methods. Therefore, through a thematic interpretation of the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, the researcher presents the research findings on the unemployment experiences and sentiments of the research participants in a manner that gives voice to their feelings and perspectives on the subject matter. Different religious beliefs, theologies, philosophical ideologies, and theories of development over the centuries of the evolution of work in its definition and practice have influenced people's perception of work, especially its categorization and specialization. The valorization of white-collar jobs as a stream of consistent income came out strongly, with research participants citing their socialization from a young age to endeavour for formal employment- a factor they worked towards throughout their education years. To still earn an income, the research participants have taken up various blue-collar jobs outside the ideal of formal employment while holding on to the hope of finding work in their desired professions. However, such valorization has anchored the importance of work to the income one earns from it, because this is the only way they can sustain themselves and their families. Thus, one's identity and dignity are measured by what one earns, that is, in economic terms, the income one gets from work.

Keywords: *Youth, unemployment, Youth's Perception of Work, Machakos County*

How to Cite: Nzuki, J. (2026). A Theological Evaluation of Youths' Perception of Work in Machakos County, Kenya. *Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Religious Studies*, 6(6), 12-34.

1. Introduction

Work plays a significant role in our well-being, a fact that concerns policymakers and governments. Applebaum asserts that "work is like the spine which structures the way people live, how they make contact with material and social reality, and how they achieve status and self-esteem. Work is basic to the human condition, to the creation of the human environment,

and to the context of human relationships.”¹ The United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights articulates that “everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.”² The eighth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) aims to ensure full and productive employment and decent work, which entails improved youth employment prospects, as young people are disproportionately affected by decent work deficits, unemployment, and low-quality jobs.³ The 2005 Iberoamerican Convention on the Rights of Youth reaffirms the right to work for the youth, and the 2006 African Youth Charter recognises young people’s right to gainful employment.⁴ Reaffirming the youth’s right to employment, Pope Francis, the 226th Pope of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) stated, “Work is not a gift kindly conceded to a recommended few: it is a right for all ... and in particular, the young must be able to cultivate the promise of their efforts and their enthusiasm, so that the investment of their energies and their resources will not be useless.”⁵

However, though work plays a significant role in our well-being, O’Higgins laments that youth unemployment is a global epidemic, one of the greatest tests that continues to be a serious policy challenge to governments and has been presented with varying degrees of urgency and often as a full-blown crisis. O’Higgins further notes that the epidemic hardly hits developing countries, for unemployed youth are living in poverty with their only access to work being informal or under indecent employment conditions; this has dashed their vigor, the will to work, and legitimate hopes of getting employed.⁶

The global, regional, and local statistics on youth unemployment give us a precise idea of the gravity of the situation. In August 2004, the ILO reported that youth unemployment was at an all-time high, and that half the world’s unemployed were between 15 and 24 years of age. By 2009, the youth unemployment rate in the developed economies was 17.7 percent. By 2010, the European Union youth unemployment rate was 21 percent. The ILO’s 2012 conference underscored that youth unemployment was worsening, as youth (aged 15-24) were three times more likely to be unemployed or underemployed than adults.⁷ ILO further projected that the global youth labour force will increase by 41.8 million people between 2017 and 2030. By 2018, only 37 percent of the world’s youth were employed, and 42 percent were unemployed.⁸

¹ Herbert A. Applebaum, *The Concept of Work: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (New York: Suny Press, 1992), 1.

² United Nations. “*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*” (2015), 48.

³ ILO, *Guide to International Labour Standards and Rights at Work concerning Young People* (Geneva: ILO, 2017), 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵ Leonardo Salutati. What’s the Church Say on Unemployment? A Lot Actually May 15, 2016, special to crux. <https://cruxnow.com/church/2016/05/whats-the-church-say-on-unemployment-a-lot-actually/>

⁶ Niall O’higgins, “Youth Unemployment and Employment Policy: A Global Perspective,” *O’Higgins* (np. 2001), 9.

⁷ ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017: Paths to a Better Working Future* (Geneva: ILO, 2017), 75.

⁸ Rosina Gammarano, “Labour Market Access: A Persistent Challenge for Youth around the World,” *International Labour Organization* (Geneva, 2019).

By 2019, one-fifth (22.2 percent) of youth worldwide fell into this category, and those employed were in poor-quality jobs.⁹

Africa, too, shares the globe's demographic reality. By 2015, Africa was home to 226 million youth (aged 18-35 years, according to the African Union). According to the African Development Bank (AfDB) publication, this number doubled in 2016, for nearly 420 million were either unemployed or vulnerably employed. A 2017 study on youth unemployment by the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) indicated that Africa's youth population is expected to double to over 830 million, representing 29 percent of the world's youth by 2050. During the April 2018 Think Tank Summit, Ken Ofori-Atta lamented that of the 10-12 million youth in Africa who enter the workforce each year, only 3.1 million secure employment.

Kenya, too, reflects Africa's demographic reality: based on UN (2015) estimates, the youth population was over 9.5 million, accounting for more than 20% of Kenyans. According to the 2015/2016 Household Survey, youth (aged 18-34) constituted 32% of Kenya's population.¹⁰ However, most were unemployed. By 2016, the youth unemployment rate was 22%. In 2017, a World Bank report indicated that Kenya's youth unemployment rate was 17.3%, the highest among East African countries, compared to Tanzania's 5.5% and Uganda's 6.8%.¹¹ The census data released on February 19, 2020, shows that 38.9% of Kenyan youths are jobless.

The background of the study shows that though work plays a significant role in our lives, contemporary society construes work in terms of pay/formal employment. It assumes that they do not have work if one is not employed. Therefore, there is a need to redeem the very idea of work from this narrow, albeit significant concern with the extrinsic value of work. We need to consider the intrinsic value of work and appreciate people's contributions to other fields, such as the '*jua kali*' (informal) sector and domestic chores. Being unemployed need not mean being without work but being free for significant work.¹²

Redeeming the idea of work calls for theological reflection on work that interprets and evaluates the ideologies, theologies, and theories of development that underpin youth unemployment and facilitates the transformation of human work. The Bible offers a valuable resource for generating social, political, economic, theological, and pastoral views on work and unemployment. Therefore, a theology of work based on the proper interpretation of scripture will help mitigate misconceptions about work in contemporary society.

The church cannot be indifferent or complacent; it is her mandate to respond to youth unemployment and to ensure youths' well-being and the fullness of life in work. She is God's prophetic voice, and her position in the community and holistic perception of life give her a better position to address the impact of youth unemployment. As God's voice in the community, she can provide vital lenses for interpreting the reality of youth unemployment and, at the same time, help the youth order their worlds and make sense of their experiences.

⁹ Governing Body 340th Session, Geneva, October–November 2020 Policy Development Section Employment and Social Protection Segment (12 October, 2020), 3-4.

¹⁰ Ministry of Public Service, *Youth and Gender State Department for Youth Kenya Youth*, 4.

¹¹ Neville Otuki, [Kenya's youth percentage among the highest globally - Business Daily \(businessdailyafrica.com\)](https://www.businessdailyafrica.com) (2017).

¹² Volf Miroslav, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, 156.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualisation of Work

Work forms an “essential part of our personal lives,”¹³ as Parkan explains, “The concept of work presents itself to us in an amorphous form, clouded in generality and abstraction.”¹⁴ This has led to different conceptualisations, which are vital in this study, for the concept of work adopted influences how we address the issue of work and unemployment. Polkowska says, “No less important is the manner of perceiving work, bearing in mind the principle that the way we think about something determines reality. How we think about work makes this work so.”¹⁵

Generally, we equate work to one’s means of livelihood and labour; historians typically relate work to the economic context of labour processes and the socio-political development of a proletariat in a capitalist society.¹⁶ However, of great importance to how we think about work is the historical background of work and the evolution of its definition and practice over time. Though the Bible gives us the foundation upon which the theology of work is construed, the concept of work in history reveals meanings and implications which must be studied to arrive at an adequate frame of reference for a theology of work. History helps us synthesise and appraise the theological meaning of work. Through philosophical reflection, we can discern the role of work in our existence and then construct a Christian ethos of labour that goes beyond incidental admonitions.¹⁷ Thus, a reflection on man’s work in history can add richness of meaning to a theology of work.

The onset of agrarian settlements changed the design and perception of work. Before this time, work was either an individualised activity or a result of collaborative activities such as hunting and gathering. In the agrarian settlements, work was organised in seasons. Work was embedded in familial, clan and tribal interpersonal relations; people depended on close-knit communities for existence. Work was integrated into the fabric of communal life like other activities, and all members had something to contribute to the community’s economic life. Thus, all people worked to ensure individual and group survival.¹⁸

Labour and commerce were considered essential human life activities in the Greek and Roman empires. Religion and philosophy influenced how the Greeks and Romans perceived work and their attitude towards it. Religiously, the phrase “like his ancestors” insinuated that a person and their work, especially their skills, were passed down to him.¹⁹ Specific gods were patrons of different types of work; “Demeter brought corn,” “Dionysos brought wine,” Hephaestus

¹³ “The Anthropology of Work and Labour: Editorial Note (2018): 19.

¹⁴ Barış Parkan, “Work and Value as Processual Entities,” *The Value of Work in Contemporary Society* (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2014), 66.

¹⁵ Dominika Polkowska, *The Value of Work in Contemporary Society* (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary 1996), viii.

¹⁶ Richard Price, “The Historical Meanings of Work,” *International Review of Social History* 34, no. 2 (1989): 327.

¹⁷ Peter Schoonenberg, S. J., *God’s World in the Making* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1984), 136-137.

¹⁸ Helmut Fend, “The Historical Context of Transition to Work and Youth Unemployment,” *Youth Unemployment and Society* (1994): 78-79.

¹⁹ Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations, 50 BC to AD 254* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 101.

“was the blacksmith and craftsman,” Hermes “was the merchant and messenger,” and “Mercurius was a patron god of shopkeepers.”²⁰ Since work was handed down by the ancestors and the gods were patrons, workers sought their blessings by performing specific acts.

Greek philosophy, especially the dualism component, negatively influenced their attitude towards work. Platonism regarded the material (matter) as evil and classified universal truths into higher and lower levels. In contrast, Aristotelianism divided activities into *praxis*-work carried out for its own sake- and *poiesis*-work with some extrinsic purpose, representing a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Platonism and Aristotelianism undermined the sacred nature of work into drudgery and toil; people worked to earn money or to meet temporal needs.²¹ Labour and business were regarded as undignified, and being out of work (unemployed) was a good fortune that guaranteed one an opportunity to participate in the political domain and enjoy a contemplative life. Work was associated with slavery, and only 20 percent of the population actualized the highest human potential, whereas the remaining 80 percent were slaves. This led to the classic divide between ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’: those who could live without working and those who had nothing but their capacity to toil.²²

3. Materials and Methods

The current study adopted the Pastoral Circle (PC) method, which is a social transformative theological approach geared towards social action that is holistic and contextual, with God as its centrepiece. The study was conducted in Machakos County, which has a population of about 1,421,932 and is projected to reach 1,851,106 by 2050. A total of 39% of this population comprises youth; as is the case in other counties in Kenya, the county is experiencing rising youth unemployment. The experiences of these unemployed youths were considered in the study. Participants were identified through sampling; that is, a representative sample of the county's youth population was engaged. Purposive sampling was used for participant selection. Purposive sampling was chosen because it concentrates on those population segments that can provide the most meaningful information.²³ The inclusion and exclusion criteria were used in the sampling. Based on the inclusion criteria, participants were unemployed youth who were permanent residents of Machakos County aged between 18 and 34 as per the Kenyan Constitution 2010.

The research targeted 81 participants for both the semi-structured interviews and FGDs. However, this target was not met: only 36 people participated in the FGDs, and 24, rather than 45, were involved in the semi-structured interviews. This constitutes 75 percent of the target population. The target was not met because unemployed youth thought I was offering them jobs; some came with their CVs. Having come out of a campaign season, participants also expected some handouts. For this reason, I could not continue with the semi-structured interviews. Participatory Action Research (PAR) tools and techniques were used to collect

²⁰ Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, John Raffan, trans. (Cambridge, Harvard Univ. Press, 1985), 314.

²¹ Angelo Nicolaides, Cnr Janadel, and Alexandra Avenues. “Ethics and the Dignity of Work: An Orthodox Christian perspective,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* Vol. 101 (2020): 1.

²² Paul R. Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity: Vocation, Work and Ministry in a Biblical Perspective*, (Paternoster Press, 1999), 145.

²³ Ibid.

data, as they are instrumental in engaging research participants in dialogue, empowering them to analyze their situation and plan for action. Data were analyzed in terms of their structural and social relationships. An inductive qualitative data analysis approach was adopted for the study. Through inductive analysis, themes and patterns from the FGDs and interviews were generated, and a thematic analysis approach was utilized. Nowell et al. define thematic analysis as a qualitative approach that identifies, analyses, and interprets themes; it assists in identifying patterns that result in recognition of the main themes of the collected data, making it easier to analyse qualitative data.²⁴

4. Results and Discussion

As seen in the preceding chapters, the valorisation of work directly causes the valorisation of workplaces as people compare industrial and non-industrial forms of work. It is because, whether known to us or not, work wields a transformative power for every individual who partakes of it. This is consistent with Weber's assertion in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930) that humans not only transform material culture through work but also that work transforms them and demonstrates this transformation. Could this be why work is so coveted and perceived differently by individuals?

Polkowska avows that “. . . The way we think about something determines reality; how we think about work makes this work so.”²⁵ Work in contemporary society is construed in terms of pay/formal employment; hence, you do not have work if you are not employed or on a paycheck. People work in exchange for remuneration, such as wages or salaries, for time worked or work done.²⁶ This is why the ILO campaigns for decent work: highly skilled, better-paid work that makes a greater contribution to the economy and guarantees secure employment and safe working conditions.²⁷ However, theologically or religiously, work is perceived as a collaboration with God to provide and cater for creation; it is any task that goes beyond wages to one's obligation as a human being, providing for oneself, family, community, and the nation at large.

These two perceptions of work emerged during the research in Machakos County; however, it is evident that white-collar jobs are lauded more than blue-collar jobs and self-employment. Despite the varied perceptions of work among the research participants, the collected data make it evident that work is central to individuals' existential well-being. However, having work has to translate to social and economic progress and mental and physical wellness. A person's work should also be their source of income, preferably monthly; it should incorporate the use of one's skill, especially the training they have received in tertiary education. In this regard, the lack of monetary fulfillment has repercussions detrimental to an individual's social standing, as it ripples through how they relate to themselves, their family, friends, community, the

²⁴ Nowell, Lorelli S., Jill M. Norris, Deborah E. White, and Nancy J. Moules. “Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria.” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16, no. 1 (2017), 2: 1609406917733847.

²⁵ Dominika Polkowska, *The Value of Work in Contemporary Society* (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary 1996), viii.

²⁶ ILO, “Resolution Concerning Statistics of Work, Employment and Labour Underutilization.” In *19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians* (2013), 6.

²⁷ Employment and Decent Work in https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/topics/employment-and-decent-work_en.

church, and the state at large. Paid work makes it possible to meet basic needs, pay taxes, and live a life that one deems ‘comfortable.’

4.1 White-Collar Jobs versus Blue-Collar Jobs

Informed by a focus on the economic aspect of work, the white-collar/blue-collar job discourse emerged prominently during the FGDs and individual semi-structured interviews. White-collar jobs are often lauded over blue-collar jobs for the financial security they offer – the assurance of a consistent monthly income. They are coveted for their holders’ high social standing in their communities. As Mueni, one of the research participants, stated, “Work is for a paycheck, working in an office and getting money at the end of the month.” The FGD at Machakos Town came to a consensus that “. . . Getting paid improves your status in the society and makes you economically stable.” This notwithstanding, the research participants cited the seemingly impenetrable ‘world’ of white-collar jobs, which leads to frustration and hopelessness.

Youth have the mentality that you must wake up and go to an office to be employed- a white-collar job. If I perceive work as a white-collar job, I will sit and wait for one all my life; I will not go look for another because I think it is beneath me. Generally, graduates who are not lucky enough to get jobs will remain unemployed because they believe they must work in an office. (Mueni, 31)

Participants further noted that the ‘world’ of white-collar jobs is impenetrable due to the country's high youth population (youth bulge, as discussed in chapter one). Muema, one of the interlocutors, explained, “The youth population in Kenya is high, and also those that are trained are more, but the job opportunities are fewer than the youth.” Echoing Muema, Mukonyo narrated, “There are more schooled/qualified youth than job opportunities. The job market is full such that it cannot accommodate anymore.”

As participants have narrated, corruption in government systems is further compounding the situation. Lamenting on this, Ndanu narrated, “The government is hiring ghost workers, and you find a 73-year-old on a government payroll whereas a youth who is more qualified and up to speed is unemployed.” The FGD at Machakos Town attributed the impenetrability to the fact that “Some jobs are identified with certain families; business-employment is for the family members.” Echoing the FGD, Ndanu narrated that “Certain jobs are associated with certain communities, and if there are no people from those communities, the opportunity remains either vacant or it is granted to someone not qualified for that particular job.” This, according to Mulei is having double standards, he stated that “. . . when you apply for a job of which you are qualified it ends up that someone unqualified gets the job simply because they are from a well-off family.”

The other two factors that make the world of white-collar jobs impenetrable, as narrated by the participants, are nepotism and tribalism; “. . . those in positions grant job opportunities to their relatives (*and this*) has led to youth unemployment,” said Nthenya. Mbula noted the impossibility of securing a chance for a white-collar job if you have no relative to push you through the government systems. Mutua further stated that, due to selfishness, those in power employ only people from their community or kinsmen.

While the research participants were not conversant with the development theories and their intricacies, the perception of work as centred on the economic aspect of life and the overglorification of white-collar jobs as opposed to the blue-collar jobs, ties in with the

modernization theory, which posits that the rise of capitalism and capitalist institutions is imperative in turning traditional societies to modern ones, for they are backward. It also contends that there is a universal pathway to development.

The modernization educational model (Oxford-Cambridge) taught that education is a pathway to prestige, affluence, and white-collar jobs.²⁸ As the research participants narrated, this perception has influenced not only individuals' perceptions of work but also the community's; they consider white-collar jobs the ultimate goal of education, especially if one gets a job aligned with their specialization. For example, Muthike perceived work as a specialization in which you have skills and are paid for them. In contrast, the FGD at Mavoko agreed that work is "what we do to meet our daily needs according to our qualifications and the standards of the Ministry of Labour."

This model of education encourages young people to study hard so that at the end of their studies, they get very good jobs (white-collar jobs); as Mbatha, one of the participants, quoted a Swahili song, "*Vijana someni pia muongeze bidii, mwisho wa kusoma mtapata kazi nzuri sana,*" (youth study hard for at the end of your studies you will get a very good job). As participants narrated, especially the graduates, they studied with hopes of getting into the workforce and pursuing their area of specialization. Unfortunately, this is not the case, for after studies, there are no jobs, and since the system prepared them for white-collar jobs, they cannot cope with unemployment. Mueni narrated, "We are taught to study hard, and we will get good jobs, but we are not told what to do when there are no white-collar jobs." This is why Ayithey lamented that the kind of education offered in Africa leads to functional illiteracy; it teaches the masses that without degrees, they have little social status and nothing to contribute to economic development, a "consumption variety" which only equips students with foreign tastes and knowledge; and teaches them how to consume foreign goods and not how to produce those items. It sees education as an end in itself, not a means to an end, and as the passport to prestigious government posts.²⁹ This form of education does not allow creativity and character formation.

Since the educational system promises white-collar jobs, youth have become selective and feel that some jobs are not essential or are beneath them. "Since the white-collar job did not come my way, I demean the little jobs I do for society, which seems not to appreciate them," said Muema. Participants further noted that since society expected them to get good jobs after their education, it also looked down on them for engaging in blue-collar work. They feel that they just wasted their time and resources on education. According to Smith, it is unfortunate that when people spend an inordinate amount of money to study in a particular field, they feel that this money is somehow wasted if they don't specialize.³⁰ As Katunge lamented, it is unfortunate that the same society that promised us white-collar jobs demeans the blue-collar jobs we engage in: "I am a shopkeeper, and some of my friends demean the work I do, and they feel it is too small for them." Kinyungu, in the same vein, narrated, "People tend to look down on me for I went to school, yet I have no employment; this is quite demeaning." Mutua also noted, "Though

²⁸ George Ayithey, *Africa in Chaos*, 22-23, 142-146.

²⁹ George Ayithey, *Africa in Chaos*, 144-146.

³⁰ Gordon T. Smith, *Courage and Calling: Embracing your God-given Potential*, 137.

I do my hustles, society classifies me as unemployed, and there is a big gap between me and those in white-collar jobs.” Mbatha captured all these in the following sentiments:

Community-based ideologies on work: as a graduate of the University of Nairobi, the community will not understand when I do jobs like pushing a cart to earn income. They will keep talking about it, “Alienda campus na ndio huyo anasukuma wheelbarrow” (he went to campus and is pulling a wheelbarrow). This, of course, will discourage me from engaging in it.

The aftermath of the white-collar job perception of work, as narrated by participants, is living a life of anticipation of these jobs and demeaning the blue-collar jobs, “. . . I am still applying for a white-collar job. I have made applications to different organizations, and I am still waiting for a positive response . . .” said Nthenya. Apart from living in anticipation, participants also pointed out that being educated and unemployed is disappointing and frustrating. Ndanu noted that “it kills the self-employment spirit,” whereas Muema asserted that “it leads to idleness for youth are unable to differentiate between work and job.”

The participants’ perception of work mirrored the modernization theory’s perception of development as economic growth. They perceived work as any activity that is paid for or is remunerated. In this case, work is measured in terms of its extrinsic value, how people make money to consume goods; it is valued for material gains such as wages, perks, working conditions, etc.³¹ Thus, work has no value; the only value is gained from what a person’s work produces. As Nthenya, one of the participants, stated, “Work is a responsibility entrusted to you within good working conditions and good remuneration.” This ties in with the ILO campaign for decent work: highly skilled, better-paid work, significantly contributing to the economy, and guaranteeing secure employment and safe working conditions.³²

Unfortunately, though participants talked of the extrinsic value of work, they also flawed it; according to them, it has led to individualism, selfishness, and greed; “it fails to acknowledge that work is a communal activity,” said Katunge. Mukonyo also noted that this perception fails to acknowledge that “work does not only benefit materially, but it also benefits all aspects of life.” All participants agreed that such a perception pays no attention to people’s contributions to other fields, such as the informal ‘Jua kali’ sector and domestic chores.

Nevertheless, although white-collar jobs are lauded, participants acknowledged the importance of blue-collar jobs. These have helped individuals provide for themselves and their families despite their susceptibility to inconsistent income flow. Some jobs that emerged during the interviews and FGDs include construction work, where one is paid a daily or weekly wage; selling water; shopkeeping; boda-boda riding; working at a carwash; and farming. These blue-collar jobs, according to participants, though they provide for their daily bread, face many challenges.

³¹ Michael Naughton and Gene R. Lacznia, “A Theological Context of Work from the Catholic Social Encyclical Tradition,” 982-983.

³² Employment and Decent Work in https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/topics/employment-and-decent-work_en.

A critical aspect of blue-collar jobs is capital; for instance, if one chooses self-employment, setting up a business is capital-intensive, and not many individuals can afford it. According to the FGD at Kangudo, “There are many jobs, but there is no capital to do the jobs . . . or even utilize modern technology and techniques.” “Due to lack of enough capital, we cannot maximize the readily available resources,” noted Mutua. Similarly, the FGD at Machakos Town pointed out that “due to lack of enough capital, these businesses are unsustainable. Also, other factors, such as government regulations, prevent businesses from yielding much. The licenses to do these businesses are expensive.” As Nelson observes, “Government regulation and the constant threat of possible litigation bring new complexities and greater demands to our work.”³³

Participants acknowledged that advanced technology also affects blue-collar jobs, in addition to capital and government regulations. While they were not conversant with modernization theory of development, this aligns with the theory’s view of traditional knowledge as backward and its replacement by Western knowledge and technology. Modernists ignored Africa’s indigenous knowledge systems and technologies, including traditional art and farming. As observed in the participants’ responses, people failed to draw on traditional values and social systems and instead unquestioningly adopted new farming methods without considering the African climate. They started planting maize, beans, and coffee, and with the failed rains, farmers were usually disappointed. For example, Mutio narrated, “We grow coffee, and there is no profit; losses are more than profits due to poor markets and high costs of maintaining it.”

Acknowledging that times have changed and technology has advanced, participants noted that essential elements of African indigenous knowledge can assist them in their blue-collar jobs, especially those in farming. According to participants, drought-resistant crops such as cassava, millet, and sorghum helped traditional communities, which were mainly agricultural. Commenting on this, Nzioka noted that “the community understood seasons, planted drought-resistant crops which would cushion them in case of failed rains. They also made the land productive through crop rotation and use of manure. . . .” Participants felt that borrowing a leaf from this can deal with disappointments and frustrations for those in farming and, especially when rains fail. According to participants, other blue-collar jobs in traditional African communities that have been abandoned but remain viable include arts and crafts, sculpture, rope making, and basket weaving.

As discussed in this section, the white-collar versus blue-collar jobs can be attributed to the valorisation of work over the years; intellectual work is highly esteemed, and manual work is either demeaned or despised. This is why, though blue-collar jobs have been provided for the participants, they are dissatisfied and still searching for white-collar jobs. This perception of work is neither theological nor cultural, but rather the aftermath of capitalism and modernization.

According to the Old Testament (OT), work is any occupation or activity, either skilled or artistic, in which one applies his/her will and mastery. In the New Testament (NT), the verb *ergazomai* (work) means making a meaningful economic contribution. According to African culture, to live means to work and to work means to live; no activity does not involve working of some kind. Thus, theologically and culturally, there is no categorization or hierarchical

³³ Tom Nelson, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work*, 40.

grading of work or distinctions between various sorts of work; any activity that makes God's world flourish is considered work. There is no contempt for manual work; whatever we do, we collaborate with God to provide and cater to creation. Hence, as we seek to address youth unemployment, it is essential to address the capitalist categorization and specialization of work and to help youth understand that all types of work are valuable, for in and through them we accomplish God's purposes in the world.

Work and how it should be done is not our idea but God's. God is the first and finest worker who created, designed, fashioned, crafted, and engineered the universe (Gen 1:1). Therein lies the significance of work; to work is to express the creative nature of God.³⁴ God created us in his own image and likeness so we can characterise and act like him. Hence, the command to work "is part of the DNA of being human."³⁵ Work is part of who we are. Hence, this is not a "take it or leave it" variety of command; it is founded on God's self-counsel as the very function of human nature (Gen 1:26); though we may pervert it, fight it, and publicly abandon it, we cannot escape it.³⁶

From this command, we get our job description: to subdue, rule, cultivate, and take care of creation. God gave us an administrative responsibility (Gen 2:4–6), and he expects us to apply our physical abilities and mental faculties to accomplish it. We are to subdue by making the earth productive and rule by exercising skilled mastery over it. Through subduing and ruling, we are to harness the land, the sky, and the sea; to develop and open up their potential from the animal kingdom to the plant kingdom, to human 'kingdoms' of theory, of technology, of relationships, of economy, of art, of politics and so on.³⁷

Cultivation means applying physical power and labour in agricultural and industrial terms, using knowledge, science, technology, and labor skills to bring out the good from the land, the sea, and the sky.³⁸ It means enculturing creation from animal husbandry to nuclear physics, from homemaking to accounting, and in all the ways that make the world flourish.³⁹ Finally, we are to take care of the world; we are custodians of the resources, skills, abilities, and capabilities God has given us. We should use our intellect, knowledge, wisdom, imagination, creativity, and power, whether in its political, economic, cultural, or religious form, to maintain, sustain, and improve creation for our well-being.⁴⁰ Thus, our job description is not limited to intellectual work (formal or white-collar jobs); it also extends to physical (informal, manual or blue-collar jobs). Therefore, whatever work we do to develop, cherish, subdue, replenish, and care for the world should bring glory and honour to God and ensure our best interests are attained.

³⁴ Lacroix, Jean, and Denyse Barbet. "The Concept of Work." *Cross Currents* 4, no. 3 (1954): 236–50.

³⁵ <https://edensbridge.org/2011/11/15/to-work-abad-to-work-serve-and-worship-genesis-215/>

³⁶ Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis*, 42, 52.

³⁷ <http://www.abxn.org/nv/rrrr.html#shepherds>

³⁸ David E. Pratte, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Bible Study Notes and Comments* (United States: np, 2013), 22, 29.

³⁹ Paul R. Stevens, *The Abolition of the Laity: Vocation, Work and Ministry in a Biblical Perspective* (Paternoster Press: 1999), 146-147.

⁴⁰ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, 95.

Youth can borrow a leaf from Jesus and Paul, who were craftsmen. Before he began his public ministry, Jesus worked as a carpenter (Mk 6:3), and at the onset of his ministry, he called his disciples from the ranks of the working people, Simon and Andrew, the fishermen (Matt 4:18); Matthew and Zacchaeus the tax collectors (Matt 9:9, 10:3, Lk 19:1). Though the community despised these occupations, Jesus showed no contempt, he was real about real life, real work and how God can be a part of it as illustrated in a peasant farming, a farmer sowing seeds (Mk 4:3ff, Lk 9:62), the labourer in the vineyard (Matt 20:1–15), a shepherd looking for a lost sheep (Matt 18:12), the fishermen and their nets (Matt 13:47–50), the housewives with their leaven and meal (Matt 13:33, Lk 15:8), a wise man building a house (Matt 7:24).

Paul seized the opportunity to make tents regardless of society's perception of tent-making. During his time, manual workers were pretty unimportant, a social nonentity, and their work only allowed them to survive at a subsistence level. However, he laboured and toiled day and night so that the work of God under his custody would not suffer shame. He maintained financial independence and worked with his own hands to relieve the church's burden of supporting him (2 Thess 3:7–8). He paid his own way and set forth an example worthy of imitation (1 Thess 3:8), 'his precepts on work were reinforced by the practice of work.'⁴¹ He lived out the Gospel both in the church and in the marketplace; he did not want to be a burden to the church (1 Thess 4:12). This means that dependency on others burdens them (1 Thess 4:12) when youth fail to work because they despise blue-collar jobs; they become a burden to the community.

Since we were created to work and for work, we find meaning, satisfaction, and delight in it, whether in white or blue-collar jobs. Obedience to the command to work presents us opportunities for joy; God prospers and establishes the work of our hands (Ps 90:16–17, Job 1:10, Deut 28:4–5, Isa 65:21–23) and enables us to experience joy in our work (Eccl 8:15 cf. 2:24, 3:22, 9:7). The opposite is also true when we do not work, internal discouragement, emptiness and even despair creep in and as the participants observed. It also leads to poverty, unproductivity, and an unhealthy environment, conflicts, crises, and sometimes violence, as was the case in the Roman Empire when it disregarded manual labor (1 Cor 6:9–11). It is worth noting that these are not due to unemployment but to not working in general.

Therefore, there is no vocation so simple, no labour so mean, as not to be suffused with the divine splendour and subservient to the glory of God's name; all our cares, toils, annoyances and other burdens are under the superintendence of God who orders all of life. Hence, even the worst tasks have splendour and value in God's eyes.⁴² "The labour of the craftsman is honourable, for he serves the community in his calling; the honest smith or shoemaker is a priest."⁴³ Therefore, the blue-jobs identified by the participants are valuable to God, for they partner with him to accomplish his purposes in their lives and the community. We need constructors, water vendors, shopkeepers, riders, detailers, and farmers for the community's well-being. If youth can acknowledge this, then they can have enough and more than enough

⁴¹ Todd D. Still, "Did Paul Loathe Manual Labor? Revisiting the work of Ronald F. Hock on the Apostle's Tent Making and Social Class," 790.

⁴² Herman Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace", *Calvin and the Reformation*, Geerhardus Vos trans. (New York: Revell, 1909), 124.

⁴³ Edward Granter, *Critical Social Theory and the End of Work*, 17–18.

to do; no one can contend that their work is more important, for God calls us to different duties, and even the lowest task is worthwhile in that it is done ultimately in the service of God.

As the participants narrated, though the extrinsic value of work is essential, it has led to individualism, selfishness, and greed. This can be attributed to the fact that whenever the intrinsic value of work is left out, work loses its value; it is no longer worth doing for its own sake, for people's worth is measured in terms of what they do and the returns thereof. Biblically, our worth and identity are not determined by what we do but by who we are, "the image of God"; our 'true self' is not found in what we do; it is conferred to us by God. Therefore, work cannot be reduced to a mere means for survival, for this alienates us from our core nature and holistic development (1 Cor 3:14–15). We do not work for remuneration or a paycheck; work is central to the existential well-being of individuals and communities, physically, socially, economically, politically and spiritually.

The words "*abad*" and "*samar*," *radah* and *kabas*, as used in the command to work, show that work is not just a means to an end; through work, we obtain the necessities of life (2 Cor 9:9), develop culture, co-operate with God and partner with him in preserving creation.⁴⁴ Thus, work helps us express ourselves and participate in the community; it benefits the worker and enables them to care for others (Eph 4:28). It also allows one to express their creativity and sense of identity and purpose. In subduing, ruling, cultivating, and caring for the world, we serve human needs and the general welfare of society.

Therefore, youth need to understand that, though work is necessary for satisfying our needs, it "goes far beyond providing us with necessary means of sustenance; we not only live from what we do, but to a large extent, we are also what we do."⁴⁵ Therefore, work encompasses "everything that contributes to our having and enjoying our daily bread."⁴⁶ Accordingly, neither is employment work nor is all work employment. One can be employed without working, and one can also work without compensation.⁴⁷ As Nelson asserts, "Work is not about economic exchange, financial remuneration . . . but about God honouring human activity and contribution . . . An integral aspect of being human, an essential aspect of loving God and his created world, and a vital part of loving our neighbour as ourselves."⁴⁸

God is an excellent and competent worker (Gen 1—2) and expects us to emulate him. It means that youths' educational skills and specializations from tertiary training are essential in carrying out the command to work. Through these, youth are to 'mirror' the work and creativity of God as co-workers with him, utilize science and technology to investigate how the earth functions and harness it. This ties in with the Jewish tradition that males should learn a trade, even those

⁴⁴ Miroslav Volf & Gordon Preece, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, 760.

⁴⁵ Volf Miroslav, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, 12.

⁴⁶ Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to Gods Work* (Penguin, 2014), 2, 58.

⁴⁷ Volf Miroslav, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, 8-12.

⁴⁸ Tom Nelson, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work*, 24.

destined to become rabbis,⁴⁹ and Calvin's call for individuals to seek to progress through the occupational hierarchy, to seek that work at which they were best.⁵⁰

However, youth should not demean work not in line with their skills and specialization; biblically, work is any occupation, business, or activity, whether skilled or artistic. Therefore, just like all other humans, youths are world-makers by divine intent and by their very nature, and God has endowed them with gifts and abilities to perform both simple and complex tasks. Being conscious of this can help youth navigate the capitalist spirit, which glorifies white-collar jobs over blue-collar jobs. Youth should use their skills and extract the greatest possible gain from work, and as Calvin puts it, as they do so, they should not only enjoy the fruits of labour but also re-invest and create yet more work to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.⁵¹

Therefore, the dualistic perception of work as white-collar and blue-collar jobs, which leads to confusing work with career, employment, or occupation, can be addressed by acknowledging that all vocations are sacred. As Keller notes, "In God's economy, there is no hierarchy of work or career; all vocations are inherently and potentially sacred, for in and through them we serve God and the world. Since God calls us to the work, our work is an offering to God."⁵² Concurring with these sentiments, Smith narrates that, "All vocations are sacred because the kingdom of God is not merely spiritual . . . to that end, God calls and enables his children to be his kingdom agents within every sphere of life and society. Each vocation reflects, but one means by which God, through word and deed, is accomplishing this."⁵³

No work is beneath us or not a good utilization of our gifts; work of all kinds, whether with our hands or the mind, evidences our dignity as human beings because it reflects the image of God in us. Hence, there is no basis for condescension or superiority or a basis for envy or feelings of inferiority.⁵⁴ Our value is not pegged on our work or the wage we are paid; there is good and meaningful work without remuneration.⁵⁵ Thus, the ordinary, daily routine, common work is significant for "no task is too small a vessel to hold the immense dignity of work given by God. Simple physical work is God's work no less than the formulation of theological truth . . . We cannot look down on labour involving more intimate contact with the material world. Caring for and cultivating this material world has worth, even if it means cutting grass."⁵⁶ Therefore, work is less about what one does than what one is. Hence, work and career/occupation are not synonymous: as Smith outlines, though you can be dismissed from the workplace, lose your job, or be released from your position, that does not mean you have lost your work; there is a distinction between work and a job. Work is a gift from God, which denotes our fundamental identity; it remains and is not something you choose or that someone else can give or take away

⁴⁹ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 1990, 940.

⁵⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.10.6.

⁵¹ Elizabeth E. Ostring, "The Theology of Human Work as Found in the Genesis Narrative Compared with the Co-Creationist Theology of Human Work," 50.

⁵² Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to Gods Work*, 35.

⁵³ Gordon T. Smith, *Courage and Calling: Embracing your God-given potential*, 44.

⁵⁴ Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to Gods Work*, 35, 41.

⁵⁵ Gordon T. Smith, *Courage and Calling: Embracing your God-given Potential*, 39.

⁵⁶ Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to Gods Work*, 40.

from you.⁵⁷ Therefore, though youth may not have formal or clearly defined jobs, they are called to work. Such a calling is much deeper and all-encompassing than a career or occupation. Therefore, any available work is worthwhile.⁵⁸ Such an understanding of work is the only thing that will free youth from the contemporary notions of work, for work will no longer be a thing they do to live but what they live to do; they do not need the money from work to survive; they need the work itself to survive and live fully human lives.⁵⁹

In a nutshell, the white-collar versus blue-collar jobs discourse cannot be blind to the fact that the Bible acknowledges all types of work; farming (Gen 4:2, 26:12, 14), keeping livestock (Gen 4:2, 20, 13:2, 4, Job 1:10), blacksmith (Gen 4:22), hunting (Gen 10:9, 25:27), skilled artisans, blacksmiths, metalworkers, goldsmiths, craftsmen in bronze (Ex 31:3–4, 1 Kgs 7:14), stone and wood work (Josh 9:21, 1 Kgs 5:6, 5:15), gleaning (Ruth 2:3), carpenters, builders, and masons (2 Kgs 12:12, Prov 24:27), vinedressers and tillers of the soil (2 Kgs 25:12), traders of silver, iron, tin and lead, horses, mules, ivory tusks, ebony, turquoise, embroidered work, fine linen, coral rubies, honey, olive oil, balm, wine, wrought iron, lambs, rams, goats, spices, precious stones and choice garments (Ezek 27:12–25), temple workers (2 Kgs 12:12, 2 Chron 2:13–14, Hag 1:14). Therefore, whether, in white-collar or blue-collar jobs, the bottom line is, work is a command from God. God expects us to use physical and mental labour to subdue, rule, cultivate, and care for the world using readily available resources, skills, abilities, capabilities, gifts, and talents.

4.2 The Morality of Work

The research participants noted that work should benefit an individual holistically, rather than just their economic well-being. In this sense, it is better not to be picky about the work one finds, because money has to be made. However, research showed that while work is perceived as any activity that provides income and daily bread, some jobs are considered unworthy. Society looks down on individuals who do these jobs. The two jobs mentioned in this category, which I will use as practical examples for this segment, include selling alcohol and prostitution. At the core of this discussion is the formative nature of work as an activity that affects both the person and society.

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) holds that work is both a means to a financial end and an act of virtue. Therefore, this tradition provides a theology of work that serves as an ethical framework for evaluating work-related issues by grounding work in a moral activity.⁶⁰ As a formative activity, work is both subjective and objective: subjective, as it has a self-determining effect on the individual, and objective, as it affects actors outside the individual (external objects).⁶¹ The individual is a constant in this subjective and objective work dynamic; therefore, the (trans)formation the individual undergoes, as a result, underpins the moral dimension of work.

⁵⁷ Gordon T. Smith, *Courage and Calling: Embracing your God-given Potential*, 137.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁹ Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*, 24-25.

⁶⁰ Michael Naughton, and Gene R. Lacznia, "A Theological Context of Work from the Catholic Social Encyclical Tradition," 981-994.

⁶¹ Ibid.

The perceptions of work held by the research participants concur with Scripture and tradition, for they all culminate in the assertion that work is not an option but a necessity if they are to support themselves and their family members. It is a foundation for family life; it provides a means of subsistence and ensures the raising of children and the provision of a dignified life for our loved ones.⁶² As narrated in all the FGDs and the semi-structured interviews, work is a means through which we support our families, pay taxes, and serve God. Mueni, one of the participants, noted that “we work every day to provide for the family. So, from that day on (*when man fell into sin*), it has been work, work, so that we can provide for the family and eat.” Agreeing with Mueni, Muema said, “. . . I should look for something to do to keep me busy and provide for my family. I do blue-collar jobs, which have generated income for my family this far.” In defining work, Nthoki stated work is “Any activity that pays taxes and generates revenue.” These sentiments were also echoed by the FGDs at Kangudo and Muthike; the former stated, “We work to pay taxes, to support our families, and to serve God in the church with our income.” In contrast, the latter noted, “When you are unemployed, you cannot pay taxes and revenue. Unemployment makes youth beggars and drains the society of great brains.”

In this sense, work without remuneration, whether in daily wages or monthly salaries, can hardly be considered as such. Remuneration is integral to the formative activity that work is, as it also directly impacts the worker and the society, which, according to the interlocutors in this research, has a say in whether or not a job is morally acceptable. It is imperative to note that the workplace and how work is carried out contribute significantly to the changes a worker undergoes.

At the heart of what is ethical and morally acceptable regarding work is the cognizance that work causes changes in the subject and the object. While these changes might be either positive or negative, how the work is organized and the worker’s role in it determine the effect of these changes on the individual and society. Therefore, the morality of work is a discussion of the values upheld or compromised in one’s line of work or job, whether white-collar or blue-collar. The reason selling alcohol and prostitution are frowned upon in some communities, as articulated by two research participants, is due to the values and societal norms that are regarded as compromised and, perhaps, the transformation this work has had on the individual as well as how this reflects in the community or society.

Though participants identified work with the “fall,” it is important to note that work is not a result of the “fall of man” or a curse; it existed before the “fall” and is inherently good and meaningful. However, sin distorted the nature of work both physically and intellectually (Eccl 2:17–26, 8:17); it became toilsome, troublesome, burdensome, wearying and disappointing (Job 4:8, Ps 90:10, Prov 24:2, 12:11, 14:23, Eccl 1:3, 2: 11, 17–23, 3:9, 4:4, 5:15–16). Nevertheless, work is still honourable, and people are blessed when they work industriously.⁶³ Just as the reformers argued, leading a daily work life is sacred and pleasing to God, who values all kinds of work; whatever work we do is a calling, and each person should regard their work as such. Thus, both manual and intellectual work are of equal value, for in both, God’s presence

⁶² *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Par. 294.

⁶³ Alistair Mackenzie, *Faith at Work: Vocation, the Theology of Work and the Pastoral Implications*, PhD diss., 11-12.

is made manifest and his purposes fulfilled; they reveal the spirituality of our daily lives and give practical guidance to marriages, parenthood, economic activity, and citizenship.⁶⁴

However, the distortion of work by sin leads to the question: Are some types of work unacceptable? As Smith asserts, “. . . not all work is good. Work can be destructive, hurtful and a disservice to Christ and others. Our longing for meaningful work must be framed in the context of that which is good, noble, and excellent, that which enables us to bring glory to God/pleasure to God, that which can with genuine passion say that we do “as unto the Lord” (Col 3:23).”⁶⁵

In biblical times, some trades, such as butcher, dung collector, tanner, gambler with dice, tax collector, and publican, were despised, for they were believed to lead to dishonesty, defile the worker, or transgress certain demands of the religious law.⁶⁶ This means that we can use our hands to do work that is degrading and unacceptable, and at the same time, we can also use them for ἀγαθόν, “honest work.” Thus, remuneration does not make work morally acceptable, for people work for the wrong reasons due to sin. For example, the scribes and Chief Priests sought to kill Christ, and Judas Iscariot made money by betraying Christ (Matt 26:14ff). Thus, not all work is morally acceptable.

In the OT, gleaning was made to uphold “the dignity of work, for those unable to participate in the labour market due to lack of resources, socio-economic dislocation, discrimination, disability, or other factors.”⁶⁷ It gave people experiencing poverty an opportunity to work rather than beg, steal, or starve. When Israel failed to uphold the God-given provisions for work, some turned to prostitution, an act which he strongly condemned through the prophet Micah. The prophet called upon the leaders to ensure that people had access to the resources required to make a living. In Ephesians 4:28, Paul upheld the dignity of work by exhorting the thief who used his hands to deprive others to use the same hands to provide for others.

Therefore, when the government makes it difficult for the youth to access white-collar jobs due to corruption, tribalism, and nepotism, it goes against its biblical mandate. God institutes governments to encourage kingdom ethics and to bring a creation order into the management of human affairs, an order based on justice and peace (1 Kgs 10:9, Jer 22:15–16).⁶⁸ Justice and righteousness, in this case, extend to the economic structures of the nation (Ps 72). However, this system has become captive to the economic order due to sin. It only serves the powerful, who, as narrated by the participants, deprive youths of their rightful access, to productive resources (Prov 31:9) and, at times, push them to illegitimate businesses and jobs (Mic 1:7). When youths are deprived of their rightful access to productive resources, it is the responsibility of the government to step in with intervening power to correct the injustice (Dan 4:27, Prov 31:9).⁶⁹ It should eliminate conditions that would lead youth to degrading work to provide for their families (Mic 3:1–2) by addressing corruption, tribalism, and nepotism that exist in

⁶⁴ Gene Edward Veith, “Vocation: The Theology of the Christian life,” 119.

⁶⁵ Gordon T. Smith, *Courage and Calling: Embracing your God-given Potential*, 32.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁷ <https://www.theologyofwork.org/old-testament/the-twelve-prophets>

⁶⁸ Ibid., 66-67.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 72-73.

government offices, and ensure that youth get equal opportunities (Eccl 4:1, Amos 5:12, 15, Jer 21:12, 22:15–16, Ps 45:4–5, 101:8).

4.3 Feelings Towards Work

Sandeland notes that the concept of feeling serves two different and antagonistic ideas. On the one hand, feeling is regarded as a response to stimuli, as an evaluation or judgment about a specific object. In this sense, feeling results from processing information and is *about*⁷⁰ something else.⁷¹ On the other hand, feeling is a process expressed by active verbs that describe how one feels. It is, therefore, not a discrete response but an occurrence with its own dynamism, risings, transmutations, and fallings.⁷² The process of feeling is ongoing and applies to all aspects of life; feelings are subject to change. The individual is the constant in this process. Hess asserts that when youth are unemployed and unable to meet their aspirations, they feel incompetent, vulnerable, inferior, useless, and worthless. The aftermath is typically low self-esteem or loss of identity, depression, and anxiety, which robs them of the opportunity to lead a fulfilling life.⁷³

The pros of having a job, as highlighted by the research participants, include a consistent income stream, meeting their own and their loved ones' needs, and contributing meaningfully to society. While the positive effects of having work outweigh the negative, being unemployed (in formal employment), lacking capital to start a business, or settling for casual labor significantly affects the individual, their immediate family, friends, and their community.

It indicates the value the participants attributed to work and employment. According to most participants, work breaks the yoke of dependency; it makes them happy when they do not depend on others for basic needs. Mutua narrated, “When I have some work to do, I am happy, and my family is happy too, those that I meet can attest to this for I share the little I have with them. . . .” Thus, being employed or having work is equated with being happy, peaceful, and economically independent, Kalekye stated that, “Work gives me fulfilment for it places me in a position of self-sustenance” Work is also essential for acquiring self-confidence and being considered a “worthy person” by others. As Muema posits, “When I get some work to do, I go home confident because I can afford to change their diet that day; my family will be able to eat that which they have not eaten for a long time, for example, meat, eggs and even sausage.” This was also articulated in one of the FGDs at Kangundo, “. . . Our wives and children are happy when we are working. It also makes us feel useful.”

Just as youth are happy when employed or have work to do, being without work creates frustration and uncertainty and is equally damaging, as the participants indicated. Some negative feelings that came out strongly include stress, frustration, disappointment, bitterness, pity, boredom, and worthlessness. Ultimately, these negative feelings undermine their self-esteem and confidence, culminating in unhappiness with their lives. The following are some of

⁷⁰ Word in italics in quoted article.

⁷¹ Sandelands, L. E. “The Concept of Work Feeling.” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 18 (1988): 437-457.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Laura E. Hess, C. Petersen & Jeylan T. Mortimer; “Youth, Unemployment and Marginality: The Problem and the Solution,” 15.

the outstanding sentiments describing the negative feelings elicited by unemployment or lack of work:

. . . It (unemployment) causes disappointment and makes someone feel like a beggar and a burden to others. (Nthoki, 29)

When I am working, I feel happy and motivated to live, and when there is no work, I am very stressed and, most of the time, bored. (Nzioka, 24)

Being unemployed leads to self-pity since I cannot support myself; it makes me dependent. (Mutio, 20)

Lack of work makes us feel discontented, for needs are more than we can simply meet because we do not have money. (FGD Mavoko)

. . . When I cannot meet my own needs or the family's needs, bitterness and gloom set in. . . . Unemployment makes you useless. You have poor health, a poor diet... you are stressed... you lose friends because they demean you and the work you do... Even if one is self-employed or doing manual work, they are classified as unemployed youth because their work is not recognised. Thus, being without work is quite stressful and makes you feel useless... When not working, I am gloomy, bitter, and have conflicts with people." (Muema, 24)

Work is a foundation for the formation of family life; it ensures a means of subsistence and serves as a guarantee for raising children and for providing a dignified life; low wages, unemployment, economic insecurity and lack of decent work affect the family negatively: couples not wishing to have children; children have it difficult to study and become independent; calm planning for the future is precluded; and poverty.⁷⁴ The married male participants asserted that since their wives, children, and parents look up to them for provision, unemployment stresses them up; the FGD at Kangudo narrated, ". . . Being without work makes us uncomfortable . . . It troubles our hearts, for we have families to feed and clothe. It feels bad when you cannot cater for the needs of your family, including your parents who are also dependents. . . ." The FGD further pointed out that the inability to provide for the family leads to the denial of conjugal rights, thus affecting their ego and confidence, and at times, it leads to violence, marital conflicts, and disrespect not only from their wives but also from their children. Also, the unmarried male participants narrated that unemployment makes them delay marrying or postpone it because they feel that they do not have what it takes to raise a family. Unfortunately, as Mutua stated, opting not to marry makes some engage in fornication.

The interlocutors' feelings show what happens when we obey or disobey the command to work (Gen 1:28, 2:15). Work breaks the yoke of dependency and is a source of dignity, self-fulfilment, identity and recognition, and material wellbeing. It is necessary for development, sustenance, economic growth, spiritual discipline, and maturity; it has a common good embodied in the general welfare of the society. Paul worked with his own hands to relieve the church's burden to support him (2 Thess 3:7–8). Though he arguably had the power and the privilege to forgo labour and to receive support from the church, he chose not to exercise such rights for dependency on others makes one a burden to the community (1 Thess 4:12). Through

⁷⁴ World Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris-the Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary* (23 June 2015).

tent making, he did not only pay his own way, but he also set forth an example worthy of imitation for his precepts on work were reinforced by the practice of work.”⁷⁵ He lived out the Gospel both in the church and in the marketplace! He worked to be a model for the Thessalonians (1 Thess 3:8). This was also exemplified in the monastic theology of work; according to the Benedictine rule, each monastery was to constitute all things necessary such as water, a mill, a garden, and various crafts, so that the community could sustain itself without recourse to alms or the marketplace. According to Benedict, the monastery was a workshop, an economic unit aiming for self-sufficiency.

A lack of work leads to frustration, bitterness, a sense of worthlessness, emptiness, and low self-esteem, as the interlocutors clarified. It deprives youth of the opportunity to serve their families and communities, to articulate their creativity, and to express their sense of identity and purpose in life. Thus, having no work deprives youth of every aspect of their lives. Pope Francis asserted that unemployment is a social and spiritual evil; the absence of work damages the spirit, just as prayer damages practical activity. He further observed that “. . . when work is detached from God’s covenant with man and woman, and it is separated from its spiritual qualities, when work is held hostage by the logic of profit alone and human life is disregarded, the degradation of the soul contaminates everything . . .”⁷⁶ Thus, work is an integral part of life not only for its economic benefits but because it adds dignity to our lives. For this reason, within the household codes (Eph 6:5–9), employers are implored to pay their employees sufficient and appropriate wages and respect and treat them with dignity.

In a nutshell, the participants’ feelings show that work, identity, and dignity are interrelated. However, this interrelatedness is influenced by the contemporary’s perception of work whereby work confers identity and dignity on people; their worth and value are measured by what they do and the returns. Thus, a worker’s remuneration depends on the work they do. Such a perception has influenced stakeholders’ interventions on youth unemployment: the antidote to unemployment is the creation of more jobs. Unfortunately, theologically, our identity, dignity, and vocation are conferred to us by God; we are created in God’s image (identity), we are valuable to him (dignity), and he has endowed us with gifts, talents, abilities, and capabilities to contribute to our wellbeing (vocation).

However, our identity, dignity, and vocation are distorted by sin and further eroded by unemployment, as this study shows. Thus, though creating jobs for youth is essential, their eroded identity and dignity can only be restored through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Youth need to rediscover their identity and dignity; in doing so, they will be empowered to make decisions that contribute to their own lives; a dignified person, not money, transforms the world. Having a good sense of identity and dignity will enable them to discover their vocation as they use their gifts, talents, abilities, and capabilities to subdue, rule, cultivate, and care for creation, regardless of the nature of their work.

CST stipulates that work depends not on what people produce or the type of activity they undertake, but exclusively on their dignity as human beings. Thus, the subjective aspect of work is more important than the objective; it concerns the internal transformation of a person,

⁷⁵ Todd D. Still, “Did Paul Loathe Manual Labor? Revisiting the Work of Ronald F. Hock on the Apostle’s Tent Making and Social Class,” 790.

⁷⁶ “Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’*. On Care for Our Common Home.” *Libreria Editrice vaticana* (2015). Par. 127.

focusing on the changes work brings about in their personality, character, and potential as a human subject.⁷⁷ Thus, any productive activity derives its principal value from the person, not from the kind of activity or the objective results. All work is dignified as a means for the self-formation or self-transformation of free, rational, and dynamic persons.⁷⁸ It is, therefore, vital to understand the subject of work and how they are affected psychologically, ethically, economically and spiritually.

This research took a human-centred approach to establishing how individuals perceive work and feel towards it. In this regard, it is imperative to note that while the employment-unemployment discourse has over-focused on the impact employment and unemployment have had on economies, the effects of unemployment, especially on the individual, require more illumination in research and in practice to put into perspective the dynamics of feelings towards work, the response individuals have to these feelings, as well as the resulting actions. Most of the research participants repeatedly highlighted hope as crucial to their wait for employment, stating that God is concerned about their situation and that they only need to trust the plans He has for them.

5. Conclusion

Over the centuries of the evolution of work in its definition and practice, different religious beliefs, theologies, philosophical ideologies, and theories of development have influenced people's perception of work, especially its categorization and specialization. The valorization of white-collar jobs as a stream of consistent income came out strongly, with research participants citing their socialization from a young age to endeavour for formal employment—a factor they worked towards throughout their education years. To still earn an income, the research participants have taken up various blue-collar jobs outside the ideal of formal employment while holding on to the hope of finding work in their desired professions. However, such valorization has tied the importance of work to the income one earns from it, as this is the only way one can sustain oneself and one's family. Thus, one's identity and dignity are measured by what one earns, that is, in economic terms, the income one gets from work.

6. Recommendations

Since work is both objective and subjective, youth are at the core and must be part of the solution to unemployment. To do so, I first recommend a change in their perception of work: from being employed (having a white-collar job) or receiving a paycheck or remuneration to perceiving work as a command from God. Thus, work is any undertaking or task that goes beyond wages to one's obligation as a human being, providing for oneself, family, community, and the nation at large. Hence, youth should stop demeaning certain jobs, especially blue-collar jobs; as they wait for their 'ideal job,' they should be open to taking available jobs, even if they are not in line with their area of specialization. They should look for opportunities to work, whether or not, such as volunteer work and community service.

⁷⁷ Paul H. Dembinski, "Church Related Texts on Labour-Work in Progress," 253.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

References

- Applebaum, Herbert A. *The Concept of Work: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*. New York: Suny Press, 1992.
- Ayittey, George. *Africa in Chaos*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1999.
- Bavinck, Herman. *Calvin and the Reformation*. New York: Revell, 1909.
- Calvin John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. McNeill, John T., ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960.
- Dembinski, H. Paul, "Church Related Texts on Labour-Work in Progress" *Rethinking Labour Ethical Reflections on the Future of Work A Caritas in Veritate Foundation Working Papers*, (Geneva; FCIV, 2018), 251–256.
- Fend, Helmut. "The Historical Context of Transition to Work and Youth Unemployment." *Youth unemployment and Society* (1994): 77-94.
- Gammarano, Rosina. "Labour Market Access: A Persistent Challenge for Youth around the World." *International Labour Organization, Geneva* (2019).
- Gene Edward Veith, "Vocation: The theology of the Christian life." *Journal of Markets & Morality* 14, no. 1 (2011), 119.
- Gordon, Random House, *Random House Webster's College Dictionary*. Random House, 1998.
- Granter, Edward. *Critical Social Theory and the End of Work*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Hess, Laura E., Anne C. Petersen, and Jeylan T. Mortimer. "Youth, Unemployment and Marginality: The Problem and the Solution." *Youth Unemployment and Society*. 1994.
- Keller, Timothy. *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*. Penguin, 2014.
- Mackenzie, Alistair. "Faith at Work: Vocation, the Theology of Work and the Pastoral Implications: A Thesis in Pastoral Theology Submitted for the Degree of Master of Theology at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand." PhD diss., University of Otago, 1997.
- MacMullen, Ramsay. *Roman Social Relations, 50 BC to AD 254*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.
- Myers, Bryant. *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*. Marynoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011.
- Naughton, Michael, and Gene R. Lacznia. "A Theological Context of Work from the Catholic Social Encyclical Tradition." *Journal of Business Ethics* 12, no. 12 (1993): 981-994.
- Nelson, Tom. *Work matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2011.
- Nicolaides, Angelo, Cnr Janadel, and Alexandra Avenues. "Ethics and the Dignity of Work: An Orthodox Christian perspective." *Pharos Journal of Theology* Volume 101 (2020): 1-16.
- North, Gary. *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis*. Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012.

- Nowell, Lorelli S., Jill M. Norris, Deborah E. White, and Nancy J. Moules. "Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16, no. 1 (2017): 1-13.
- O'higgins, Niall. "The Challenge of Youth Unemployment." *International Social Security Review* 50, no. 4 (1997): 63-93.
- Ostring, Elizabeth E. "The Theology of Human Work as Found in the Genesis Narrative Compared with the Co-Creationist Theology of Human Work." PhD diss., Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, Australia, 2015.
- Otuki, Neville. "Kenya's Youth Percentage among the Highest Globally." *Business Daily* (August, 2017).
- Parkan, Barış. "Work and Value as Processual Entities," *The Value of Work in Contemporary Society*. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2014.
- Polkowska, Dominika. *The Value of Work in Contemporary Society*. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2014.
- Roberts, H. Richard "Capitalism," *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*. Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason and Hugh Pyper eds. Oxford University Press, 2000
- Salutati, Leonardo. "What's the Church Say on Unemployment? A Lot Actually May 15, 2016, special to crux. <https://cruxnow.com/church/2016/05/whats-the-church-say-on-unemployment-a-lot-actually/>
- Smith, Gordon T. *Courage and Calling: Embracing your God-given Potential*. Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2011.
- Stevens, R. Paul. *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective*. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.
- Still, Todd D. "Did Paul Loathe Manual Labor? Revisiting the Work of Ronald F. Hock on the Apostle's Tentmaking and Social Class." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125, no. 4 (2006): 781-795.
- Volf, Miroslav. *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001.
- Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, John Raffan, trans. Cambridge, Ma. Harvard Univ. Press, 1985