

# Attitudes Towards Work in Contemporary Society. A Study of Work from a Christian Perspective

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**Abstract:** Work is one of the most common activities in human life. Regardless of nationality, age, or social status, it is present in human life in order to earn the income necessary for daily living. The industrial revolution, technological development, and, more recently, the use of artificial intelligence have transformed the way we work without eliminating work from our lives. The person who works relates to work in a certain way and develops a specific attitude depending on the conditions and benefits of work. The Christian faith provides insight into the nature of work. Faith cannot be separated from work because work itself has its origin in God and retains a spiritual dimension. In addressing today's challenges related to work, the Christian faith proposes a reordering of values around the common good. Both the employer and the employee are thus able to benefit from work, each achieving his or her desired goal. Through their work, Christians can be role models of seriousness, professionalism, productivity, and innovation. These qualities need to be reflected in the lives of believers in order to develop the right work culture.

**Keywords:** Work, Contemporary Society, Christian Values, Work Ethics, Origin of Work, Work Culture

## Introduction

Work represents the activity that people have undertaken since ancient times, with the aim of earning a living and obtaining the goods necessary for survival. This activity is characteristic of man, and despite the evolution that has taken place over time, which has shown us that work can take various forms, it remains very important and so necessary for man today.

This article will explore the possible attitudes of a Christian towards work. It will explain that while work has evolved quite a lot in the context of industrial and technological reform, and more recently due to artificial intelligence, nevertheless people still must work. Consequently, the act of working requires individuals to adopt a specific attitude or perspective. Although most countries have specialized institutions working to improve working conditions through laws and directives, people are still impacted by their work, and it remains a challenge to adopt the right attitude. While it is difficult to encompass every possible attitude people have toward work, three common attitudes found in a Christian's life warrant attention: hostility, enrichment, and opportunity to honor Christ. These three attitudes are among the most common, with other perspectives often seen as variations or combinations of these.

This topic holds significant importance because work is such a fundamental human activity. Thus, it is necessary to know the theological and biblical foundations of work, as well as the various attitudes that believers can manifest. According to biblical teachings, Christians must be positive examples in all they do, and become worthy role models. This

should characterize the whole of human existence, a paradigm that includes the activity of working. The Christian who works becomes an agent who influences those around him by the work he does. This influence used in an appropriate way is one of the best opportunities to serve as a witness to others. Knowing the possible attitudes and implications that result from adopting the right attitude to work is essential to the life of faith.

From a methodological point of view, work can be seen as a transversal activity common to all people, regardless of age, nationality, education, religion, or other possible criteria. With this foundation, three primary ways for Christians to relate to work can be outlined. The first perspective is viewing work as a burden, and this perception may lead to the development of a hostile attitude toward it. The second attitude is to regard work as an opportunity for enrichment and a means of improving one's livelihood. The third possible attitude is when a believer is convinced that through the work they undertake, they can honor God by being an example of seriousness, productivity and competence. Finally, the advantages of adopting the right attitude and how this approach can lead to the formation and development of a work ethic will be presented.

### **Work as a common human activity**

Analyzing from a historical perspective, work has been recognized as a common activity. Whether we are talking about the past or the present, man has had to work to obtain the essentials of life. In this context, the one who works develops an attitude towards work. The Christian perspective on work must start from the origin of work. Thomas Schirmacher argues that "the Christian attitude to work has its origin, like the conception of love and thought, in God Himself, who is the Creator" (Schirmacher, 2011, p. 37).

According to biblical teaching, man was created in God's image and inherited God's traits. One of these traits concerns the activity of labor. "Within the Ten Commandments, the commandment concerning man's duty to work for six days and to rest on the seventh day is based on the fact that God created the world by a work that took place over six days and then rested from all His labor" (Schirmacher, 2011, p. 37). God is the one who worked and continues to work, which leads us to understand that the origin of work comes from God, He being the first to work and then commanding man to do the same.

Because work is "rooted in man's being created in the image and likeness of God" (Schirmacher, 2011, p. 38), we arrive at several practical consequences. The first consequence is related to responsibility: "the greater the responsibility entrusted, the greater the amount of work becomes" (Schirmacher, 2011, p. 38). The second relates to personal abilities: "the work is always related to the person and corresponds to the abilities of each individual" (Schirmacher, 2011, p. 38). The third is about the reciprocal nature of work: "work is a reciprocal activity, in which each works for the other" (Schirmacher, 2011, p. 38). Work is an activity common to both men and women. It is through work that people earn a living. "The greater part of people's working life is occupied by work" (Constantineanu, 2016, p. 173), this shows how important it is to have the right perspective on work. Due to the considerable time that individuals devote to their jobs, work should be considered "one of the basic components of everyday life" (Constantineanu, 2016, p. 173). We must also remember that due to developments and changes in recent decades "work has become a major preoccupation for society in general" (Constantineanu, 2016, p. 173) and this should lead the Christian movement to lean more and more towards this area. Christian faith must respond to human needs and contribute to the development of society.

In the context of globalization (Măcelaru, 2014, pp. 67-73; Rotaru, 2014, pp. 532-541; Petcu, 2023, pp. 90-100) and labor migration, it is more necessary than ever to reflect on what work means, what the optimal conditions for its development are, and some ethical aspects so necessary for work. Jugaru (2015, p. 9) argues that "the dimension of faith,

although it is part of a different register of our existence from that of business and work, is indispensable for living a life of purpose because it highlights the fact that we are not just matter, but also bearers of the image of God." There must be a very close link between faith and work and these two aspects cannot be separated. A genuine Christian lives and demonstrates his spiritual values even in the workplace.

"Work is important not only as a responsibility to the Creator or as a means of earning a living, but also because it relates us to our fellow human beings" (Jugaru, 2015, p. 12). Through work, we can build relationships with those around us, help through our experience and gain the trust of others. John Stott believes that we need a work philosophy that will then determine our attitude to work (Stott, 1999, p. 185). In a society where individual purpose often rules the lives of some, the Christian, through his work, has the opportunity to show love, compassion and understanding. These attitudes must be grounded in the fact that "God has a plan, a calling, for each person's life" (Jugaru, 2015, p. 14) and that we are placed alongside others not in a random way of fate, but as God has ordained.

Thus, faith and work are closely linked, and the two dimensions have a common origin. The Christian must live with the thought that work is the place where he can put into practice the spiritual values (Rotaru, 2024, pp. 301-318) that come from the life of faith. Christians need to be involved and concerned about improving working conditions, bringing added value to everything they do (Măcelaru, 2016, pp. 13-16).

### **Work as a burden**

The first attitude that a Christian may develop in relation to work is to view it with hostility, seeing work as a burden. It is only a short step from this to the development of a general dissatisfaction, because the attitude of hostility can be extended to fellow-workers, to people in positions of authority, and can lead to a profound anathematization of all work-related activities. Such situations arise when we do not really understand the role and purpose of work. Corneliu Constantineanu believes that "work is extremely important for life in society. Its significance lies first and foremost in the fact that it is through work that people earn a living. In order to live, people must work" (Constantineanu, 2016, p. 173). Without this perspective in mind, man will regard work as an element of oppression or a means by which the rich and wealthy will get richer on the labor of others. In fact, work gives each and every one of us the opportunity to earn a living. According to Dumitru Stăniloae, work should be seen as "the only creative factor after God. It is the continuous source of all goods. It is the most precious treasure" (Stăniloae, 2014) and it "produces everything man has and everything he needs" (Stăniloae, 2014). Understanding the purpose of work also "gives us a sense of individual and social identity in that our daily labor shapes and determines, to some extent, who we are" (Constantineanu, 2016, p. 173).

Most likely, the attitude of dissatisfaction and of considering work as a non-beneficial activity may stem from poor working conditions. We start with the idea that exploitation through work exists in our world (Măcelaru, 2024, pp. 865-869). The reports of the International Labor Organization and UNICEF show that there is an increase in the number of those exploited. For example, the press release of June 10, 2021, states that "the number of children exploited in child labor has risen to 160 million globally, an increase of 8.4 million in the last four years" (OIM and UNICEF joint report, 2021). In such a context, it is a little difficult to get those who work to stop seeing work as a factor of oppression, since they are forced and compelled to work in poor conditions. Exploitation through work is not only about forced labor, but also about other work-related elements which, if missing, can lead the person doing the work to adopt a rejection attitude towards work. "Victims of trafficking in human beings may be exploited both by forced labor and by being subjected

to the performance of work or services in violation of the legal rules on working conditions, wages, health and safety" (Manea & Șologon, 2022, p. 106).

When an individual begins to see work as a burden and adopts a negative and pessimistic attitude, it indicates a need for improvement in working conditions. From the perspective of the Christian faith, both the employee and the employer should respect each other. In the context of the development of a hostile attitude towards work, it is the employer who should contribute to a change for the better in working conditions. According to Christian teaching (Rotaru, 2012, p.5), both the servant and the master must fulfill their duties and respect their commitments.

When those in authority take advantage of their privileged position by forcing employees to undertake hard labor, employees can develop feelings of repulsion and dissatisfaction. The relationship between employee and employer is not always a good relationship, but sometimes because of different expectations, differences arise. It is the Christian faith that strives to create the right climate between employer and employee. It is the Apostle Paul who advises servants to obey their masters and masters to treat their servants well: "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him" (Ephesians 6:5-9).

The hostility developed towards work is closely related to the origin of work. We start from the idea that although work was left by God from the beginning of creation, it is now under the influence of sin, which makes it difficult and hard to do at times. John Stott observes that some people are very negative about the jobs they hold and promote the idea that, if possible, work is something to be avoided (Stott, 1999, p. 185). This perception, although common, cannot be considered a Christian one. Work should be seen from a completely different perspective. This does not mean that the one who works does not encounter certain difficulties, but these can be overcome if there is a correct understanding of them.

Doing a job requires an invested effort and if the work is hard, and at the same time the benefits are not numerous, it may be perceived by many as a bad thing, in some cases even a necessary evil. With this perception in mind, it is up to each individual to contribute to improving working conditions and changing the general outlook on work: work is not just a hard thing that in most cases causes suffering, but it also has other positive aspects.

For a believer, presenting work as a complicated and difficult activity is not an appropriate approach. Stăniloae (2014) affirms that "the man who works imitates God, continuing creation, since he takes from nature the goods placed by God in it in a virtual state, and participates in God's prone activity, since he contributes to the maintenance of his own life and the maintenance of his fellow men." Looking at work from this perspective, Christians in today's society can understand the purpose of work and contribute to changing the general negative perception that is quite common among some people.

Work should be a necessary activity in which each person can make his or her own mark and contribute to the production of goods and services that help to develop and improve living conditions. The Christian is urged to beware of adopting a negative attitude to work, so that he can present himself correctly at work and become a positive example to his fellow men.

### **Work as a means of enrichment**

The second attitude a Christian may adopt towards work is to perceive it as a means of enrichment. In general, here we can speak of the fact that man is actually drawn to work more and more, unwilling to regard work as a necessary part of earning a living, but rather as an end in itself. Ryken believes that one of the main problems of work is that many people work far too much (Ryken, 1987, p. 44). In such a context, we can realize that one of the motivations for work is the desire to earn as much as possible. We need to make a distinction in this situation and note that paid work is only part of the totality of activities, and to this many other activities which are also work, but are not paid, are added (Ryken, 1987, p. 45). In other words, more work done to increase income means less time left for other activities, some of which are very important for maintaining a balanced life.

In such situations, in general, if not enough time is allocated for rest, overwork, exhaustion, burnout, stress, depression and burnout can result. In this way, it can be seen that a fierce desire for more money can lead to adverse consequences. This has led to situations in which some people work, invest all their energy in work, without realizing that there is more to life than earning an income through work (Rotaru, 2010, p. 7).

To counter this inappropriate attitude requires a correct understanding of work as it emerges from Christian teaching. The first to develop such an understanding were the early Church Fathers (Rotaru, 2005, p.35). They are credited with redeeming the concept of work and giving it its true meaning. In the time of the early Church, labor was very often presented in degrading terms because of Greek philosophical understandings (Constantineanu, 2018, p. 141). Thus, it is the Church Fathers who are trying to change the general perception by claiming that work is "a noble activity and insisted that there is nothing shameful in physical labor" (Constantineanu, 2018, p. 141). Labor is neither a means of exploitation nor a way to get rich by making it the purpose of life. It was also the Church Fathers who "also counseled against excessive work and insisted that Christians should not neglect time for rest and worship of God" (Constantineanu, 2018, p. 141).

The Apostle Paul counsels Timothy and says to him, "if we have enough to feed and clothe ourselves, it will be enough for us" (1 Timothy 6:8). This means that there is a limit to how far we are willing to work for income. If this limit is exceeded, there is the danger of the desire to get rich, about which the apostle Paul goes on to say: "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts, which plunge people into devastation and destruction" (1 Timothy 6:9). It is often the desire to get rich that can lead man into the wrong situations. When speaking of a believer, he must be aware that labor "can become an idol" (Constantineanu, 2018, p. 145) through "the vanity of getting rich" (Constantineanu, 2018, p. 145). There are cases where labor has taken hold of man and out of the desire to become prosperous, he may end up in situations where he works very hard without finding that all-important balance between work, rest and fellowship with God. The ultimate goal of the believer must be the salvation of the soul, not material possessions. "Even if earthly treasures have a certain value, and for some people they represent an absolute value to which they attach their hearts and become its slaves (cf. Matthew 6:19-21), yet it is good to remember that these treasures are transitory and must not hinder us in our transcendent, eternal realization" (Enășoae, 2013, p. 7). When man gives priority to the spiritual dimension, God will certainly be the one who will take care of other material needs.

The Bible tells us that God even cares for the birds in the sky or the flowers growing in the fields: "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do

they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" (Matthew 6: 26-32).

If all this is God's concern, even more, He will take care of man's material needs. Besides, even if one makes a purpose and develops a fierce desire to work to get rich, is all this a guarantee of well-being? Certainly not, for man's life is closely bound up with divine providence. That is why work should not be the supreme goal of life, but rather the mechanism by which man earns his living on this earth. The wise man is the one who does not put his hope in work and possible material possessions (Vasile, 2016, pp. 258 – 262) but "understands the teaching of Christ and realizes that the treasures of the world are acquired with much toil and can so easily be lost" (Enășoae, 2013, p. 7).

### **Work as an opportunity**

The third attitude towards work is one where faith and work are combined to achieve the desired outcomes. Faith cannot be separated from work because faith is more than a mere creed, and it must be included in everyday activities. Corneliu Constantineanu observes and affirms that: "for too long the Church has separated faith from other aspects of reality and reduced it to a purely spiritual dimension with serious consequences for the representation and incarnation of the Gospel. We have reduced faith almost exclusively to church attendance, to personal spirituality and a personal life of prayer, to a Sunday faith carried out mainly within the walls of the church" (Constantineanu, 2016, p. 161) Surely this is not a good thing, because faith should hold a place of honor as an integral part of all areas of life. The Christian must rediscover the pleasure of living faith in public, realizing that the values of the divine kingdom must permeate the whole of human existence (Rotaru, 2021, pp. 135-152).

Enășoae looks at work and gives it a spiritual dimension by stating that "human work, seen as an existential reality of human nature, is not merely a participation in divine creation, but also a responsible commitment to bring this creation to its eschatological fulfillment, that is, to its liberation from the bondage of evil and to its clothing in the glory of the resurrection" (Enășoae, 2013, p.8). It is the Christian's duty to relate correctly to work by understanding the commitment he has and the fact that human work can even become a means of perfecting the Christian, having a transforming capacity (Enășoae, 2013, p. 8).

It is work that enables Christians to present Christ to those with whom they work, because work involves human interaction. By adopting the right attitude and having the right work ethic, the believer can become a guide to Christ for those with whom he works. "In order to build a proper, positive attitude toward work, it is important to know that our work matters to God; that work, seen as cooperation with God, has a fundamental meaning and supreme significance in the context of the eschatological transformation of the world" (Constantineanu, 2016, p. 175). If God is the one who has worked and continues to work, He is to be taken as a model by every believer. With this in mind, the believer who works to produce goods or services must be involved with passion, motivation and diligence.

It is God who has endowed man with certain qualities, which some call vocations. If a man carries out his work in these vocations, it goes without saying that the results produced will bring benefits. Since work is a goal-oriented activity, the purpose of work is always present in the work process (Volf, 1992, p. 200). Since the aim of work is to produce concrete results, let us not neglect the means at our disposal to present the Christian faith through concrete deeds and actions. The activities of the believer should always be carried

out with morality with all its derivative aspects in mind. All this means more than mere codes of laws or deontology, for we are talking here about the values of the divine Kingdom. This can be understood by the fact that "Christian ethics is distinct, being something more than a superior version of other conceptions. It acquires its reality because of a unique divine intrusion" (Henry, 2004, p. 225).

Christians need to understand that ethics is not just a spiritual thing, but that it must embrace all activity, including work. All of this is to promote morality as a normality "in an ethically and spiritually confused world" (Botoi, 2020, p. 404). Given that "the world in which we live today, and which this time we identify with the society that is becoming more and more present in its various manifestations in the public space, cannot (any longer) be transfigured only in the perspective of an eschatological meaning" (Botoi, 2020, p. 404), we are aware that society "must become a pre-paradisaical space in which the Christian moral order is imposed as the natural state of the human condition on the road to the Kingdom" (Botoi, 2020, p. 404).

The result of hard work brings added value to the community and can lead to appreciation from others. By realizing that man has a duty to work, and by doing so with joy and devotion, the Christian can become a witness to God. Enăsoae (2013, p. 17) states that "man is the initiator, promoter and final recipient of work," and this idea helps us to understand that there are immediate benefits that derive from doing work. As such, every Christian should be concerned about identifying the results of professional activity. If the believer desires to have a broad perspective on life, he must also integrate the faith dimension into it, in order to follow the biblical and theological principles that are models for the conduct of any activity. In this way, it is possible to arrive at a proper attitude in which work is done joyfully and which in turn produces social and spiritual satisfaction (Rotaru, 2011, p. 5).

## Conclusions

The analysis made in this study shows that the activity of work is common to all people regardless of age, nationality, religion or professional background. Work was initiated by God and commanded to man in the Garden of Eden. It is through work that a person obtains the income necessary to sustain life. In the context of the evolution of society and technological development, there is a need to reflect on work and to see how the conditions in which work is carried out can be improved.

There is a close link between faith and work through the fact that the believers must develop the right attitude towards work. Three possible attitudes of the believer have been identified. The first is that work is seen as a burden, developing hostility in the heart of the laborer. Often, this attitude arises in the context of difficult working conditions when the rights of the employee are not respected by the employer. That is why, according to Christian teaching, the employer is advised to provide suitable working conditions and fair rewards, and the employee is to be the one who performs his work with seriousness and dedication.

The second attitude refers to the perception of work as a means of enrichment. In such a context, the one who works is no longer interested in anything other than the gain resulting from work. This perspective can lead Christians to focus excessively on work, forgetting the fact that life is not only about work, but also has many other aspects that should not be neglected. As a result of overworking, many people today experience stress and depression, viewing life as a burden.

The third attitude is to see work as an opportunity to present Christ. In addition to its professional and social dimensions, work also has a spiritual dimension. It offers the opportunity for believers to be positive role models in their working life. By adopting the

right attitude and having the right work ethic, a work culture is developed where activities are carried out in harmony, workplace relationships are appropriate, and productivity is reflected in work results. Therefore, Christians should seize every opportunity to witness to Christ, including within the workplace.

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