

Goal 8:

DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



For people of working age who are healthy and not in education, it is important to have a job to go to. When we work, we contribute to society while at the same time earning a living and developing ourselves. When the division of labour in society is implemented in a good way, it represents humanity at its best. We contribute with different abilities and ideas, with care and muscle power, and together this becomes a machine that serves the many needs of society.

Unfortunately, too many people work under poor conditions and they do not earn enough to get out

of poverty. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 states that countries must promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Developing countries must grow financially in order to lift the population out of poverty. Then there must be decent jobs for everyone, and there must be sustainable economic growth. That the work should be decent is essential. Because the division of labour can also represent humanity at its worst. When people are forced into slave labour or exploited to work hard for lousy wages, it equates to suppression and not progress.

Biblical reflection

“The labourer deserves to be paid”, Jesus said when sending out the disciples (Luke 10:7). These words refer to every honest worker, and they are certainly based on Jesus’ own experiences as carpenter (Mark 6:3). Since his youth, he most likely had worked together with his father; he knew well working conditions that could be inhuman, with daily hard toil for an uncertain salary at the employer’s mercy. Such experiences nurtured the prophetic vision of a time when people “shall build houses and inhabit them” (Isaiah 65:21).

In the parable about the labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16) Jesus turns upside down the ruling scale of how to value work. By letting the last be the first, Jesus claims the dignity and equal importance of all, independent of social roles and productivity. The value of work and the inalienable value of the labourer are mutually affirmed. It is indecent to reduce a worker to just a cog in the wheel of production or in the pursuit of profit.

The Bible sees work as service – serving God, one’s neighbour and all of creation (Genesis 2:15). Work is thus a good thing; through work we realise God’s vocation. Growth is a natural consequence of decent work; sustainable growth is growth for the well-being of all and also for nature.

Challenge

Do you know if anything you own was made by slaves? What can you do, together with others, to combat slavery and degrading conditions in clothing production or other industries that we depend on?

Questions

- What does the concept of decent mean? What values does it express?
- Some perceive economic growth as a social benefit, others consider it a social problem. Do the Bible and Christian faith provide any basis to form an opinion about this?

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, our brother, who walks with us through our workdays and weekends, Let us all participate with the energy and abilities we have. Let us share work and responsibilities, Without coercion and with joy. Give growth where needed, and teach us to be thankful and settle for enough.

We commit everything and everyone, into your hands, Lord. Amen.