

# For God's sake work!

by Phil Jump

It seems impossible to turn on the TV evening news these days without being confronted yet again with the faltering economies of Europe, teetering on the brink of collapse. Billions are being poured into the ever deepening financial hole, in desperate attempts to shore up the system. Such interventions, we are told, are necessary in order to maintain our ability to manufacture, trade and earn.

Work is portrayed as an economic activity that depends upon economics for its existence. This is language that we have become used to in recent years; even the distinction between those who have employment and those who do not, is increasingly expressed as whether or not an individual is 'economically active'.

Economic well-being has largely become accepted as the principle end of work - when we speak of someone 'getting a good job', this normally means that they are being well paid rather than engaged in virtuous activity. But for the people of Greece, Spain and an increasing number of other European nations, their economic activity seems largely to be required so as to generate sufficient revenue to repay an escalating national debt.

In a world that tells us 'we work to earn', this must raise serious questions as to what is the point of continuing to do it. Staving off the collapse of our nation's infrastructure might be something of an incentive, but it hardly seems a brilliant one.

The crisis has largely impacted the UK by requiring us to work a few years more before

we can retire. The rhetoric of protest has been interesting; few have welcomed it as the opportunity to remain longer in a meaningful and fulfilling vocation, rather work is depicted as a kind of penal sentence from which release has been postponed.

Perhaps this is not all bad news, particularly for people of faith. The argument that work is primarily and almost exclusively an economic pursuit is a relatively new one. Words like 'company' and 'family firm' remind us that this is an activity rooted in community. Work is an expression of our humanity, it generates and expresses a common bond between us as we engage together in common purpose.

It is also a reflection of our identity as beings made in the image of God. The early accounts of Genesis depict humanity being tasked with the care and oversight of the natural order. These are the earliest roots of this human enterprise that we call work, and even though affected by what classical theology describes as 'the fall' - its impact was to diminish our capacity for work, not to suddenly introduce it as a necessary evil.

As economic accounts of the purpose of work appear increasingly questionable and unpopular, might the world of business find itself irresistibly drawn back to a faith-based perspective? Whether or not it yields an eye-watering Christmas bonus, or manages to keep our nation's economy afloat, might the workforces of future decades find themselves boarding commuter trains or signing on for the early shift, because they believe that what they are doing is part and parcel of what it means to be human? ■



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