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NOMINATIO,IIAL 3RO/A.DCAST  
---THE REFORMED CHURCHES  
OF AUSTRALIA

## PRODUCTIVE LIVES

*Our people must be able to do what is good for them so that they may provide for their families and not live unproductive lives. 3:14*

I don't know about you, but I am always embarrassed to see people fighting. When I notice a couple in a shopping center having an argument, I tend to look away. I am embarrassed for them, and I feel uneasy.

I guess that's the reason I always feel somewhat strange whenever I see people on strike. From a distance it doesn't bother me; I see them over there-walking with their signs that say such and such a thing is unjust. But when I get up close, I feel uneasy.

I get especially upset when those on strike are people I respect and depend on. To be sure, I respect all people who do our nation's work, but there are some people that I tend to think are above striking. Doctors and nurses are such people. So are teachers. So are airline pilots, in a way. I was talking to one of them the other day about a pilot who was striking against one of the major airlines-and I think he felt out of place there with his signs on his back and his captain's stripes for all to see.

"I hope this strike will be over very soon," he said. "It'll depend on how determined our pilots are; if some of them start crossing the picket line, there could be trouble. This could last a long time." I nodded and told him that I, too, hoped it would be over soon. Somehow, seeing the company's planes standing in lines on the tarmac, unused, made me feel that civilization was falling apart.

But strikes will continue, despite the embarrassment some of us may feel, observing them, and despite how unpleasant they are for those directly involved in them. There is a lot of conflict out there in the area of labor and management, and it will probably continue because so many things are changing. Workers feel threatened by robotics-the ultimate form of automation-and the job market is very unstable: highly trained people suddenly become obsolete. Big companies experience widespread uncertainty as international competition makes cost management absolutely essential.

New technologies (like the computer) suggest that nearly everything will be rearranged. So where do we turn? Will our modern world, with all its technology, degenerate to a dog-eat-dog existence? What are we in for during the years ahead? All



the symptoms we see point to a force a prolonged conflict. And what *that* may involve we do not know, for we are in a new age. But it's an age in which people still must have jobs and the basics necessary for daily life. What's in store for us?

Well, when we think about what is happening and what *might* happen, we should also think about how humankind has become more vicious and selfish. It is a time when personal gratification has become the primary good. People know what they want, and they are out to make sure that they get what they think they have coming to them. Amid the spirit of competition, selfishness is in the air. And because of this, it is very doubtful that satisfactory solutions to our problems will be found.

What has happened is that ideal roots in the Christian worldview have been displaced by evolutionary ideas such as "survival of the fittest. Conflict is inevitable among human beings. Those who find themselves on opposite sides of an issue share a common point of view and a common faith, there's a possibility of finding a solution. If those who struggle together think of themselves simply as part of the animal kingdom, however, the possibility of their finding satisfactory solu-

tions to their problems diminishes greatly.

Christianity is important for many reasons, and its ability to bring useful ideas to the realm of labor and productivity is one of them. Now, this may surprise you. You may have assumed that Christianity has very little to do with the nitty-gritty of the labor problems we face these days. But the Bible, the guide for Christian living, has a great deal to say about work and labor matters; it is in fact a very practical book, and Christianity is a very practical religion. Today we are going to examine a passage found in the book of Titus in the New Testament part of the Bible, and I want you to look at it with me; I think you will find it extremely interesting.

Much of the book of Titus discusses what Christ's salvation means for believers on a day-to-day basis: "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age ... " (2:11,12). Now, that's practical religion.

The book of Titus also concludes with a statement about some of the practical matters that face us each day: "Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may pro-

vide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives." Let's see what this verse says about faith and about the work we do.

Notice first that it's addressed to "our people." Who are these people anyway? Well, they are the special people who were transformed by their faith in Jesus Christ. You see, the good news about salvation through the crucified and resurrected Lord Jesus Christ was first announced in a pagan, hostile, cruel world. And within this world, certain people believed the good news, which changed their lives. Some of them were rich people, land owners, and employers-but such people were few. Most of the first believers came from the lower classes, and many of these were slaves. But whatever their class or station, they were expected to see how faith in Jesus was supposed to change everything for them. They were to be better husbands, better wives, and better workers.

So there grew up a special class of people in the world-Christians-people who wanted to live the Christian way. They were special people with a special faith and a special life-"our people." Such people had a lot to offer in the first century, and the same is true of people

like them today. And today it is just as necessary that the same gospel be proclaimed widely. Those who know Christ as their Savior and Lord nowadays can contribute to solving labor problems just as Christians of the first century did.

Consider the "Value of the Person" movement, led by Wayne Alderson. Alderson, who narrowly escaped death as a soldier in World War II, has brought love and compassion into serious labor struggles, first to the steel industry and later to other industries. He is a skilled labor negotiator who has worked behind the scenes in some of the largest labor conflicts in North America. And he goes into the fray with the Bible, with prayer, and with his special "Value of the Person" emphasis that has proved to be extremely helpful.

Earlier I mentioned a pilot strike. Well, Wayne Alderson helped in the settling of that major dispute, working behind the scenes as a representative of the same group-"our people"-that the apostle addressed when he wrote to Titus.

Are you a member of that group of special people? Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior? Everything begins with Him. Jesus gave Himself on Calvary's cross to forgive you and me of our sins. And our sins are so many. Each of us

needs divine forgiveness and cleansing. If we believe in Jesus, He gives us that forgiveness, and He enables us to serve Him. He helps us to become part of that special people who are saved and who have much to offer when it comes to solving the great problems that confront us these days.

Now, that verse from the end of the book of Titus also tells us that the special people we have talking about are to devote themselves to doing good. I believe that *doing good* in this instance relates to the kind of work people do, the skills they develop and use, and the gainful employment they seek for themselves.

The Bible doesn't allow us to assume that a person can accomplish good by doing just anything. Some occupations, for example, are not good at all. Take prostitution. I hate to say this, but nowadays, because of the way human thinking has been twisted, there are people who think they would really like to be Christians some even think that they *are* Christians but who are so confused morally that they think of prostitution as merely another job. Counselors who work with our program have had frequent contact with a young woman who says that, as soon as she pays her bills, she will get out of the business she is in but that, for now, pros-

titution is her only means of earning a living-so she continues to live as a prostitute.

That's an extreme case, however. Even so, many other occupations today pander to human lust and contribute to the debasement of human life. Many publishing, video, and entertainment businesses these days, for example, thrive on pornography. And once we start thinking about things like this, there is bound to be a wide range of opinion regarding what really is good and what is not good. I personally find it hard, for instance, to consider producing and distributing alcoholic beverages as doing good.

The important thing to realize, though, is that not all occupations are good and that the special people who belong to Jesus Christ should not become involved in work that dishonors God and that degrades others. They should not, nor should we all, simply assume that if a job exists, it is a good one. If we started thinking more about work in terms of the nature of the jobs we do, we would eliminate from the labor scene much of the controversy that arises when people engage in work that does not receive God's blessing.

I must stress that this line of thought makes sense only to those who are among



the special people we have been talking about. And I must ask again—are you a part of this people, those who belong to Christ because they have fled to Him for their salvation? I wonder...if you became a Christian, would you keep the same job you have now, or would you look around for something more productive?

Something more productive ... yes ... that brings me to another point raised in Titus 3:14. This verse provides an extremely useful idea that we can use when making judgments about work being good for us and for our country. This verse says that the special people of God should do what is good so that "they may provide for daily necessities." This is what work is all about. Work should provide for daily necessities.

Now, this is something we could talk about for a long time. There is work, for example, that is legitimate but that does not provide for daily necessities in a strict sense. I am thinking of the work of a talented musician who, with high discipline, practices every day to provide a discriminating audience with an uplifting musical experience. One could say that such a musician's work does not really provide for daily necessities. But let's limit our discussion to the ordinary labor that

most of us do on a day-by-day basis. The idea of producing first of all in terms of daily necessities is extremely important.

When we analyze what is happening these days in labor/management and the economy, we see that much of what our country produces is fundamentally frivolous and useless. There is a tremendous emphasis these days on marketing, and thus artificial wants and needs are created and stimulated. As a result, some sectors of our economy are booming along, making products that are not really necessary at all, while some of the major needs of society are not being met.

One does not have to be an astute observer to see from our crowded urban areas that literally millions of people are not getting their daily necessities at all. Others, however, are collecting more and more toys—as yuppies boldly proclaim on their tee shirts, "The one who dies with the most toys wins." Clearly, the principle of providing for daily necessities is not operating. And this introduces to the realm of work and production all sorts of motivations that are essentially unwholesome. What finally results is that selfishness rules. Both producer and consumer are taken up with making things and doing things for themselves that have

nothing whatsoever to do with what people really need.

As this takes over in a nation, in a society, the primary goal becomes making money, and little regard is given to what is really needed. And when this dominates the working world, superseding the production of what is really needed by human beings who need to eat and have proper shelter and transportation and education, a web of conflict weaves itself into the workplace. When emphasis shifts away from the usefulness of the product to the selfishness of workers and managers, fierce confrontation can result.

Christ's special people must think about such matters, at least if they take their Lord seriously and if they take passages like Titus 3:14 seriously. Christians must examine their own lives and see if they are engaged in work that provides for our daily necessities. Other work is not worth their effort.

Titus 3:14 ends with an intriguing idea that, if taken seriously, would revolutionize our thinking and our practice. Let's read this verse again: "Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives." Our lives should be ~~pro~~ductive.

We should produce in terms of what we add to the world's good. Each of us should have the opportunity to contribute services and goods to our society that will provide for our daily necessities and also for the necessities of others.

But we should also hope that we can gain satisfaction in doing good and worthwhile things. This brings me back to the "Value of the Person" movement, led by Wayne Alderson. It is important that useful products result from work done in the workplace, but it is also important that the people who work be treated properly.

Those who manage natural resources and create the economic engines that keep us, as a society, going have the responsibility to make sure that those who are taken up in the processes of manufacturing, marketing, educating, transporting, or whatever are treated justly and are given the opportunity to develop what the Bible calls ~~productive~~ *life*. This idea began dominating our conversations, whether we were talking from the side of labor or the side of management, we would experience a breath of fresh air in our economic life.

In terms of this idea we could judge the true usefulness of products being introduced into the marketplace. We could also

evaluate what we asked of each other as we made the necessities of life. Surely we couldn't ask one another to expend energy on products that demean and debase mankind. And we couldn't ask one another to put up with unrelenting monotony or inhumane working conditions or unjust compensation. Productive lives this is the goal all of us should want for ourselves and for everyone else.

Somehow, what we have talked about here today seems impossible to achieve, and in a sense it is, for today there are so many who deliberately ignore the humanizing message of the Bible. This is most unfortunate. Change can begin, though, if more and more people take the Lord Jesus Christ seriously and read and obey the Bible, which reveals how this Savior wants us to live.

Christianity is magnificently practical. Faith in Christ can revolutionize the work place. And through such faith, more and more people will be able to live productive lives.

## PRAYER

*Lord, our God, we thank you for the many millions of people who are gainfully employed. We thank you for work to do and for the abundance that this work has made available to us. Yet, we know that many things are seriously wrong with the world of work nowadays. Much of what we do does not produce what the world needs most. And many of us have to work under conditions that make our lives miserable.*

*Show us all, O Lord, that the Christian faith has much to offer in guiding us to think properly about the work we do. Help us to think about what we produce in our work each day, and if it's tearing people down rather than building them up, help us to turn away from it, no matter how profitable the work may be. Help us to focus on what it means to live productively. We want to live productively ourselves, and ask you through Christ to make this possible. We pray in His name. Amen.*



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