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The Right to Live

AN OLD RELIGIOUS PROVERB tells us: “If any man will not work, neither should he eat.”

Do you agree with this? I personally agree in part, but not entirely. We need to understand the circumstances in which those words were written, and compare them with circumstances today.

Of course, we still believe that a person who is unwilling to take a job to support himself, should not expect other members of the family to take care of him, unless he is too handicapped to work, or cannot find a job he is capable of doing. In no way can we excuse a person who is just too lazy to work, and expects other family members to provide him with food and clothing.

In the days when that proverb was written, human beings lived by hunting, farming, fishing, or other work that depended upon their natural surroundings. Some had sheep, goats or other domestic animals; others had fertile land where they could grow crops and vegetables; yet others lived near the sea or a river where they could fish.

Think about the situation in our world today, where rich people provide the capital to set up business and employ poorer people to work for them. Some unemployed people may have enough money or skill to set up their own small business. However

that is not always possible because goods can be made more cheaply and quickly by machine, and not everyone can afford a machine to set up his own business. Today almost everything depends upon machinery or technology of one kind or another, and most workers depend on finding employers in large factories, enterprises, offices, schools, hospitals, and other professions.

The fact is that machinery and technology have changed our way of life completely from the days when man was totally self-dependent, and life was less demanding. As machinery and technology have become more sophisticated, fewer people are required for some jobs. Consequently, finding satisfying employment now is very competitive, requiring better qualifications, and higher education. Some employers have benefited from the surplus of workers by reducing wages. Workers, on their part, are now demanding a minimum wage to prevent greedy employers from taking advantage of the surplus of workers.

Hong Kong workers learned a bitter lesson during the recent economic crisis. It is now time for employers to consider other people’s livelihood, rather than merely increasing their profits during an economic boom.