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WORLDLINESS IN THE CHURCH

OF THE TWO EXCUSES usually advanced for worldliness in the Church, that concerning the raising of money is perhaps more excusable than that concerning the attraction of young people. For as the world in general is largely controlled by economic considerations, church policies also are often dictated too much by the pecuniary factor, and even godly men may be driven by the sheer necessity of making church ends meet to employ methods of raising money which violate their own principles.

One Church Assembly at least has repeatedly declared in categorical terms that it is wrong and against Christian principles and the rules of the church practice to indulge in any form of gambling, however light-heartedly, for the raising of church finance. And it has taken years for such statements to convince many church leaders that this rule should be observed whatever the pressure from the worldly-minded. Still there are many with absolutely no conscience on the matter who are ready to flout these injunctions whenever they can get away with it, and even boast of their deeds with almost religious fervour. Such people have little understanding of basic moral principles. Of course the gambling instinct is inherent in man, and needs to be lifted out of itself to an inordinate degree before it can be fitted into a moral and Christian framework — if ever; for even the heroic ‘ gambles ’ of the prophets, apostles, saints and martyrs were all ‘ dead certainties ’! For faith in the faithful God is never a chance and can never be misplaced, for faith is ‘ substance ’ and ‘ evidence ’ of Him in whom no chance or change can be.

But gambling apart, what of the dances, whist drives, concerts, sales of work, cafés, bazaars, fetes, teas and coffee mornings of every sort? Even where money is not an urgent necessity these go on for the social pleasure people find in them. And yet the primary aim is the making of money. How

is it *made*? Bluntly stated, people *sell* their money to the Church. The almost invariable principle, apart from the gambling menace and the inducement to win more than one spends, is that money is bartered for something in return, either a cup of tea, or goods, or pleasure, in music or amusements. For those who begin this practice, perhaps in extremity, had they need to continue more and more to keep the Church going at all, for the springs of spontaneous giving simply dry up. This thing which is killing the Church is like a drug which both dopes the spirit of Christian giving and produces a craving for more of the same.

But someone will say, 'There is something you are forgetting: What of the labour of love of those who prepare for such efforts? What of the articles made with love to God and man in every loop and stitch?' That is wonderful, and let no one despise such service, especially when done by those deprived of serving the Lord in other ways; but should the product of such devoted Christian labour be *sold*? Are there not many at home and abroad who need such gifts freely given in Christian love? And could not those who have the means provide materials for poorer workers to make gifts for those in need, that it might be gift all round? Paul made tents to pay for his board and lodgings, but it was by the gifts of the Church in one place that its often desperate need in another was met.

So much for money: what of pleasure? In this modern pleasure-crazed age we are told that it is impossible to draw people to Church and keep them there without social inducements. And if we want young people, the life-blood of any Church, we must cater for them. All right, but what if in doing so we make the Church no more the Church and turn it into a superficial round of mere observance and pleasurable activity? When this becomes the mode of Church life, the minister is respected less and less until even his living (the Church's responsibility according to the Scriptures: cf. 1 Cor. ix. 13, 14) is grudged, and he is tolerated as a doubtful necessity whose principal duty is to mumble the words of baptismal, marriage and funeral services, and thereafter make himself as scarce as he can. And, lo, when the miscreants who reduce a Church to this have done their worst, having turned Christ's Church into a poor imitation of the theatre or community centre, they tire of the wreck they have made, and desert the ship they have sunk.

If it is said that this puts the matter too extremely for reasonable argument, we reply that it is only when it is thus pushed to its ultimate conclusion that short-sighted 'rationalists' see their folly. Yet someone says, 'That is not how it works in our Church. We combine the social life of the Church Hall with attendance at Church, and it works. Our young folks are, well — nearly as regular in attendance at Church as they are at week-night activities.' Nearly! But we *know* that the social can combine with the religious: we are not thinking of mere religious observances, of which there is a disastrous surfeit; but of Christian and spiritual exercise, and we have never in our life known that to combine effectually and permanently with the socialities of the Church Hall conducted as a 'bait' — whether in evangelical Churches or not. Oil and water don't mix, nor do the standards and activities of this world mix with the spiritualities of God's holy world. Listen to John, and James, and Paul, and Jesus: 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the vain glory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.' 'Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God.' 'For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: for these are contrary the one to the other.' 'The mind of the flesh is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be.' 'If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.' 'A servant is not greater than his lord.' 'These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be made to stumble. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offereth service to God. And these things will they do, because they have not known the Father, nor me.'

Two things remain to be said. The first concerns financial and vital statistics in the Church. There is, we believe, a wealth of these to show and prove

that the truly spiritual Church is better off and more materially secure than the worldly Church, as it is generally better and more faithfully attended. Most spiritual Churches would gladly submit their statistics for comparison without fear.

The second thing to be said here is that much of the Christian Church's traffic and ambitions in ungodly things is undoubtedly due to her (mostly) wilful ignorance of the biblical doctrine of the remnant. The Church will never be popular, as we have shown from Scripture, nor will she ever Christianize the world. It will take the second coming of Christ to do that! And the sooner she learns to *be* the Church, which she alone can be, the sooner will she know true prosperity within her God-appointed limits, and the sooner will she make an impact upon the world both pleasing and glorifying to God.

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