

Extract 63

‘Providing recreation for the people’ will soon be looked upon as a necessary part of Christian work, and as binding upon the church of God, as though it were a divine command – unless some strong voices be raised which will make themselves heard. I do not presume to possess such a voice, but I do entertain the hope that I may awaken some louder echoes. Anyway, the burden of the Lord is upon me in this matter, and I leave it with him to give my testimony ringing tone, or to let it die away in silence. I shall have delivered my soul in either case. Yet the conviction fills my mind that in all parts of the country there are faithful men and women who see the danger, and deplore it, and will endorse my witness and my warning.

It is only during the past few years that ‘amusement’ has become a recognised weapon of our warfare and developed into a mission. There has been a steady ‘down grade’ in this respect. From ‘speaking out’, as the Puritans did, the church has gradually toned down her testimony: then winked at and excused the frivolities of the day. Then she has tolerated them in her borders, and now she has adopted them and provided a home for them under the plea of ‘reaching the masses and getting the ear of the people’. The devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the church of Christ that part of her mission is to provide entertainment for the people with a view to winning them into her ranks. The flesh⁹¹ that lies in every heart has risen to the bait. Here, now, is an opportunity of gratifying the flesh and yet retaining a comfortable conscience. We can now please ourselves in order to do good to others. The rough old cross can be exchanged for a ‘costume’, and the exchange can be made with the benevolent purpose of elevating the people...

My first contention is that providing amusement for the people is nowhere spoken of in Holy Scripture as one of the functions of the church... Now, surely, if our Lord had intended his church to be the caterer of entertainment, and so counteract the god of this world, he would hardly have left so important a branch of service unmentioned. If it is Christian work, why did not Christ at least hint it? ‘Go into

⁹¹ Original had ‘human nature’.

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all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature', is clear enough. So would it have been if he had added: 'and provide amusement for those who do not relish the gospel'. No such addendum, however, is to be found, nor even an equivalent for such, in any one of our Lord's utterances. This style of work did not seem to occur to his mind. Then again, Christ, as an ascended Lord, gives to his church specially qualified men for the carrying on of his work, but no mention of any gift for this branch of service occurs in the list. 'He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers – for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ'. Where do the 'public entertainers' come in? The Holy Ghost is silent concerning them, and his silence is eloquence.

If 'providing recreation' be a part of the church's work, surely we may look for some promise to encourage her in the toilsome task. Where is it? There is a promise for 'my word'; it 'shall not return unto me void'. There is the heart-rejoicing declaration concerning the gospel: 'it is the power of God'. There is the sweet assurance for the preacher of Christ that, whether he be successful or not as the world judges success, he is a 'sweet savour unto God'. There is the glorious benediction for those whose testimony, so far from amusing the world, rouses its wrath: 'Blessed are you when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you'. Were the prophets persecuted because they amused the people, or because they refused to? The gospel of amusement has no martyrology. In vain does one look for a promise from God for providing recreation for a godless world. That which has no authority from Christ, no provision made for it by the Spirit, no promise attached to it by God, can only be a lying hypocrite when it lays claim to be 'a branch of the work of the Lord'...

But again, providing amusement for the people is in direct antagonism to the teaching and life of Christ and all his apostles. What is to be the attitude of the church towards the world according to our Lord's teaching? Strict separation and uncompromising hostility. While no hint

ever passed his lips of winning the world by pleasing it, or accommodating methods to its taste, his demand for unworldliness was constant and emphatic. He sets forth in one short sentence what he would have his disciples to be: 'You are the salt of the earth'. Yes, the salt – not the sugar-candy, nor a 'lump of delight', something the world will be more inclined to spit out than swallow with a smile, something more calculated to bring water to the eye than laughter to the lip.

Short and sharp is the utterance: 'Let the dead bury their dead: but go and preach the kingdom of God'. 'If you were of the world, the world would love his own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you'. 'In the world you shall have tribulation but be of good cheer; for I have overcome the world'. 'I have given them your word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world'. 'My kingdom is not of this world'. These passages are hard to reconcile with the modern idea of the church providing recreation for those who have no taste for more serious things – in other words, of conciliating the world. If they teach anything at all, it is that fidelity to Christ will bring down the world's wrath, and that Christ intended his disciples to share with him the world's scorn and rejection. How did Jesus act? What were the methods of the only perfectly 'faithful witness' the Father has ever had?

As none will question that he [that is, Christ] is to be the worker's model, let us gaze upon him. How significant the introductory account given by Mark: 'Now, after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe the gospel'. And again, in the same chapter, I find him saying, in answer to the announcement of his disciples that all men were seeking for him: 'Let us go into the next towns that I may preach there also, for therefore came I forth'. Matthew tells us: 'And it came to pass when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and preach in their cities'. In answer to John's question: 'Are you he that should come?' He replies: 'Go and show John those things which you do hear and see; the blind receive their sight, and the lame

walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them'. There is no item in the catalogue after this sort: 'And the careless are amazed, and the perishing are provided with innocent recreation'.

We are not left in doubt as to the matter of his preaching, for 'when many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door, he preached the word unto them'. There was no change of method adopted by the Lord during his course of ministry; no learning by experience of a better plan. His first word of command to his evangelists was: 'As you go, preach'. His last: 'Preach the gospel to every creature'. Not one Gospel writer⁹² suggests that at any time during his ministry he [that is Christ] turned aside from preaching to entertain, and so attract the people. He was in awful earnestness, and his ministry was like himself. Had he been less uncompromising, and introduced more of the 'bright and pleasant' element into his mission, he would have been more popular.

Yet, when many of his disciples went back, because of the searching nature of his preaching [in John 6], I do not find there was any attempt to increase a diminished congregation by resorting to something more pleasant to the flesh. I do not hear him saying: 'We must keep up the gatherings anyway: so run after those friends, Peter, and tell them we will have a different style of service tomorrow. Something very short and attractive, with little, if any, preaching. Today was a service for God, but tomorrow we will have a pleasant evening for the people. Tell them they will be sure to enjoy it, and have a happy hour. Be quick, Peter; we must get the public somehow – if not by gospel, then by nonsense'. No, this was not how he argued. Gazing in sorrow on those who would not hear the word, he simply turns to the twelve, and asks: 'Will you also go away?'

Jesus pitied sinners, pleaded with them, sighed over them, warned them and wept over them, but never sought to amuse them. When the evening shadows of his consecrated life were deepening into the night of death, he reviewed his holy ministry, and found comfort and sweet solace in the

⁹² Original had 'Not an evangelist'.

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thought: 'I have given them your word'. As with the Master, so with his apostles: their teaching is the echo of his. In vain will the apostolic letters be searched to discover any trace of a gospel of amusement. The same call for separation from the world rings in every one [of them]: 'But not conformed to this world, but be transformed' is the word of command in the Romans. 'Come out from among them. and be separate and touch not the unclean thing' is the trumpet call in the Corinthians. In other words it is come out – keep out – keep clean out – for 'what communion has light with darkness, and what concord has Christ with Belial?'

'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world'. Here is the true relationship between the church and the world according to the letter to the Galatians. 'Be not, therefore, partakers with them. Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them' is the attitude enjoined in Ephesians. 'Sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world: holding forth the word of life' is the word in Philippians. 'Dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world', says the letter to the Colossians: 'Abstain from all appearance of evil' is the demand in Thessalonians.

'If a man, therefore, purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use' is the word to Timothy. 'Let us go forth, therefore, unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach' is the heroic summons of the Hebrews. James, with holy severity, declares that 'the friendship of the world is enmity with God; whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God'. Peter writes: 'Not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance; but as he who has called you is holy, so be holy in all manner of conversation'. John writes a whole letter, the gist of which is: 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love 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 pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes

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away, and the lust thereof, but he that does the will of God abides for ever'.

Here are the teachings of the apostles concerning the relationship of the church and the world. And yet, in the face of them, what do we see and hear? A friendly compromise between the two, and an insane effort to work in partnership for the good of the people. God help us, and dispel the strong delusion. How did the apostles carry on their mission work? Was it in harmony with their teaching?...

The charge brought against the apostles by the members of the Council was: 'You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine'. Not much chance of this charge being brought against modern methods! The description of their work is: 'And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ'... They 'ceased not' from this, they had no time for arranging for entertainments: they gave themselves continually to the ministry of the word. Scattered by persecution, the early disciples 'went everywhere preaching the word'...

When God told Paul that he had much people in Corinth, I read: 'And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them'. Evidently then, he judged that the only way to bring them was by the word. A year and a half, and only one method adopted. Wonderful! We should have had a dozen in that time! But then Paul never reckoned that providing something pleasant for the ungodly was part of his ministry; for, on his way to Jerusalem and martyrdom, he says: 'Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God'. This was all the ministry he knew. The last description we have of the methods of this prince of evangelists is of a piece with all that has gone before: 'He expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets, from morning 'til evening, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus'. What a contrast to all the rot and nonsense now being perpetrated in the holy name of Christ! The Lord clear the church of all the rubbish that the devil has imposed upon her, and bring us back again to apostolic methods!...

Lastly. The mission of amusement... is the devil's half-way house to the world. It is because of what I have seen that I feel deeply, and would fain write strongly. This thing is working rottenness in the church of God, and blasting her service for the King. In the guise of Christianity, it is accomplishing the devil's own work. Under the pretence of going out to reach the world, it is carrying our sons and daughters into the world. With the plea of: 'Do not alienate the masses with your strictness', it is seducing the young disciples from the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ. Professing to win the world, it is turning the garden of the Lord into a public recreation ground. To fill the temple with those who see no beauty in Christ, a grinning Dragon⁹³ is put over the doorway.

It will be no wonder if the Holy Ghost, grieved and insulted, withdraws his presence; for 'what concord has Christ with Belial, and what agreement has the temple of God with idols?'

'Come out!' is the call for today. Sanctify yourselves. Put away the evil from among you. Cast down the world's altars and cut down her groves. Spurn her offered assistance. Decline her help, as your Master did the testimony of devils, for 'he did not allow them to speak, because they knew him'. Renounce all the policy of the age. Trample upon Saul's armour. Grasp the book of God. Trust the Spirit who wrote its pages. Fight with this weapon only and always. Cease to amuse and seek to arouse. Shun the clap of a delighted audience, and listen for the sobs of a convicted one. Give up trying to 'please' men who have only the thickness of the ribs between their souls and hell; and warn, and plead, and intreat, as those who feel the waters of eternity creeping upon them.

Let the church again confront the world; testify against it; meet it only behind the cross; and, like her Lord, she shall overcome, and with him share the victory.⁹⁴

⁹³ Should this be 'Dagon'? A reader informs me, however, that 'a grinning dragon... is used as a motif for pleasure *etc.* in the world'.

⁹⁴ Archibald Brown: 'The Devil's Mission of Amusement: The Church's Task – Entertainment or Evangelisation?'