



A WEEKLY COMMENTARY

ON TARGET



- NEWS HIGHLIGHTS
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- COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The price of Freedom is eternal vigilance -

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THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: "With freedom goes responsibility. A free man is answerable for his own acts and omissions. At Common Law, Everyman is answerable for his own acts. No man is answerable for the act of another unless he has commanded it or consented to it.

– Richard O'Sullivan K.C. in *"The Christian Philosophy of Common Law"*. 1947

LAWS DON'T MAKE MEN GOOD – THERE BUT FOR... by Betty Luks:

Some readers have 'taken umbrage' because, having written about the spiteful attacks by the establishment media against Prince Charles and his (then) bride-to-be Camilla, I "wished them well and the greatest of joy and happiness in their life together." Those readers interpreted this to mean I was condoning adultery and asked wasn't I aware of what the Bible had to say about such matters. Yes, I am aware of what the Bible has to say about such matters.

In fact, I am reminded of Queen Elizabeth's words (taken out of another context) that all our actions have a 'ripple-on-effect' in our own life, and the lives of those around us - for good or for evil. We only have to look around us to see the 'ripple-on-effect' of broken families and anchorless children – often the direct consequence of infidelity and divorce, etc. The sad thing is, there are not too many families in the West who haven't been affected and traumatized by such behaviour.

But you know what? I also know about the forgiveness and grace of God in my life – miserable sinner that I am. And Oh! How I related to Prince Charles and his wife Camilla as they knelt before Him (and the whole world was a witness to their humble confessions) and asked His forgiveness and sought His grace to strengthen their resolve to live together as He would have them do so.

The article was written from a personal viewpoint; from one frail human being to fellow human beings, with a wish for their joy and happiness in their life together. It was not attempting to deal with any other aspect of the matter, whether theological, constitutional, or legal.

But the letters did prompt me to give much thought to questions of the Moral Law and the Gospel. For this reason the following article, first published in the Social Credit quarterly, "The Fig Tree" over sixty years ago seems to me to be relevant. It was written from a Social Credit angle – so please keep this in mind. I am not seeking to offend those who wrote to me, but I am asking them to thoughtfully consider my response.

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"ON TARGET"

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LAW AND GOSPEL IN A FRESH CONTEXT by Rev. Stewart Mechie – first published in the Social Credit quarterly "*The Fig Tree*" March, 1939:

"Perhaps the most fundamental hindrance to the acceptance of Social Credit principles is the widespread feeling that it is immoral to receive something for nothing. It is commonly believed, and sometimes said, that to give people a payment, like a National Dividend, for which they have not worked, would be unjust in itself and would lead to general demoralisation. It may be pointed out in reply that many of those who share this feeling are themselves the recipients of dividends for which they have not worked, and that they are not obviously demoralised thereby. Again, the citizen of today may fairly claim to be the heir of all the inventors of the past and therefore, on bounds of barest justice, to be due a dividend from the present-day fruits of the cultural inheritance of the ages, whether or not his services are required in contemporary production. It may be doubted, however, whether such replies, reasonable as they must be admitted to be, can do much to eradicate this half-inarticulate feeling, for it springs chiefly from a perverted moralism nourished by human pride and self-conceit.

An examination of the same moralism at work in another sphere may not be without interest and profit.

The moralist has always had a difficulty with the Christian Gospel. It seems to him dangerously facile to declare that the Divine welcome awaits all who, weary of past failure and fruitless effort, cast themselves in simple faith on the Redeemer.

"Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot."

That is good religion, but it seems very risky morality. The issue emerged in the first generation of the Christian Church, as soon as the Jewish Christianity of the earliest days began to ask itself on what terms Gentiles could be allowed into the Church and could be received there in full fellowship with Christians of Jewish race. The Judaizing party in the Church demanded that Gentiles should come in by way of the Jewish Law. From one point of view that was not an unreasonable demand. The morality of many of the cities of the Roman Empire in the first century was shockingly low. To preach a Gospel of free grace and unmerited forgiveness to Gentiles brought up in such an environment seemed to the opponents of St. Paul to be a condoning of evil and a direct encouragement of laxity. Let the Gentile become a good Jew first. Let him keep the Law and give guarantees of moral soundness; then let him have the Gospel.

Was it not dangerous to eliminate the Law and trust to the Spirit? Moreover, in those days, as in later centuries, there were at work antinomian tendencies. There were not wanting some who declared that their possession of faith or their participation in certain rites or sacraments exempted them from the demands of mere morality.

Here was a good cudgel wherewith to belabour the Apostle of free grace. What else could he expect when he went about declaring that Christians were "not under the law but under grace"?

It has been suggested that St. Paul was untrue to the mind of his Master in this matter; but the suggestion will not bear deep examination. In the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18: verses 9-14) there is no question of bare justice, of making the punishment fit the crime, but rather, as a great expositor declares, "Christ's reflection on the two men is equivalent in drift to Paul's doctrine of justification by grace through faith".

Similarly in the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20: verses 1-16) the bargaining spirit of the labourers, who wish payment to be in proportion to work done, is set against the Divine spirit of abundant and over-flowing kindness which takes no account of merit.

Again, in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: verses 11-32) it is the elder brother who would like the father to adhere closely to the rewarding of merit. The father, on the contrary, meets the returning prodigal's "I have sinned" with no limited forgiveness, no probation for a period, no demand for guarantees, but with a full and free forgiveness on the spot.

What is thus evident in the teaching of Jesus is even more clear in His conduct. The indignation of the religious leaders of the day who sneered, "this man receiveth sinners and eateth with them" was not aroused simply by the fact that he took note of the outcasts of society.

They expected a holy man of God to turn His attention to them, to denounce them and preach to them; and if some of them saw the error of their ways and became penitent, so much the better. But a holy teacher would, of course, keep them at a distance till they gave proof of amendment. The burden of their complaint against Jesus was that He sought out sinners, associated with them before they gave signs of amendment, accepted them as He did Zacchaeus (Luke 19: verses 1-10) without any period of probation or accumulation of merits to balance past misdeeds.

This, in action, is the Gospel of free grace for which St. Paul stood. It is the only message worthy of being called a Gospel, for on the strict basis of merit no man can stand before a holy God and no man can give adequate guarantees.

Obviously it involves a moral risk, but, according to the New Testament, God takes that risk, and as a recent writer puts it, "perhaps the very faith which God has in the future of a poor defeated sinner who has nothing to offer but a cry, the faith by which God accepts the risk for Jesus' sake and justifies the ungodly, creates its own verification and brings that apparently impossible future into actual existence.

Certainly this was what happened when Jesus brought all His love and trust to bear upon the publicans and sinners who felt that they had forfeited all love and trust for ever. His forgiveness not only cancelled the past, but regenerated them in the present and made them saints for the future" (J. S. Stewart, "A Man in Christ", page 259).

Over against the Gospel, then, we set the religion of legalism and moralism which, in the long run, is a religion of salvation by human effort, and is commonly tainted by tendencies towards something negative and mercenary, the attempt by rigorous repressions and meritorious practices to put God in man's debt and so to wring salvation from Him.

A true Evangel, on the other hand, declares that God never can be in man's debt and that salvation does not need to be wrung from Him. In His loving-kindness He has taken the initiative: salvation is freely offered; all that man can do and need do is humbly and gratefully to accept.

To admit that, however, is an offence to man's pride. On the Gospel basis "boasting is excluded," as St. Paul says. But man likes to boast, or, at any rate, he likes to feel that he has something to boast about. He longs to be able to feel that he is earning his salvation. To suggest that this is for ever impossible is an affront to his self-conceit. Man's attempt to earn salvation, instead of being content to receive it, is grounded in this pride which cannot bear to admit its entire dependence on Another. Thus, in the Judaizing opposition to the Gospel of free grace there was more than a fervent zeal for the interests of morality. There was this innate human pride which hates to admit its own failure and dependence, and also a large infusion of Jewish racial and religious pride.

A free Gospel put the Gentile on the same footing as the Jew.

Both could do nothing to earn their spiritual blessings, both must be content humbly and gratefully to accept them. It was hard for the Jew to find himself in no better a position than the despised lesser breeds without the Law.

No wonder the Judaizing section of the Church found refuge from this humiliation in a zeal for the interests of morality and a demand that Gentiles should come to the Gospel by way of the Law. Sympathetically considered the Judaizers were not unreasonable; critically considered they stood for a legalistic moralism perverted by pride."

GOD'S BOUNTY IN NATURE – A SHARE FOR ALL:

"Are we wrong in supposing that the same temper of mind which once denied all men free access to God's free grace and insisted on their first carrying the burden of Jewish legalism is now revealing itself in those who would deny men access to God's bounty in Nature and in the cultural inheritance of the race unless they first acquire merit by engaging in gainful employment?

In both cases there is little, if any, necessary connection between the pains to be endured and the blessing to be acquired thereby. The connection is largely needless and arbitrary.

Moreover, in both cases there is a show of fervent zeal for morality and in both cases a large admixture of pride, partly the pride which rebels at every man being put in the same position as a hitherto privileged class, and partly the pride which cannot bear to realise that it is not self-sufficient – however absurd and impossible such self-sufficiency would be – but would like to stand on a basis of bargaining and work done even in the presence of the Creator of all.

This is not religion, it is not even morality; it is a perverted moralism – perverted because not founded on Reality."

THE INDUSTRIALISED, TECHNOLOGICAL, AUTOMATED AGE by Ronald Fischer:

The concept that having a job is the aim of life is obsolete. All the needs, and indeed the desires, of a modern society can be provided by one in five of the working age population. This was revealed at Mikhail Gorbachev's State-of-the-world conference in San Francisco in 1995. As technology advances, that twenty per cent will be reduced to fifteen, ten and beyond. The stigma of "unemployment" should be removed from that eighty per cent plus. When robots take over the manufacturing industry to the level of ninety per cent plus, how then will purchasing power be distributed to the former workers? By taxing more highly those who still have jobs?

Thus the concern expressed in the Ballarat *Courier's* Editorial, April 20th, 2005, is futile.

Big businesses like Masterfoods and FMP, mentioned in the Editorial, will continue to shed jobs in the interests of the bottom (dollar) line. Ultimately, when they can downsize no more it will be no longer viable for them to remain in Australia.

Included in this bracket should be Telstra if it is fully privatised. It will be owned by multinational interests with no concern for the jobs of Ballarat's residents, nor for whether we have good communications or are relegated to a backwater of the communications industry.

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