

exterior, and for an outlay of 4/6. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the remaining member of this issue. The most that can be said for Renwick's *Story of the Church* is that, in the total extent of it, it may serve to demonstrate the pitfalls that await a Church which departs from the touchstone of Scripture : the brief record of history illustrates Packer's thesis. Professor Renwick was set an impossible task—Church History in 200 pages ! The result is a book of stark contrasts : good men and bad men ; but the subtler shadings of human character and situation are lost. In consequence, those who know their Church History will be moved, time and again, to say, " Well, really it was not quite like that. Righteousness was not all on one side." Those who have no such knowledge are in real danger of reaching wrong conclusions, or making wrong assessments of the issues involved. In the visible Church, as we know, the good is ever mingled with the bad and, presumably, the same must apply to every series of books that ever was !

The Pastor's Policy on Worldliness

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IT is very obvious that there is a " split-mind " on the subject of " worldliness " among Evangelicals of all denominations in this country. There are two main schools of thought.

1. Those who claim to maintain and teach the rigid line of *total abstention* from those things classed as " worldly ".

2. Those who claim to practise and teach *discrimination* in such matters. If the former is the rigid policy, this, for want of a better word, is a " liberal " policy.

The Minister of Christ, seeking to be a true Pastor to his flock, finds himself in the midst of these conflicting opinions. Let us suppose he encourages his young people to go to a Young People's Holiday Centre or Convention. When they return, he finds them bewildered and even annoyed because someone, speaking apparently with authority, has laid down the law that they *must*, as Christians, give up the cinema, dancing, use of lipstick, etc. The Minister feels in his heart that this policy has been wrong. Yet, he cannot escape the fact that " worldliness " is undermining the spiritual life of many of his people, both young and old. He sees the effect of TV. on this family, of dancing on this young couple, and so forth. He feels an instinctive dislike of the rigid line of laying down the law, and yet he often feels tempted to take it, when he sees the effects of " worldliness " on his flock ! If such a state of mind exists, it is no wonder he is not consistent in his policy.

In seeking a sound, consistent policy it is essential to define what the New Testament means by the World. Not a little of the difference of outlook results from failure to do that. The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that the World is a great enemy to growth in the

Christian life. There must be no compromise with the World. Yet, there is no explicit description of what the World is, no neat catalogue of worldly things. Everything in this life that is inherently evil must be included under the heading of the World, unless, of course, it belongs to the category of the Flesh or the Devil. On that all Christians agree. But the problem does not end there. Some things are regarded as inherently evil by some Christians and not by others. Again, worldliness may extend to the good things in life. Careful attention to the New Testament shows that worldliness is defined in terms of attitudes. I John ii. 16. Worldliness is essentially an attitude to life, working itself out in different ways. I am worldly-minded if I allow anything, even a good thing, to come between myself and God, if I allow anything or anyone to sap my spiritual life or blunt my sense of the eternal. A Christian may find his business, or his home, or his friends, or his social interests, or his hobby, can become the World for him. Whether that happens depends on his attitude to them.

Nevertheless, to say all that about the Bible's teaching on worldliness is not enough. There arises the whole question of what is to be done about specific amusements and forms of recreation—the "doubtful" or "questionable" matters. The words "doubtful" and "questionable" are used simply to indicate that the matters concerned are those on which Christians do differ. The use of such adjectives must not be understood as necessarily settling the issue. On such matters, what is the Pastor's policy to be? On the one hand, he has people in his congregation who, as far as he knows, are not yet converted. What line can he take with them on amusements? Or, he has a young convert who is puzzled because someone says he must give up this or that, and he cannot see why he should—what is he to advise? Again, he finds out that two of his Sunday School teachers are going dancing every Saturday night. They have not told him. Shall he, as Pastor, broach the subject and say they should give it up? Perhaps he discovers that one of his wardens keeps wines and spirits in his home. Is he to say or do anything? Then, what must be his policy on social activities in the life of the congregation, in the parochial organizations? Finally, what must he do in his own life regarding worldly activities?

Clearly, the Pastor must have a consistent policy in his dealing with individuals, with regard to the congregation, and for himself. •

(1) *The policy with individuals.* It is here that the split in Evangelical opinion chiefly shows itself. Let us take, first, the rigid policy advocated by many godly people—the total abstinence policy. Many Evangelical Christians draw up, or inherit from their families and spiritual advisors, a catalogue of "worldly" things—dancing, theatre-going, the cinema, horse-racing, drinking, card-games, smoking, etc. (It is interesting to note that the catalogue is usually confined to recreational activities, whereas, in fact, the World has other avenues of approach besides that of recreation.) They constitute the World, it is said. Having got that list firmly fixed in the mind, they maintain that they, as Christians, must never take part in any of those things, and they "teach others also". They are as strict with others, especially young Christians, as with themselves. This policy, they

maintain, is Scriptural. All the references in the New Testament to the World are presented as conclusive evidence. Furthermore, they point to the laxity in moral standards in society generally, they speak of low standards within the Church, and insist that for the Christian to maintain the very highest standard there must be no compromise with any of the "worldly" things on their catalogue. In these days, they say, it is getting harder to stand firm on these matters, but that is all the more reason why there must be no compromise. To strengthen their case they appeal to history. It is when the Church has been lax on worldliness that there has been no blessing. When Christians have been ready to deny themselves, God has honoured and blessed. Finally, they declare with conviction and truth that Christ can and does satisfy! What further need is there, they ask, for the pleasures of the world?

Now none will deny that the Christian is perfectly free to take as rigid a line as he wishes for himself, although he ought to beware lest, in pursuing this policy, he is not refusing the good things God has given us richly to enjoy (James i. 17; I Tim. iv. 3 and 4). Yet, part of the aim of this paper is to suggest that to foist this rigid policy on another Christian, to teach others that they *must* take this line of total abstention on those "worldly" activities, concerning which Christians do differ, is unscriptural. Whether it be a Minister or any other Christian leader I submit it is contrary to Scriptural practice to "lay down the law" on such questions.

To support such an assertion, it is necessary at least to attempt a review of the New Testament evidence which might throw light upon the subject.

If we take the Master Himself as our starting point, we must surely admit that He did not always conform to the accepted traditions of conduct. Indeed, He seems to have cared little for the rigid code of behaviour to which the faithful Jew was expected to conform. He shocked the Jews on the question of feasting and drinking. They believed He was too fond of a good time. He shocked the Jews because He did not conform to their traditions of Sabbath keeping, of ceremonial washings, etc. This should at least make us cautious of setting up strict codes of conduct for others on matters not specially dealt with in Scripture, or of slavishly following traditions of men on such matters.

Then, emphasis must be laid upon the New Testament concept that in the New Covenant we are no longer under Law but under Grace. We do not progress in Godliness and Holiness by attempting to conform to a Law externally imposed, but by an inner working of Grace, whereby we are continually renewed and transformed. The great mistake the Galatians were making was that, having begun by Grace (justified by Grace) they were now seeking to be made perfect by Law. They had thus "fallen from Grace". The significance of this, for our purpose, is that much as we want to see others growing in Grace we cannot set forward that growth in Grace by presenting them with a set of laws. To urge them to accept a code of laws, the reason for which they cannot really understand, is to try to perfect them by the wrong method. Every step forward in Grace for them must be as a result of divine illumination within the heart and conviction born of the Spirit's working. For example, if a young Christian gives up

dancing, it must be because he has been thoroughly convinced about it in his own heart by the Holy Spirit, not simply because another Christian has told him it is wrong for a Christian to dance. Careful, very careful advice has a definite place, but it must not be presented as though it were a law to be obeyed at the peril of spiritual loss. Jesus warned His disciples they must not adopt the rôle of Rabbi over others.

A further fact of the New Testament is that in "doubtful" matters each individual Christian has the right of private judgment. We are not thinking, of course, of children, for they must be obedient to their parents in the Lord in these matters. By "doubtful" matters should be understood those things on which Christians differ. Romans xiv is a classic chapter in this connection. I Corinthians viii, dealing with the question of "meats offered to idols", and Colossians ii. 16-23 also maintain the same teaching. The important concern is that everyone must be clear in his own conscience. No one can legislate for another. Nor must anyone judge or criticize another brother who comes to a different conclusion. We all feel *we* know what is right and wrong. It is so clear to us. Therefore, we easily sit in judgment upon fellow Christians. But true judgment can never be based upon observance of outward acts alone. Motives are most important and those are unknown to others. That is why we are bidden—"Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, Who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart, and then every man shall have praise of God."

Continuing with the New Testament evidence, it is highly interesting to note that the Council of Jerusalem in Acts xv did legislate on "doubtful" matters. The Gentile Christians were to abstain from meat offered to idols, from blood and from things strangled (meat from which the blood had not been fully drained). What are we to make of this? Does this set aside what has already been said? One observation I would make is that this decision of the Council, in so far as it touches "doubtful" things, was, apparently, very soon disregarded. By the time Paul wrote Galatians, I Corinthians and Romans xiv, he sees no purpose in applying the Council's decision. Indeed, he refused to lay down the law, even though there were some in Galatia and in Corinth who wished him to do so!

Finally, as far as New Testament evidence is concerned, some reference must be made to I Timothy iii and iv. Chapter iii is sometimes used to support the policy of legislating on "doubtful" matters, particularly for those who are to be led in Christian work. In the chapter Paul lays down the qualifications for bishops and deacons. But nowhere in it does he mention any "doubtful" matter. All the points are those on which all Christians agree. There is a possible exception (on the surface) in the command that a bishop must "not be given to wine". Only if we follow the Authorized Version could that be construed as demanding total abstinence. In the same epistle Timothy himself is advised to take a little wine. If we want Paul's thought on "doubtful" matters, as held at this late period in his life, we can pass over into the fourth chapter, where he shows that a mark of apostate teachers will be their insistence on celibacy and total abstinence from meats.

In view of such evidence, is not the rigid policy on "doubtful" things unscriptural? Such a policy is legalistic rather than spiritual and leads inevitably to a rabbinical, arbitrary legislation on finer points, on "borderline" activities, deciding what should and what should not be on the list of forbidden things. For instance, if cinema-going is "taboo", what should be done about the educational film, or the evangelistic film shown in a cinema? If theatre-going is banned, is it all right to read a Shakespeare play? If horse-racing is not permitted to the Christian, because gambling is associated with it, what about football? This policy also encourages a negative concept of Holiness. "Keeness" can tend to consist in abstention from certain things. Holiness may be judged by conformity to a negative code.

The further criticism could be added that the policy lands its supporters in practical difficulties. Every new thing that comes along must be judged as to whether it is "worldly" or not. This can lead to absurd conclusions. We are told that D. L. Moody was severely condemned as "worldly" by some for holding evangelistic meetings in a tent, and, still worse, in a theatre! The radio when it first appeared was regarded by some as untouchable. To a lesser extent, perhaps, television was similarly regarded at first. By this policy what is "worldly" to-day may not be to-morrow.

So far little has been done to suggest a positive policy. That must now be done, remembering it is the policy towards individuals we are concerned with at the moment. On all "doubtful" matters we must—even with the youngest convert—be prepared to let the Holy Spirit do His work, in His way, in His time. Can we not trust Him to do that? Experienced advice can surely be given, and the Spirit may well deign to use it, but it must be advice and not legislation. By trying to direct a young Christian in these problems we may well get in the way of the Spirit's working and prove a hindrance. Do we sometimes fuss around the young plant with our big, clumsy boots, trying to supervise its growth? Is it any wonder, then, if we damage the tender growth—or to change to a more Scriptural metaphor, "quench the smoking flax"? We may put before the young Christian too much too soon.

Our part must be to show sound, Scriptural principles upon which others may prayerfully form their own conclusions under the guidance of the Spirit. Let us show them there is a place for recreation in the Christian life. Merely to tell them that Christ can satisfy is really to beg the question. Of course, Christ can satisfy!—all His people believe that. But to believe it does not mean one must exclude all legitimate recreation. The older Christian who deters a younger brother from the cinema by telling him, "Christ can satisfy—the cinema cannot!", may himself be one who derives much pleasure from some other form of recreation regarded as harmless.

We need to set before others the principle of choosing the best, of discriminating between the worthy and the worthless in all that confronts them in life. And, particularly with regard to the many forms of amusement and recreation which surround us to-day, we must continually urge those in our pastoral care to seek God's Will for themselves in accordance with Biblical principles. One way is to write out

for the individual concerned some of the main Biblical principles, with the relevant references, and encourage him or her to pray over and consider them, being willing to do whatever God reveals as His Will. Such principles as the following may be given.

1. While recreation is necessary, it does not mean "a rest from being a Christian".

2. Avoid anything that in itself fosters sin. We must not run into temptation. We must not see how far we can go before sinning.

3. Avoid anything that weakens spiritual zeal and appetite for the things of God.

4. Beware of coming under the control of anything. "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." We know we have liberty as Christians, but it must be disciplined liberty.

5. Avoid anything that might be a stumbling-block to others, either Christian or non-Christian. This must be followed stringently.

6. Ask the question, "Can I thank God for what I engage in?"

When we ask our people to face up to such principles and make their own choices prayerfully, we are adopting the only sound policy. We are giving the Holy Spirit the opportunity to do an inner, spiritual work, for the Spirit works through the Word, and we are directing the Christian to the Word. We are not, of course, dependent upon individuals coming to consult us on these matters. In preaching and other media of teaching the same policy can be followed.

(2) *The policy for the congregation.* Consideration must now be directed towards the Pastor's policy for the congregation as a whole. What is he to allow or not allow in the parochial organization? The situation is obviously different from that towards individuals. Have we any precedent in Scripture to guide us? No! The problem of social activities in the local church is comparatively modern. No Presbyter in Apostolic times ever had to face the question, "Should I permit the young people to have an Amateur Dramatics Group?" I suppose the nearest he might have got to such a problem would be to ask himself, "Shall I allow meat that has been sacrificed to idols to be used at the Agape?" Apart from the possible exception of the Agape the Church was not concerned then, nor for the greater part of its history, with organized "social activities" in its life. Is the answer, then, for the Pastor to throw out and keep out all such activities—the Badminton Club, the Youth Club, the Men's Institute? Much as he might like to do that sometimes, it is not in every parish desirable or practicable. We may regret the fact that social life has become such an established part of parochial life, but we cannot ignore it.

Whatever powers a Presbyter in the Early Church may have had to decide matters on behalf of his congregation, it is inevitable that the Incumbent to-day must decide what is to be allowed in the parochial organization. If he carries the majority of his Council with him, well and good! But, as every congregation contains people at differing stages of spiritual development and others still unregenerate, the Pastor must draw the line for all. It is a great responsibility, for we are warned against "lording it over God's heritage"—still a peculiar sin of Pastors! Again, in the policy for the congregation, sound

principles must be the basis of decision. The following basic principles are suggested, on the presupposition that some social life is provided as a means whereby members of the congregation may enjoy recreation and fellowship together.

1. All activities within the congregation must be judged by the primary purpose of the Church—evangelization and edification of members. All Churches ought to be prepared from time to time ruthlessly to examine and radically to revise their parochial organization in the light of the all-important purposes of the Church. This may not inevitably mean the extinction of all social activities. The opportunity for members of the congregation to meet together in informal, recreational activity ought to serve towards the edification of the saints. The *koinonia* of the Church is not limited to specifically spiritual exercises. In barring objectionable activities in a parish, do we always give enough thought to providing useful social occasions?

2. Rule out those things which take undue time and energy either of Pastor or people. This principle might exclude such activities as dramatic societies and pantomimes. It is difficult to argue that dramatic work is inherently wrong, for we now quite happily use the dramatic art in evangelistic and teaching films ("Souls in Conflict", etc.). But to have a dramatic group in a parish putting on productions, takes up an inordinate amount of time and energy. Those chiefly concerned cannot give proper time to essential things.

3. Rule out those things which give undue prominence to the less spiritually minded members. This principle is also applicable to dramatic groups. In almost all cases those keen on such things are the less spiritual people. To allow them the scope necessary for their ambitious schemes is to give prominence in the life of the congregation to those who through spiritual immaturity or deadness are not fitted for it.

4. Be thorough and consistent in keeping wrong things out of the Church's life. Here it is not the "doubtful" thing that is in mind, but that which is definitely wrong. Towards such, a thorough and ruthless policy is essential. For instance, even the mildest form of gambling must surely be excluded. There are things that crop up in parochial life which may harm none at the time. But because they are regarded, by some, at any rate, as forms of gambling, they should be excluded. Competitions such as guessing the number of peas in a jar may be harmless, but if even one or two can say it is gambling, it is better to be consistent and not allow it. If that appears to be an ultra-cautious policy, no doubt it is better to err on the side of caution in the parochial policy on these matters.

5. Let the policy for the congregation as a whole be consistent with that adopted towards individuals. If we are urging individuals to decide for themselves their own attitude to "doubtful" matters, it is foolish to pre-judge the issue for them by allowing such activities in the parish organization. Let us illustrate this in connection with the question of dancing. There is no doubt that for some at least—we would not go so far as to say for all—dancing is a strong stimulant to sexual feeling and activity. Therefore, for such persons to engage in it is to run needlessly into temptation towards laxity in thought and

action. For them dancing constitutes a grave temptation. Therefore, in asking our young people to settle the question of dancing in their own hearts before the Lord, it is not only inconsistent, but the height of folly to prejudge the issue for them by allowing dancing in the parochial life. When dancing is not allowed in a Church, each individual has to form his or her own attitude to it; when dancing is provided in the Church's life, most people never face up to the question of whether it is a right activity for a Christian—they assume because the Church allows it there is no query about its rightness. But in our policy towards individuals we insisted that each Christian must be brought to examine each "doubtful" matter for himself.

6. Avoid, if at all possible, driving people away from the Church. Think, for instance, of the man associated with a men's club or the woman attached to a women's guild. They do not come to Divine Worship as a rule. They seem to be interested only in promoting social events. It may be necessary to take action that will result in them leaving, but such action should only be taken with the utmost care. Let us not be impressed by the clergyman who can recount with relish the number of folk he has "cleared right out" of the Church. That some people go from time to time may be inevitable, but it should be a sorrow and occasion for heart-searching to the Pastor, not the occasion for "shooting a line" in a ministerial get-together.

7. Let every minister be fully persuaded in his own mind as to his congregational policy, and be charitable in relation to other men and their policies. That means in deciding our policy we ought not to be swayed merely by the opinions of Evangelical brethren. It is to the Lord we stand or fall. Nor ought we to adopt a certain line just because it is the accepted thing for Evangelicals. Traditions of men ought not to be accepted unthinkingly. Let us be fully persuaded in our own minds as to the ways and means whereby our policy is implemented. Some will tackle "worldliness" in one way, some another. We need to be charitable towards the policy of others.

To sum up these thoughts on the policy towards the congregation, what is needed is, discrimination according to principles, certainly erring, if anything, on the side of caution, and exercised in charity.

(3) *The Policy for oneself.* Clearly the Pastor must be consistent in his attitude to "worldliness" as far as his own life and that of his family are concerned. He ought, of course, to apply the Biblical principles which he advocates to others, giving special attention to the example of his life on all his flock and all who know him. There is not a higher standard of holiness for the clergy than for the laity, but those called to be pastors are thereby ensamples to the flock. They must, therefore, be ready for personal sacrifice of pleasure, ready to be hard on themselves, for the sake of those for whom Christ died. St. Paul was ready for self-denial and strict self-discipline, willing to direct heavy blows against his body and to force it to be a slave, lest having acted as a course-herald to others he himself might become disqualified from and put out of active service (1 Cor. ix. 27). The Pastor's policy on worldliness for himself, for his congregation, and for the individuals he counsels, is to practise, to show and to advise discrimination on the basis of Scriptural principles prayerfully considered.