

# EXCERPTS FROM

October – December 1981

# THE LINK

**North Road Chapel** (Evangelical)

**BIDEFORD**

## Internet Edition

## THE SEDUCTION OF SPIRITUAL ENTERTAINMENT

There is an evil within the church to-day, so gross, so brazen in its impudence, yet, so widespread in its practice and influence that there is scarce a company of Christians anywhere who will stand up and positively denounce it: that evil is ENTERTAINMENT.

Frequently, in the local papers there are advertisements and reports of so-called evangelical activities, and the following are but a few examples:

"Morning service with drums and tambourines".  
"Top; American Band - the band that has rocked America".  
"Gospel Concert".  
"Rock goes to church",  
"Drama used in a church service".  
"A church organizes its own pop festival".  
"Drama was used during the Sunday morning celebration of the Eucharist".

Others report on "Discoes", "Street Theatres" and "Gospel Demos"; whilst illustrated posters which appear outside places of worship advertising these events give the impression of the cinema rather than the house of God.

Entertainment is now looked upon as a necessary part of Christian work; something essential to the life of the church. From the introduction of the church games room, there has been a steady increase in the emphasis on entertainment within the churches, until today it is almost looked upon as a divine command to provide frivolity and gimmickry so as to reach the masses and gain their ear.

Seldom has the devil shown greater cunning than to suggest to the people of God that part of their mission is to adopt worldly means to gain spiritual ends, pandering to the senses in the belief that this will win men and women to Christ. Alas, that the church has fallen to this and that men are seen to rise to this attractive (to the flesh) bait: a classic example of seduction, "DECEIVING and BEING DECEIVED" (2 Tim.5:13).

Nowhere in scripture is it hinted that the people of God should provide entertainment or use such means in order to reach or hold the unregenerate.

When Christ ascended into heaven, having accomplished the work of atonement, he made full provision for the effectual calling of all his people, by sending the Holy Spirit, by breathing His Word, and by giving gifts unto men within the church - "and 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:" (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Where are the GROUPS, the ARTISTS, the ENTERTAINERS, etc.? such have NO PLACE IN THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH. However, many argue, these things are done to reach and to attract the non-churchgoer. Where is the mandate for this? Primarily, the Church is, "an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22): God dwells in and among His people. That dwelling place is not to be defiled by that which feeds the flesh; neither is His Church to assume the guise of the world in order to secure the eye and ear of the unsaved.

The tabernacle in the wilderness was the place where God dwelt in the midst of His people, where His law was upheld, and all the detail of holy worship rigidly adhered to. The glory and majesty of God was shown in that place; That was its prime function. It was not a 'GOSPEL TENT'- to evangelise the Philistines.

The church of this age is also to manifest the holiness and purity of her God; she is to reflect Christ, not the world of entertainment, "...as he is, so are we in this world." (1 John 4:17). He was "...the light of the world." (John 9:5). "Ye are the light of the world". (Matt.5:14) "Ye are the salt of the earth." (Matt.5.13). SALT - not candy floss - something which the world is more likely to spit out than swallow with relish and delight: something more calculated to bring moisture to the eyes than laughter to the lips.

This modern trend of introducing entertainment is contrary to the teaching of Christ and the Apostles. Nowhere

is it suggested by them that the world is to be won by pleasing it or by adopting its methods and tastes. "Ye are not of the world", said the Saviour; the world will hate the true and faithful followers of Christ because they are "not of the world", and to such as are not of the world, the Lord has given his Word, "I have given them thy word" (John 17:14); not the gift of entertainment.

When the Lord first commissioned his disciples he said "as ye go preach": to his Apostles at the ascension he said "Preach the gospel to every creature". Today, however, it seems to be a popular notion that in order to win the unsaved it is necessary to turn the church into something akin to a music hall.

The early church had supreme confidence in the PREACHING OF THE WORD: "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). They prayed that "...with all boldness they may speak the word" (Acts 4:29). The charge brought against the apostles was, "...ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine..." (Acts 5:28). "And daily in the temple, they ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus Christ." (Acts 5:42).

Scattered by persecution, the early disciples "...went everywhere preaching the word." (Acts 8:4), and as the mandate given by the Head of the Church was obeyed, we read, "and the Lord added to the church daily SUCH AS SHOULD HE SAVED" (Acts 2:47). As the gospel is truly preached, those for whom Christ died will surely hear his voice.

Was not this so at Corinth when the Lord spoke to Paul saying, "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace; For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the Word of God among them." (Acts 18:9-11). The elect of God in any place, of every generation, will always be effectually called. God who ordained the end also ordained the means, "The foolishness of preaching": no man must interfere with this. No EXTRAS are needed.

It was when the churches of Judea and Galilee and Samaria were edified; and walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the holy Ghost, that they multiplied, (cf. Acts

9:31). The additions and multiplications which we are to seek are those which come through the true preaching of the Word of God, in its entirety, under the power of the Holy Spirit.

The guidelines are plainly laid down in the Scriptures and we depart from them at our peril. God dwells in his Church, "...know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you..." (1 Cor.6:19). This also applies to the corporate body of believers when they meet in fellowship. NO gifts are to function here other than the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Nothing is valid which infringes upon the mandate of Holy Scripture.

As the great Head of the Church drew near to the end of his consecrated life upon earth, and as the dark shadows of death began to be cast immediately across his path, he reviewed his holy ministry and said, "I have given them thy word..." (John 17:14). nothing more, nothing less. Are his servants of the late 20th century greater than their Lord? (cf. John 13:16).

W.H.M.

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"The Word of life may be so distorted from the life of the Word, till it becomes the food of death"

Thomas Adams.

"Where God does not find a true mouth to speak, you must not find an ear to hear, nor a heart to believe"

Thomas Lyle.

## CREMATION OR BURIAL?

Although cremation, or the disposal of the dead by burning was practised in ancient times, it was not re-introduced into England until the end of the last century. Sir Henry Thompson, an agnostic who became professor of Surgery at the Royal College of Surgeons, publicly urged the case for cremation and due to his influence it became widely accepted in this country. In 1874 He played a major part in the forming of The Cremation Society, which was specially founded "to advocate this rational and hygienic method of disposal of the dead." This new method for funerals met strong opposition at first but it gradually gained favour. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Freemasons, materialists, and Marxists ... joined the movement," Klaas Runia, in the Encyclopaedia of Christianity, draws attention to the fact that in these early days, support chiefly came from "humanitarians and liberal theologians." When in 1884 Justice Stephen declared cremation to be a legal procedure, the necessary impetus was given to the movement. It quickly became an established practice. By 1960 about one third of all who died in England, Scotland and Wales were cremated and the proportion was then increasing by two per cent, per annum. Today cremation is often the preferred alternative and, if it has not done so already, it seems quite likely that the time will come when cremation will actually supersede burial.

Ministers have tended to assume a position of neutrality on this matter. One well-known evangelical was asked fairly recently which method he thought ought to be chosen by the Christian. His reply, given in the column of a denominational newspaper, was fairly typical. "Neither," he wrote, "has any marked advantage over the other, providing the ceremony is carried out with the dignity that is to be accorded to the human body." Neither Scripture nor conscience will allow me to agree with him.

Now I am aware that this is a most sensitive area. Most of us have probably attended cremation services for relatives or friends. I, therefore, approach the subject somewhat cautiously, and as sympathetically as I can, only pursuing it because I believe it important.

Before proceeding any further, I must make one point absolutely clear. It does not make any difference at all so far as the resurrection is concerned. At the second coming of Christ, there will be a resurrection of all men (John 5:28, 29; Acts 24:15). Divine omnipotence will then be displayed in the restoring of human bodies and whatever process those bodies may have been subjected to after death, every single one of them will be reconstructed and transformed to suit a different sphere of existence. (Acts 26:8; Rev. 20:13). There is nothing any man can do to his body to prevent that from happening. "At the last day, such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed, and all the dead shall be raised up with the selfsame bodies, and none other, although with different qualities, which shall be united again with their souls for ever." (The Westminster Confession of Faith, 1647).

Advocates for cremation often present their case quite skilfully. In a booklet issued many years ago by the Cremation Society, the following points were made in favour of the practice:

a. It safeguards health. The booklet argued that in already over-crowded towns and cities, burying the dead could become a real health hazard. This was considered Ma problem of the first importance." But although burial has been practised for centuries, there is no evidence that this has ever been a threat to people's health} and today, with the present legal requirements respecting burial, there is even less chance of that ever happening. In fact, if biblical precautions were taken, there would be no risk at all. Public burial places used to be outside towns and cities (2 Kings 23:6; Matt. 27:52, 53; Luke 7:12; John 11:30, 31). "two thousand cubits from the Levitical cities; for all other cities a great space, if not the same." (Dr. John Lightfoot). Josephus, the Jewish historian, supplies the additional information that "through that place was no current of waters to be made} through it was to be no public way} cattle were not to feed there, nor was wood to be gathered from thence."

b. It leaves the land for the living. The system of burial is wasteful, it was claimed, "preventing the economic use of valuable land for housing and recreation." A sentence from the quaint biblical commentator, John Trapp, deserves

consideration here. "It is remarkable," he says, "that the first purchase of possession mentioned in Scripture, was a place to bury in, not to build on." (See: Gen. 23). The patriarch taught by nature as well as grace, had learned the importance of caring for the bodies of the dead and of making provision for decent interment. Only heartless materialism would dare to challenge that loving concern.

c. It preserves the countryside. Attention was drawn to "the sprawling wastes of neglected graveyards and cemeteries" which could only be described as "an eyesore." That such places do exist, no-one is going to deny, but it does not have to be so. In Bible times, sepulchres were generally situated in attractive places, under the shade of trees (Gen.23:8, 9, 17; 35:8), in groves or in gardens (2 Kings 21:18, 26; John 19:41) and, in the case of public burial-grounds particularly, every effort was made to preserve natural beauty. It was the observation of Dr. George Douglas that "burial-places in the East are still kept with great neatness." As to the tombs themselves, when looked after, they can appear quite "beautiful" (Matt.23:27). Our Lord, though rebuking the hypocrisy of the scribes and pharisees who professed to honour the prophets while manifesting the spirit of their murderers, mentions the fact that at least they showed care for their tombs. "Ye build the tombs of the prophets," he said, "and garnish (or adorn) the sepulchres of the righteous." (Matt.23:29). In a day when money and time are freely spent, it is to the nation's shame that so little is done to improve the state of our cemeteries.

d. It prevents crime. This claim is made because "the law respecting cremation demands two certificates signed by independent medical practitioners, and the approval of a medical referee." This means, they say, that "the cause of death" is "definitely established." However, it must surely be apparent to all that a situation could arise when, after the funeral, a further examination of the body could prove to be of immense value. With cremation, of course, it would not be possible; whereas with burial, exhumation could take place (Cf. Jer.8:1). This being so, burial would tend to discourage crime far more than cremation.

e. It makes for a more rational outlook. Here the emphasis is laid upon "the heartbreak of the yawning grave"

and "the clammy clay." It is true that whatever provision be made for the disposal of the body, death's bitterness cannot be altogether removed. Yet, that agreed, given the choice between placing the bodies of those we love in an incinerator heated to 2,000°F and laying those bodies gently in the ground that they might, as it were, "sleep in the dust" until the grand awakening of the resurrection morning (Dan. 12:2), we, for our part, unhesitatingly choose this latter course as every way more conducive to our comfort and consolation.

f. It is an economic method. The point being that not only is "the process itself inexpensive" but also that there is "no grave to buy and no tombstone to provide and preserve." Is economy, however, the all-important factor? Evidently Abraham did not think so when, out of love and respect for "his dead," he paid the high price of "four hundred shekels of silver" for a plot of ground (Gen. 23:13-16). Why, we even read that the Chief Priests devoted the betrayal money to this purpose so that they might appear devout, so generally was it considered to be an act of mercy and kindness (Matt.27:7; cf 2 Sam.2:5). Neither ought tombstones to be reckoned items of unnecessary expense. What lessons they are able to teach the living about mortality and eternity! Yet their main service, surely, is to those who have died. To use the words of James Harvey, it is as if those stones have received Ma charge to preserve their names" and are "the remaining trustees of their memory." (Gen.35:20; 2 Kings 23:17; cf. Ezek.39:15); So long as these engraven records are before the public, the dead will be kept in remembrance and, according to God's Word, that is a blessing not to be lightly esteemed (see Job 18:17; Ps.112:6; Prov.10:7).

Not one of these arguments for cremation is in any way convincing, based as they all are upon human reasoning. A question of fundamental importance must now be asked: "What saith the scripture?" (Rom.4:3).

1. Immediately after the fall of Adam, God made it clear that, because of his sin, man was to be interred in that earth from which he originally came: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken." (Gen.3:19). As Francis

Roberts once correctly observed: "Here man is not only sentenced to death, but also to the grave."

God's Word still stands. Adam and all descended from him must "return" to this appointed place (Ps. 90:3; 104:29; Eccl. 12:7). A grave belongs to every man. Hence that scripture which says: "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth." (Ps. 146:4).

2. Not a great deal is known about very early funeral rites and customs but enough evidence is available to show that cremation was certainly the ancient and widespread practice of the heathen world. We know, for example, that among the Babylonians "cremation, mostly incomplete, was the practice." ("A Dictionary of the Bible" edited by Sir William Smith). Among the Greeks it was also usual to dispose of the body in this way. "Greeks burned the bodies of their dead, and deposited the ashes in graceful urns or under stelae (tall tablets)." ("Black's Bible Dictionary" edited by Madeleine S. Miller). The Romans too seem to have preferred this method and "during the first four centuries of the empire, the body was, in the great majority of cases, consumed by fire, and the ashes consigned to the tomb in an urn." ("A Manual of Roman Antiquities" by William Ramsey). In modern heathendom little has changed. Buddhists still bring their dead to the pyre. Hindus do the same. This connection with heathenism becomes a strong argument for rejecting it. God has said: "Learn not the way of the heathen." (Jer. 10:2; cf. Lev. 18:3, 30; Deut. 18:9).

3. From the beginning God's people rejected the heathen way of treating the dead. As Dr. Alfred Edersheim observed: "Cremation was denounced as contrary to the whole spirit of Old Testament teaching." The Jews believed very strongly that burial was divinely appointed and this became the universal custom among them (Gen. 25:9; 35:29; 50:13; Josh. 24:30; 2 Kings 13:20; 2 Chron. 9:31), the only exceptions being when there was fear of mutilation by an enemy (1 Sam. 31:12), or when it was physically impossible in a time of plague (Amos 6:9,10). That the Jews always chose "to bury rather than to burn their dead bodies" is a fact noted by Tacitus, the Roman historian} but we really do not need the testimony of secular history: Scripture itself tells us that "the manner of the Jews" was "to bury" (John 19:40).

Although the burning of the dead prevailed throughout the Roman Empire when Christianity first appeared, the early Christians strongly objected to it. Accepting, as they did, the main Jewish arguments against cremation, they believed that in the burial of the Lord Jesus, an example had been given to the Church (1 Cor.15:3; cf. Rom.6:5 - "we shall be...in the likeness of His resurrection." It would seem fitting to be like Him in His burial too) and so their dead were deposited very carefully in sepulchres. After the death of the first martyr, for example, we read how "devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him." (Acts 8:2; cf. 5:6,10). Municius Felix, an early defender of the Christian Faith, no doubt spoke on behalf of the whole Church when he said: "We observe the old and better custom of interment."

The Church's opposition to cremation eventually brought about change. It is an indisputable fact of history that "when Christianity began to increase, the funeral flames did cease, and after a few emperors had received baptism, there was not a body burnt in all the Roman Empire." (Dr. John Pearson).

4. The Bible teaches that when the soul returns to God at death, the body enters the grave as into a new "house" (Job 30:23; Isaiah 14:18). This is represented as a vast house, with many private rooms or apartments called "chambers of death." (Prov.7:27) and in these the dead "rest in their beds" (Isaiah 57:2; 1 Chron.16:13,14).

This language, so descriptive of burial, would be quite inappropriate - in fact, devoid of all meaning - once cremation is considered. This also applies to the apostle's illustration in 1 Corinthians 15, where he likens the body to a seed: "that which thou sowest" (1 Cor. 15:36-44). Since all these allusions point to burial as the proper mode, we certainly do not feel at liberty to institute the very radical change required by cremation.

5. Throughout history, the burning of the body has been associated with hatred and enmity. With horrifying cruelty men have inflicted punishment and shown contempt by means of fire (Ezek.23:25; Jer.29:22; Dan.3:6; Amos.2:1 - this last verse is very relevant to the subject in hand).

In marked contrast, love has been thought chiefly responsible for the burying of the dead (2 Sam.2:5,6; 21:10-14; Matt.14:12. See also Mark 14:3-9). Since love was appointed by our Lord as the distinguishing mark of His disciples, by which this world might know us (John 13:35 cf. 2 Tim.3:3 - "without natural affection"), we surely ought to seize this special opportunity of manifesting it. Who knows what effect it might have upon unbelievers? Before summarily dismissing that question, a remark once made by Julian, the Roman Emperor (A.D.331-365), ought to be considered. He said that, in his opinion, the spread of Christianity was at least partly due to the early Christians' "forethought about the burial of the dead."

6. If burial takes place, believers are able to make profession of their faith even in death. A silent but impressive testimony can be made to "those things which are surely believed among us," such as: Creation (Gen.2:7), The Fall (Gen.3:19), Redemption (1 Cor.6:20 - our bodies belong to Christ as much as our souls); Union with Christ (1 Cor.6:15); Indwelling by the Holy Spirit, (1 Cor.6:19); Preservation (John 6:39-40); Resurrection, (Ps.17:15); and Eternal Life (John 5:28,29). Since there is one final opportunity to declare faith in all these truths, ought it not to be taken? Only burial enables you to do so. Then let burial be the choice and "glorify God in your body."

7. Fire has always been connected with judgement. Sacrificial victims, charged with sin, were burnt, (Lev.4:12; 6:30). Idols and images, so hated and abhorred by God, were thrown contemptuously to the flames (Exod.32:20 Deut.7:5). The bodies of people guilty of heinous crimes were consigned to devouring fire (Gen.19:24; Lev.10:2; 20:14; 21:9; Num.11:1; 16:35; Josh.7:15). Related as it is to punishment, it is not at all surprising to find that fire is the element of torment in hell (Matt.13:50; 25:41; Luke 16:24). It must surely be wrong to use fire in disposing of the body. For the Christian, whose sins are all pardoned, it is so dreadfully inappropriate.

God has shown that burial is fitting and right. When there was nobody around to arrange for the disposal of Moses' body, God saw to it Himself and "He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab" (Deut.34:6). We should take very careful note of the fact that it was Satan who objected to

this, desiring to deprive God's servant of a decent and honourable burial (Jude 9).

In the light of all that God has revealed, a decision must be reached. That done, we really ought to make it absolutely clear to those with charge of our affairs that our wish is to be buried. That was what Joseph did when he "gave commandment concerning his bones" (Heb.11:22). Many have wisely followed his example, including John Calvin in whose Will the following words appear: "I desire that after my passing, my body be buried according to the customary form in expectancy of the day of the blessed resurrection."

The above was written by Malcolm H. Watts, Pastor of Emmanuel Evangelical Church, Salisbury, and is included in this magazine with his kind permission

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"He may look on death with joy who can look on forgiveness with faith"

Thomas Watson.

"A man goes to bed willingly and cheerfully because he knows he shall rise again the next day. Confidence in the resurrection would make us go to the grave as cheerfully as we go to our beds"

Thomas Manton.

"I go to my Everlasting Best. My Sun has risen, shone, and is setting. NAY, it is about to rise and shine forever." - one of the last sayings of

George Whitefield.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

THURSDAY 22nd October 1981. A meeting has been arranged, commencing at 7.30 pm. on behalf of the PROTESTANT ALLIANCE, when Mr.A.G.Ashdown, the Secretary, will give an illustrated lecture on the subject of THE ENGLISH REFORMATION.

SUNDAY 10<sup>th</sup> December 1981 at 3.30 pm. The speaker will be Mr.B.H.E.Nethaway (Clyst-St.-Mary)

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## OBITUARY

On Wednesday 24th June, a large number attended the funeral of Mrs. Mollie Bennett, wife of Mr. W. Bennett, an elder in the church. She had been a member at North Road for about 50 years, and the suddenness of her illness and death came as a shock to everyone. We give thanks that the Lord spared her from a long period of suffering, and for the grace and strength which has been given to our dear brother at this time. The peace and fortitude so manifest in him has been an inspiration to all. We continue to bear him up in our prayers, also, his two daughters and their families.

Our sister Miss Edna Pursey was called home on Wednesday 22nd July. The whole of her working life was spent in the teaching profession: for many years she has lived in Bideford and been in membership at North Road Chapel. More recently she has been in failing health and passed away at the Grenville Nursing Home at the age of 81 years. We rejoice that her weariness is forever gone, and she too is now at home with the Lord.