

**How can the  
Church mind its  
own Business ?**

**by Lance Shilton**

HOW CAN THE CHURCH MIND ITS OWN BUSINESS?

by the Reverend Lance R. Shilton, B.A., B.D.,  
Th.L., Rector of Holy Trinity Church, Adelaide.

Trinity Sermon No. D17

National Library of Australia Card number  
and ISBN:

0 86945 017 4

Published by the

TRINITY PUBLISHING SOCIETY

87 North Terrace,

ADELAIDE, South Australia, 5000

MOORE THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE LIBRARY



3 2042 10099034 4

## "HOW CAN THE CHURCH MIND ITS OWN BUSINESS?"

Since my statement last week concerning the irresponsibility of those who have arranged for a betting agency in close proximity to legitimate trading in a large department store, there have been, as you may imagine, a number of comments made.

One parishioner told me that the fellows at work had been hotly discussing the issue. I enquired, "I suppose they have been calling me a narrow-minded wowser". He replied, "Worse than that!"

Another parishioner told me that he came in on a conversation in a barber shop. One man remarked, "What right has this man Shilton to protest; he's never done a decent day's work in his life". I am thankful to say that the parishioner put him right.

I have received many letters and 'phone calls during the week. All have expressed gratitude that expression was given to the Christian conscience in the community, except one who suggested that I didn't go far enough. He wrote, "I speak as a socialist ..... Your reference to 'shareholders' with Christian convictions is surely a contradiction in terms. Shareholders are gamblers, and those in this capitalistic game in a big way not only profit themselves without physical effort, but the profit continues in perpetuity. Attack gambling if you will, but only if you include all of it". In my reply I said, "Last November I visited Russia, which is the home of a certain kind of socialism, but lottery tickets were being sold openly for government income. This disappointed me".

During the week a number of letters have been written to the Editor of our morning paper. All have been in favour of the stand made except one who suggested that the Church should mind its own business, in words such as 'sticking to its own affairs'. The correspondent obviously has one view of what the Church's business is, but those who comprise the Church have a different view.

We might well ask the question, "How can the Church mind its own business?"

But first there are other questions which need to be answered. One is:

### WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

Not a building, however beautiful or old  
 Not the clergy only, but the lay people as well.  
 Not a denomination only, but the whole body of  
 believers, of whom Christ is the Head.  
 Not necessarily those who attend Church Services  
 - many do that for a variety of reasons.

I have just begun a matriculation class in one of our High Schools. At the beginning of the year I ask them what Church they attend, if any, and the reasons why they do or do not attend Church. Here are some of their replies:

I attend Church when I am a server. The only other time is when I'm requested to by my parents.

It would be wrong in my parents' eyes if I didn't.

I feel guilty if I don't go for a long time.

I hope to meet some new friends.

I like the girls.

Out of 31, 10 attend occasionally, for wrong motives. 3 attend regularly for right reasons.

The real Church does not necessarily comprise all those who attend Church Services.

The real Church does not necessarily comprise those who try to live a good life. Many people in the community try to live good lives without necessarily professing to be Christians. They may try to attain to Christian standards of morality without being Christians.

The answer to the question, "What is the Church?" is simply this, as contained in the Prayer Book.

"The blessed company of all faithful people", i.e., community or fellowship of those who have admitted they are sinners and come to Jesus Christ in repentance; who have believed that He died for them on the Cross to take away their sins, and rose again from the dead to open the gates into everlasting life; who have counted the cost of becoming a Christian and committed their life to Him.

The Church is the Body of Christ. Every Christian is a member or organ of the Body, while Christ Himself is the Head, controlling the body's activities.

The next question which needs to be answered is this:

#### WHAT IS THE CHURCH'S BUSINESS IN RELATION TO THE COMMUNITY?

Christ did not found the Church to be a 'museum for saints' or a 'holy huddle for the pious'. It was not founded for so-called spiritual reasons as some would say, with the suggestion that the spiritual is entirely separate from everyday life. When Christ first appeared to the Disciples after the Resurrection His first message to them as they huddled together, frightened, worried and bewildered, behind closed doors, was, "Peace be unto you". Then, "As My Father hath sent Me, so send I you", and then, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit". - their peace, their purpose and their power.

The Church today has its commission, too.

#### 1. TO DECLARE THE ABSOLUTE STANDARDS AS DECLARED IN THE SCRIPTURES.

The central conception of Christian ethics that runs through all the various expressions of the 'new morality' is a complete rejection of any divine sanction for any specific law, rule or regulation. No wonder the community itself is confused about its standards of morality when the lead given by some churchmen has been so uncertain and removed from a Biblical basis. In one form or another they

end up with some variation on the theme that the only test for any action is whether or not it is inspired by love.

But love is the fulfilment of the law, not the opposite to it. Love without law is sentimentality. When Christ said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind, soul and strength, and thy neighbour as thyself", He was not contradicting the Ten Commandments or superseding them, He was giving the positive statements which already appeared in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy. These laws were not given to make people miserable or to restrict their freedom; they were there to keep them happy by preventing them entering into license which would rob them of their happiness. The absolute standards of God's moral code are there so that we might truly enjoy ourselves, serve others and be in fellowship with God. That is why these commandments have been the framework of our society in the past, and why we need to declare them again, when instead of God's Law, many are trying to substitute expediency or magnify opinion or sentimental feeling, wrongly called 'love'.

#### 2. TO SHOW COMPASSION FOR ALL THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE EVERYWHERE.

The Bible says that the common people heard Jesus gladly wherever He went. He healed the sick, He comforted the sorrowful, He gave practical encouragement. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that we are to withdraw ourselves from society. In fact, the teaching is to the contrary.

The Early Church had concern for those who were in need, as we read several times in the New Testament. We are to join with others who are working to good purpose to lift the unfortunate. God needs social workers, doctors, hospital attendants, nurses, welfare workers, teachers. This is the Church in action; lay people in organisations and institutions helping to meet the needs of people in a variety of needs where compassion

is essential. Many organisations which may now be predominantly secular, had Christian beginnings, and all are byproducts of Christianity, even when some of their members are not Christians. Madam Chiang Kai-Shek said, "Confucianism worships ancestors, but never builds an old folk's home".

It is the Church's business to be amongst people and their problems, whether physical, mental or spiritual. It is the Church's business:

### 3. TO PROTECT THE YOUNG, THE INNOCENT AND THE WEAK.

When gambling is legalised it gives to them the impression that it is right. It must be misleading to those who are not able to think things out for themselves. Our newspapers now present T.A.B. betting as respectable and hail its success because within a few days over \$86,000 has been spent. What influence does this have upon the young? Admittedly, some will gamble whether facilities are available, but many would not be bothered if they were not available. Experience in Britain has shown the grip it quickly gets upon the community.

Recently, I heard in one of the conversation sessions on the radio, two commentators discussing the conference held in Western Australia recently concerning legalised prostitution. Both commentators agreed that it should come in. Their argument went like this. "Prostitution is going to take place anyway; therefore it is better to control it so that it will not be harmful". What about the young, the innocent and the weak? Have we no responsibility to them? It is the words of Jesus which make their protection the Church's business, "It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he be cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones" (Luke 17:2).

As well as things which are harmful in themselves, there is also the responsibility to consider the weak in those things which are not harmful in themselves. Paul said in I Corinthians 8:9, "But take heed, lest by any means

this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak".

It is the Church's business:

### 4. TO STAND FOR THE TRUTH AT ALL TIMES.

Some critics of the Church have the idea that the Church is against everything that is pleasant and profitable. They say Christians are like the woman who complained that everything worth doing in this life is either immoral, illegal or fattening. The prophets of old were outspoken in their condemnation of social evils. John the Baptist had no hesitation in denouncing Herod. But so often today the Christian point of view is not presented because everyone is waiting for someone else to say or do something.

Of course, there are some Christians who say, "Keep religion out of politics, keep it out of social problems. Just preach the Gospel". Unfortunately, we are often drawn back from social action because of the ecclesiastical organisations, sometimes called the Church, which in history have meddled in politics for their own material gain. Sometimes this withdrawal is a reaction to some social gospellers who keep talking about 'bringing in the Kingdom', and who make some particular social issue into their gospel.

But Jesus said we are to be the salt of the earth; a minority, perhaps, but effective. He also said, "Ye are the light of the world". Faint, perhaps, but definitely recognised in the darkness. Our responsibility is to stand for the truth whether that stand is welcomed or not, accepted or not, criticised or not.

It is the Church's business:

### 5. TO EMPHASISE THE NECESSITY OF PERSONAL CONVERSION.

Some of us so easily adopt an 'either - or' attitude. We think that either we preach the Gospel, or we

engage in community witness. But the two are not mutually exclusive. They should go together.

In a letter to one of my correspondents I said, "I do not believe that any political system is perfect - socialism or capitalism. One may be nearer than the other to the Christian ideal, but both fail because of the basic selfishness of man".

The Christian Faith recognises that man is a sinner, and that he needs to be redeemed rather than reformed; he needs to be saved rather than improved.

We may and should make our stand for social reform and do all we can to prevent moral degradation, but the heart of the matter is this. Man must be changed. Human nature, being what it is, will always rebel against advice or rebuke. It needs to be humbled before the Cross of Christ. I believe that if each Christian were to witness to that truth, consistently and courageously, we could see a revival in our community which could change the attitudes of those opposed to the Gospel. If we were to pray we could see miracles happen.

Yes, it is the Church's business:

- (1) To declare the absolute standards of the Gospel
- (2) To show compassion to the needy
- (3) To protect the weak
- (4) To stand for the truth
- (5) To emphasise personal conversion.

So we come to the real question:

#### HOW CAN THE CHURCH MIND ITS OWN BUSINESS?

1. By fulfilling the command of Christ to go into all the world.

We are to avoid two extremes, isolation from the world and imitation of the world. God does not want us

to be either 'holier-than-thou' or 'worldlier-than-thou'. He wants us to be like Jesus.

Not isolation from the sinner, but separation from the sin.

Not imitation of the world, but identification with the worldling.

As members of the Church we must take notice of our Head, Jesus Christ. He said, "Go into all the world" - that is the business of the Church.

2. By following the Example of Christ by taking up the Cross daily.

This means that our witness will cost us something in time and in prayer, personal inconvenience, and in some countries, suffering and death.

Lord, help me to live from day to day,  
In such a self-forgetful way,  
That even when I kneel to pray,  
My prayers shall be for others.

Others, Lord, yes others,  
Let this my motto be,  
Let me live for others,  
That I may live like Thee.

3. By finding those who are lost and bringing them to Christ.

David Brainerd, in the journal of his life among the North American Indians, said, "I found that when my people were gripped by this great doctrine of Christ and Him crucified, I had no need to give them instruction about morality. I found that one followed as a sure and inevitable fruit of the other".

Do we want social reform? The preaching of the Cross and the Resurrection have been primarily responsible for promoting it in the last 400 years. Prison

reform, abolition of slavery, the crusade for human dignity, the struggle against exploitation. The preaching of the Cross could do more to bring about social change than any other method.

That is the Church's business.

Lord God, we are weak, but Thou art strong.  
We are foolish, but Thou art wise. We are  
powerless, but Thou art Almighty. Come into  
our hearts; inspire us by Thy love; strengthen  
us by Thy Holy Spirit, and send us out for  
Thee, for Christ's sake. Amen.

Christians are sent by their Lord to be salt and light in the world.

Here are some further publications which are doing that very job:

No No Calcutta (OP7-\$1.00)

The thrilling story of the faith and courageous action that led to the banning of the pornographic play "Oh! Calcutta!" in South Australia. Edited by Lance Shilton.

Changing Community Standards (OP8-\$1.00)

What does the community consider decent and indecent? John Court argues that Christian principles are the only sound foundation for society.

Pornography - Some Points of View (OP9-25c)

John Court has assembled a wide range of comments. Some unlikely people support his contentions about this subject.

Drugs, Delights or Deceivers? (OP16-55c)

Dr. Norman Broadhurst and Dr. John Graham throw light on the disastrous drug scene.

Stand Up and Be Counted (OP18-\$1.00)

John Court's newest book is a must for anyone who desires to take the initiative for God in ways such as the Festival of Light.

Obtainable from the

TRINITY PUBLISHING SOCIETY

HOW CAN THE CHURCH MIND ITS OWN BUSINESS?

When Christians speak out against social evils, they can expect some harsh criticism from those who have vested interests in these evils.

Jesus promised His people that their witness would receive this kind of opposition.

Lance Shilton openly condemned the setting up of a betting agency in an Adelaide department store. This address is in reply to the criticism that his action brought.

Recommended price 10c

ISBN 0 86945 017 4

Build for Christian maturity with literature from the

**Trinity Publishing Society**

87 North Terrace,  
ADELAIDE, South Australia, 5000