

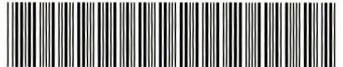
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"OH! CALCUTTA"

By D.B. KNOX

THE PROTESTANT FAITH

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The stage review "Oh! Calcutta!" is a series of dramatized sexual fantasies written by several authors and edited by Kenneth Tynan. Each section is complete in itself, they enact sexual activity on the stage and frequently the activity is a perversion of sex. Most of the time the actors are naked and they are constantly pretending to engage in sexual intercourse.

The play has been banned in South Australia by the Supreme Court on the grounds that it is, without any shadow of doubt, indecent, and to perform it would be contrary to the laws of that state. However, we are told in the newspapers that actors are rehearsing the play in Sydney and that it is intended to put it on here. There is, of course, always a lot of money to be made from pornography. But right thinking people should be concerned about the character of the society in which we live. Just as we ought to discipline our minds so that our thoughts are pure and not full of dirty imagination, and just as we ought to regulate our homes so that our shelves are not full of pornography for our children to read, so we have an obligation to do what we can to ensure that the society of which we and our families are members is also free from what is obscene and degrading in activities and in literature, films and plays. The play "Oh! Calcutta!" certainly offends against decency and wholesomeness in our community living.

There is no doubt what the mind of God is with regard to pornography, whether in book or film or play. Throughout the Bible God's word condemns lewdness. Romans 1:24 speaks of people given up in the lust of their hearts to impurity, to dishonouring their bodies among themselves, who give way to dishonourable passions and to shameless acts, and the scripture warns that those who do these things will receive in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

Not only does God's word clearly condemn impurity and immodesty, but the same condemnation is written on the hearts of everyone. Everybody knows that offences against modesty are wrong. One only has to read books of pagan antiquity to realise that this condemnation of immorality and immodesty is quite independent of Christianity, and even the play "Oh! Calcutta!" bears witness to this, for there is one scene which depicts two elderly couples engaged in promiscuous sex but when there is a knock on the door they immediately scurry to get dressed; and this haste is part of the humour. But in this way the writers and the players and the spectators testify to what their own heart is saying, that these things are wrong, and should be hidden because they are shameful. On the day of judgement those who engage in these sorts of actions or thoughts will be without excuse for their own hearts condemn them even while they are engaged in them. As Paul says, they know that those who do these things are worthy of death but they not only do them but also approve those who do them. (Romans 1:32).

God's word is clear that sexual immorality is wrong and the conscience of mankind bears this out as well. But we might ask the question, 'Why is it wrong?', because God does not give a command without a reason. The reason why immorality is wrong arises from the purpose of sex which is double sided. Sex is for the increase of mankind and at the same time for welding into deep fellowship two people who will be the parents of the next generation. Immorality rejects both aspects of this purpose. That is why it is wrong and God has written this verdict both into our hearts and into His word, so that there can be no mistake about it. Our sexual nature plays its part in fulfilling God's purpose for mankind in deepening fellowship, and because sex is so intimate an activity it is reserved in its full expression for that life-long

fellowship between husband and wife, in which two become one person through sharing everything together, and which only a permanent relationship can bring about. Fellowship is based on considering one another and selfishness destroys fellowship.

In "Oh! Calcutta!", and in pornography in general, sex is simply a bodily thing and is entirely self-centred in its expression; and so it is a complete over-throw of God's purposes. Instead of bringing about deeper personal relationship, this mis-use of sex destroys relationship by being so entirely self-centred. A society that allows such prostitution of God's gift and which flies in the face of the plain teaching of scripture as well as the prompting of the conscience is doomed to God's judgement and destruction. Nothing could be clearer in scripture or in history. A permissive society can only exist by ignoring scripture and conscience, and it will certainly reap what it sows.

What can Christians do in this situation? Firstly, they must discipline their own minds and see that their thoughts conform with God's purposes. We must also discipline ourselves in what we read or what we see on television or at the pictures. Scripture is clear: What is true, what is honourable, what is just, what is pure, what is lovely, what is gracious these are the things about which our thoughts are to be full (Philippians 4:8).

Secondly, we ought to exercise our influence in the community. A permissive society can only exist if it ignores God's word, and we Christians should be constantly witnessing to what God says in these matters so that people's consciences may be instructed, and particularly we ought to make clear the fact that God will bring everything into judgement. Christian preachers are frightened of preaching God's judgement; they are frightened of

people's reactions. This was certainly not true of the prophets of the Old Testament. And if we fail whether individual Christians or preachers, in declaring the whole counsel of God, including eternal judgement, and heaven and hell, we mustn't be surprised if we reap the consequences, namely, a permissive society. What each of us does today is serious, in view of the certainty of judgement and the eternity of hell. But if Christians play down this plain truth of scripture, as the devil did in the Garden of Eden and as so many, even famous, preachers are doing, saying there is no hell or it won't be eternal, the result can only be a permissive society; for in effect this denial of eternal judgement means that what we do today has little consequence for the future. The fact of judgement, however, makes the present moment serious.

But perhaps the most important thing that we Christians should do is pray to God for our society, just as we pray for our homes and for ourselves. We are engaged in a spiritual conflict with the powers of darkness just as Jesus was. He won the victory and our prayers will make that victory actual in our own community. There is also a practical thing that we can do and that is to write to the Chief Secretary, Mr. Willis, at Parliament House, Sydney, to express our disapproval of the play "Oh! Calcutta!" and to ask him to use his every endeavour to see that the law is not weakened through allowing it to be staged.

We hear a good deal these days about pollution of the atmosphere and pollution of the environment but not so much about pollution of society. The cleanliness of our physical environment is important but what about our social environment which is being polluted by the liquor trade with alcoholism and drinking drivers. It is also being polluted by purveyors of pornography in books and films, and

now pornography on the stage of which "Oh! Calcutta!" is an example. We need to take action and write to the Chief Secretary.

The Sydney Church of England Standing Committee has put out a statement about "Oh! Calcutta!" and I would like to conclude by reading it in a slightly shortened form, as it puts the matter very well:

WE AFFIRM:

1. That sex is God's gift to be used with gratitude.
2. That sexual intercourse is uniquely intimate. Through it man and woman express their love and tender feelings for one another and through it God continues his creative work.
3. That satisfactory marriage and family relationships (which are basic to a healthy society) involve a positive and responsible use of our sexual natures.
4. That every step should be taken in our society- and chiefly in our homes- to see that we have a right understanding of the role of sex within human relationships.

WE ALSO AFFIRM:

5. That because our sex instinct is very strong and because it can assume such a dominant and destructive role in human relationships and social life it needs to be protected from undue provocation.
6. That deliberate provocation of sexual interest and desire outside marriage (within which such desire can be properly consummated) is always wrong.

7. That the presentation of sexual fantasies in books or in films or on stage is never artistically necessary and is calculated to provide this undue provocation which deserves our moral censure.
8. That the play "Oh! Calcutta!" identifies physical excitation (with undertones of phallic worship and feminine compliance) as the whole of the true expression of our sexuality, and shamelessly presents this confusion with the express intention of providing erotic stimulation for the audience ("It occurred to me that there was no place for a civilized man to take a civilized woman to spend an evening of civilized erotic stimulation We're trying to fill that gap with this show". - Kenneth Tynan).
9. That a society which allows its citizens to be exposed to unnecessary sexual stimulation and perverted stimulation as in "Oh! Calcutta!" must expect to reap a failure in the understanding of the use of sex and an increasing corrosion of marriage and family life.

WE THEREFORE CALL upon the government authorities and citizens of this state to unite in the rejection of "Oh! Calcutta!" and similar productions in order to preserve a society free from abuses which threaten values which are indispensable to the formation of mature and healthy relationships.

WE ALSO CALL upon our society to recognise that if we neglect to be vigilant in these matters we cannot expect to escape the judgement of God:

"For be very sure of this: no one given to fornication or indecency, or the greed which makes an idol of gain, has any share in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with shallow arguments; it is for all these things that God's dreadful judgement is coming upon his rebel subjects". (Ephesians 5:5,6)

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