

THE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

By D.B. Knox

THE PROTESTANT FAITH

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All lovers of our country rejoice in the presence of the Queen of Australia in our city. We thank God that the representative head of our nation is a Christian woman and we pray that God will continue to bless her and her successors with a knowledge of Himself in Jesus Christ.

The Scriptures make clear to us that we ought to pray regularly not only for the Queen but for all her ministers and those in authority. Do we pray regularly specifically for Mr. Whitlam and the members of the federal cabinet and parliament? for the premier and his cabinet and the state parliament? Scripture is clear that we have this duty and we ought not to neglect it, for those who govern us do so as God's ministers, preserving law and order, justice and virtue, so that all may live a Godly and peaceable life. Not always those in high authority recognise that they are ministers of God but we may rejoice that the Queen is to be found in her place with her people worshipping God on His day, and we are encouraged to persevere in prayer for all in authority as we give thanks for the blessings that we enjoy through their ministries.

The occasion of the Queen's visit is, as we all know, the opening of the Sydney Opera House completed after 16 years of construction (a much longer time for building and much more expensive than the harbour bridge itself). We will all enjoy using the Opera House and we are grateful for those who constructed it, and of course our thanks rise to God the provider of all. As the Bible says, God gives us all things richly to enjoy. Music and the performing arts are His gift. We should use them rightly to elevate our spirits and to ennoble our life, and not wrongly, to harden to the sensual. It is up to us to use God's gifts rightly and to use them thankfully. Doubtless, there have been elements in the decision to build the Opera House which are open to criticism but this is not the time for canvassing these events of the past. There is, however, one element of the Opera House which dampens the spirit and makes it impossible with a free heart to enter into the festivities which celebrate its opening, and that is the fact that the Opera House has been paid for entirely from the proceeds of gambling.

Now gambling is a vice, because it is based almost exclusively on sinfulness, for it is based on selfishness, expressing itself in avariciousness and greed without any thought at the point of

the gamble for other people's interests but only for one's own. This is the exact contradiction from the way God intends us to live. Our lives are always to be centred in other people and we should be seeking their interests equally with our own. We should never sacrifice them for our benefit, but rather the reverse, we should lay down our lives for our friends if it comes to the extreme test and all other things should be loved in the same spirit.

This is the Spirit of God Himself who loves us and gives us freely all things to enjoy. Moreover, God's love for us is such that when we became involved in satan's grip through our own rebellion and sin he rescued us through Himself bearing our sins in His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. God is for us and we should be entirely for Him; and we express this God-centredness, which is the only attitude which anyone should have, by centering ourselves in other people for His sake for they are His creatures and our fellow men. Nothing ever excuses our departure from this fundamental attitude which brings happiness, joy and peace not only in our relationships with others but in our relationship with God. Yet gambling is the exact contradiction, it is the quintessence of selfishness and greed, covetousness and avariciousness. The gambler, as a gambler, cannot please God. Of course when gambling is on a small scale it is not so obvious but you only have to look at gambling when seen on the scale of poker machines or casinos to see what its fruit is.

It is wrong for a government to profit from vice. Vice must be controlled and it may be controlled by taxing it, but the object should not be the taxes but rather the control. For a government actually to promote vice to make money is indefensible and that is what the N.S.W. government, and now so many other Australian governments are doing through lotteries and casinos. The Opera House has been built entirely on the proceeds of gambling; it is very hard, therefore, for a Christian to join in the festivities of its opening with éclat and abandon as there will be such a shadow on his mind, and sorrow in his heart at this point. The Opera House is a blessing, but the way it has been built is disobedience to the basic commandment that we are to love God with all our hearts and our neighbour as ourselves. So although we are thankful for an Opera House and will enjoy its use, it is impossible to throw one's hat in the air as high as one would like and with lightness of heart for it is impossible to put out of one's mind how it has been paid for.

One feature of the celebrations of the opening of the Opera House is to be a service entitled "The Family of Man". This activity is put forward as a religious service though it has more characteristics of a pageant about it than a service which Christians would recognise as divine worship. But in so far as it purports to be the worship of almighty God it is not an activity for Christians to take part in as a religious service because the service completely and deliberately by-passes God's revelation of Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we know that in Jesus our almighty and gracious Creator, Who fills our hearts with joy and gladness, has come into our world taking our nature in order to be our saviour. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. He gave Himself for us on the cross in order to redeem us from selfishness and its eternal consequences of separation from God in hell, so that we might be restored through forgiveness to being God's sons and daughters and rejoicing in His presence through His Spirit now and for eternity. All this we owe to Jesus, our Lord and our God and we ought always to be living in his presence and rejoicing in His fellowship and looking forward to His inheritance as we await His coming.

All this is very clearly taught in the Old and New Testaments and it is quite plain that we cannot please God if knowing these things we deliberately ignore them in our seeking His face. Jesus, Himself said "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no man comes to the Father but by Me" and on another occasion He said "he that honours not the Son, honours not the Father". We Christians who know these things cannot honour God if we turn our backs on the Lord Jesus Christ, God with us, Who loves us and gave Himself for us and Who will come as the Judge of all men and for whose coming we look with eager anticipation that we might be with Him for ever. Knowing these things and living in the light of them day by day it is theologically and emotionally impossible for Christians to join in the worship of the one true God in a service deliberately designed to ignore the Lord.

The opening of the Opera House is an occasion for celebration with one another in community together in the presence of the Queen, but especially it is a time for rejoicing in God in our hearts for His continual goodness to us, in spite of our own sinfulness and the sinfulness of our community, for He makes the wrath of men to

praise Him. We should pray for one another that we may please Him in all that we do and think and that we might be ready to welcome Him in the day of His coming. What joy and festivities that day will bring for all who look for Him!

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