

OWNING THE WORLD

P.F. JENSEN

"THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"

I suppose if I called you a 'Nazi' you would be offended. I certainly hope so. Or, a 'fascist', or a 'racialist'. These are names we reserve for people we really find repulsive. We have certain definite ideas about such people and to us they are very clearly horrible types.

The word 'Puritan' is another insulting name. In modern English it generally means a 'wowsler', someone who refuses to enjoy life and does not want others to enjoy it either; a person who is against anyone having any fun. It was the English historian Macaulay who said that a Puritan was one who was against bear-baiting not because it hurt the bear but because it gave pleasure to the spectators.

Now it is a quite useless task to try to convince the general populace that this is a seriously wrong picture of the real historical Puritans of 16th and 17th Century England. We all have our dearly loved myths about the past and refuse to allow the truth to shatter them. It's like telling a little child that there is no Santa Claus - quite frequently they choose to continue to believe in him, no matter what the truth is.

On the other hand it is useful to say something about the genuine Christian attitude to enjoyment, since there are many who think that Christianity is a gloomy religion.

In fact, of course, the reverse is true. In the first place, the God who is revealed in the Bible is the God who declared the world

and everything in it 'good, very good.' It is on this basis that the Apostle Paul (who is also thought to be a dismal fellow by those who have not investigated the matter) heartily endorsed the enjoyment of sex within marriage, and food. Of course there have been plenty of religious people who have suggested that celibacy and fasting were good in themselves; the Bible is against such people. God created us bodily creatures, and the lawful enjoyment of his creation is on the agenda for each one of us. The six days of labour are meant to be followed by a day of rest.

If this is so for all men, it is doubly so for Christians themselves. We are the children of God, and in a special sense the world belongs to us. Our Saviour Christ was present at the Creation of the world; it was made 'through him and for him.' He is the 'heir of all things' and we are fellow-heirs. 'All things are yours' says the Bible, 'and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' (1 Cor. 3:21-23).

But, of course, there is a greater secret than that. If Christians have at times been a bit over-critical of innocent earthly pleasure, it is often because we have been swamped with something even greater. For pleasure is to joy as chewing-gum is to a feast. The Christian faith allows you all innocent pleasures; but it also introduces you to joy beyond words, a joy that will be yours for evermore. No one can yet describe the joys of heaven; but we can speak of the joy that is ours when we first realise that our sins are forgiven through the love of God and the death of Christ, and we can say this: it drenches the soul, and enchants the mind. Rejoice in the Lord!

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