

than Romanism or Christian Science. If our churches are in peril, it is because they have forgotten what they are.⁶⁵

Extract 47

There are some, in these apostate days, who think that the church cannot do better than to come down to the world to learn her ways, follow her maxims, and acquire her 'culture'. In fact, the notion is that the world is to be conquered by our conforming to it. This is as contrary to Scripture as the light is to the darkness. The more distinct the line between him who fears God and him who does not fear him, the better all around. It will be a black day when the sun itself is turned into darkness. When the salt has lost its savour, and no longer opposes putrefaction, the world will rot with a vengeance. That text is still true: 'You are of God, little children, and the whole world lies in the wicked one'. The seed of the woman knows no terms with the serpent brood but continual war. Our Lord says that in this matter he did not come to send peace on the earth, but a sword. 'Because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you'. If the church seeks to cultivate the friendship of the world, she has this message from the Holy Spirit by the pen of... James: 'You adulterers and adulteresses, do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God'. He charges all who would please the world with the black and filthy crime of spiritual adultery. The heart which ought to be given to Christ and purity must not wander out deliberately to woo the defiled and polluted things of this present evil world. Separation from the world is Christ's prayer for us.⁶⁶

Extract 48

This is an age which has many hopeful signs in it; but yet, if we judge according to the rule of Scripture, there are

⁶⁵ A 'Fraternal Letter by eight professors and ministers of the Congregational Union, published in 1939 (Iain H.Murray: *D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years* p356).

⁶⁶ C.H.Spurgeon sermon 1890.

some very black marks upon this century. I sometimes fear that the only age to which we can be truly likened is the time before the flood, when the sons of God intermarried with the daughters of men, and when there ceased to be a distinction between the righteous⁶⁷ and the world. It is but the part of candour to acknowledge that there is such a mixture now-a-days, such a compromise, such a-giving and a-taking on both sides of religious questions, that we are like a leavened mass, mingled and united together. All this is wrong; for God has always intended there should be a distinction between the righteous and the wicked, as clear and as palpable as the distinction between the day and the night.

My first argument is this: Whenever the church has been thoroughly distinct from the world, she has always prospered. During the first three centuries, the world hated the church. The prison, the stake, the heels of the wild horse, these were thought too good for the followers of Christ. When a man became a Christian, he gave up father and mother, house and lands – indeed, his own life also. When they [that is, the believers] met together, they must meet in the catacombs, burning candles at high noon, because there was darkness in the depths of the earth. They were despised and rejected of men. ‘They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, tormented’. But then was the age of heroes; that was the time of giants. Never did the church so much prosper and so truly thrive as when she was baptised in blood. The ship of the church never sails so gloriously along as when the bloody spray of her martyrs falls upon her deck. We *must* suffer, and we *must* die, if we are ever to conquer this world for Christ.

Was there ever such a surprising miracle as the spread of the gospel during the first two or three centuries? Within fifty years after Christ had ascended to heaven, the gospel was preached in every known part of the world, and there were converts to Christ in the most inhospitable regions. Further than the ships of Tarshish had the gospel flown; the pillars of Hercules had not bounded the industry of the apostles. To wild and uncivilised tribes, to Picts and Scots,

⁶⁷ Original had ‘the church’. This is getting too close to covenant theology. See my “‘A Gospel Church’: A Warning”.

and to fierce Britons, was the gospel proclaimed. Churches were founded...⁶⁸ And all this, I believe, was partly the result of that striking [difference], that marked difference, between the church and the world.

Certainly, during the period after Constantine professed to be a Christian, changing with the times, because he saw it would strengthen his empire – from the time when the church began to be linked with the State – the Lord left her, and gave her up to barrenness, and Ichabod was written on her walls. It was a black day for Christendom⁶⁹ when Constantine said: ‘I am a Christian’. ‘By this sign I conquer’, said he. Yes, it was the true reason of his pretended conversion: if he could conquer by the cross, it was well enough; if he could have conquered by Jupiter, he would have liked it equally as well. From that time the church began to degenerate. And coming down to the Middle Ages, when you could not tell a Christian from a worldling, where were you to find piety at all, or life or grace left in the lands?⁷⁰

Then came Luther, and with a rough grasp he rent away the church from the world – pulled her away at the risk of rending her in pieces. He would not have her linked in affinity with the world, and then ‘the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers took counsel together, against the Lord and against his anointed’; but he that sits in the heavens did laugh at them; Jehovah had them in derision. The church went forth conquering and to conquer, and her main weapon was her *non-conformity* to the world, her coming out from among men. Put your finger on any prosperous page in the church’s history, and I will find a little marginal note reading thus: ‘In this age men could readily see where the church began and where the world

⁶⁸ I have omitted ‘some of which have lasted in their purity to this day’. I do not know of any.

⁶⁹ I allow this to stand, but it would have been better expressed thus: ‘It was a black day for everybody – sinner and saint – when Constantine...’. Constantine’s so-called conversion actually paved the way to the invention of Christendom.

⁷⁰ This is too sweeping. Think of the likes of the Waldenses and the Albigenses, John Wycliffe and John Huss. See my *Battle for the Church: 1517-1644*; ‘The Long Night’.

ended'. Never were there good times when the church and the world were joined in marriage with one another.

But though this were sufficient argument for keeping the church and the world distinct, there are many others. The more the church is distinct from the world in her acts and in her maxims, the more true is her testimony for Christ, and the more potent is her witness against sin...

But now I have a very sad thing to say – I wish that I could withhold it, but I cannot. Unless, brothers and sisters, you make it your daily business to see that there is a difference between you and the world, you will do more hurt than you can possibly do good...

I would not speak too severely of Christ's church, for I love her; but because I love her I must therefore utter this. Our being so much like the world, our trading as the world trades, our talking as the world talks, our always insisting upon it that we must do as other people do, this is doing more mischief to the world, than all our preachers can hope to effect good. 'Come out from among them, touch not the unclean thing, be you separate, says the Lord, and I will be a father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters'. This surely, a stern, rough argument, might move us to be separate from the world! But once again, how is it possible for us to honour Jesus Christ, while there is no difference between us and the world?... I cannot imagine a man professing to be a Christian, and then acting as the crowd acts, and yet honouring Christ...

'O, blessed Jesus forgive us, forgive us, and give us your grace that we may do so no more, for we *would* follow you whithersoever you go; you know Lord *we would* be yours, we would honour you, and not grieve you. O give us now, then, of your own Spirit, that we may come out from the world and be like yourself – holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners'.⁷¹

Extract 49

I believe that one reason why the church of God at this present moment has so little influence over the world is because the world has so much influence over the church... Brethren, the use of the church in the world is that it should

⁷¹ C.H.Spurgeon sermon 305, emphasis his.

be like salt in the midst of putrefaction; but if the salt has lost its savour, what is the good of it? If it were possible for salt itself to putrefy, it could but be an increase and a heightening of the general putridity. The worst day the world ever saw was when the sons of God were joined with the daughters of men. Then came the flood; for the only barrier against a flood of vengeance on this world is the separation of the saint from the sinner. Your duty as a Christian is to stand fast in your own place, and to stand out for God, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh, resolving like one of old that, let others do as they will, as for you and your house, you will serve the Lord.

Come, you children of God, you must stand with your Lord outside the camp. Jesus calls you today, and says: 'Follow me'. Was Jesus found at the theatre? Did he frequent the sports of the race course? Was Jesus seen, do you think, in any of the amusements of the Herodian court? Not he! He was 'holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners'. In one sense, no one mixed with sinners so completely as he did when, like a physician, he went among them healing his patients; but, in another sense, there was a gulf fixed between the men of the world and the Saviour, which he never essayed to cross, and which they could not cross to defile him.

The first lesson which the church has to learn is this: Follow Jesus into the separated state, and he will make you fishers of men. Unless you take up your cross, and protest against an ungodly world, you cannot hope that the holy Jesus will make you fishers of men.

A second meaning of our text is very obviously this: abide with Christ, and then you will be made fishers of men.⁷²

Extract 50

In our day [alas] we must be dramatic about everything... Many churches these days have to depend upon truckloads of gadgets to get their religion going... Pastors and churches in our hectic times are harassed by the temptation to seek size at any cost – and to secure by inflation what they cannot gain by legitimate growth. The mixed multitude cries for quantity, and will not forgive a minister

⁷² C.H.Spurgeon: *The Soul Winner*.

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who insists upon solid values and permanence. Many a man of God is being subjected to cruel pressure by the ill-taught members of his flock who... demand... a popular following regardless of quality. These children play in the marketplaces, and cannot overlook the affront we do them by our refusal to dance when they whistle, or to weep when they out of caprice pipe a sad tune. They are greedy for thrills, and since they dare no longer seek them in the theatre, they demand to have them brought into the church!...

A church fed on worldly excitement is no New Testament church at all. The desire for surface stimulation is a sure mark of the flesh⁷³ – the very thing Christ died to deliver us from. A curious crowd of baptised worldlings waiting each Sunday for the quasi-religious fillip⁷⁴ to give them a lift bears no relation whatever to a true assembly of Christian believers... Religious shows leave a bad flavour. When they enter the holy place, they come perilously near to offering strange fire to the Lord. At their worst they are sacrilege; always they are unnecessary, and at their best they are a poor substitute for prayer and the Holy Spirit. Church plays are invariably cheap and amateurish, and in addition to grieving the Holy Spirit, those who attend them are cheated by getting wretchedly poor entertainment for their money...

Instead of worship, the churches are now second in entertainment to the theatres... The church is not a religious theatre to provide a place for amateur entertainers to display their talents!... We have simplified [the gospel] until Christianity amounts to this: God is love; Jesus died for you; believe, accept, be jolly, have fun and tell others! And away we go – that is the Christianity of our day. I would not give even something worthless⁷⁵ for the whole business of it...

God calls us to worship, but in many instances we are in[to] entertainment, just running a poor second to the theatres... We are using sound trucks, radio, television,

⁷³ Original had ‘the fallen nature’.

⁷⁴ Original had ‘needle’. I guess the thought was ‘a shot in the arm’.

⁷⁵ Original had ‘a plug nickel’ – a low-value US coin with the centre missing, making it even less valuable.

streetcar cards, billboards, neon signs, messages in bottles and on balloons. We are using trained horses, trained dogs, trained canaries, ventriloquists, magicians and drama to stir up religious interest. Innumerable professional guilds, industrial clubs, and businessmen's and women's committees have sprung up to provide [so-called] spiritual fellowship for religious-minded persons engaged in the various pursuits of life. Religious songs are in the repertoire of many professional entertainers.⁷⁶ Religion is being plugged by nightclub entertainers, prize-fighters, movie stars, and by at least one incarcerated gangster who has up to this time shown no sorrow for his way of life and no evidence of repentance. Religion, if you please, is now big business... For centuries the church stood solidly against every form of worldly entertainment, recognising it for what it was – a device for wasting time, a refuge from the disturbing voice of conscience, a scheme to divert attention from moral accountability. For this she got herself abused roundly by the sons of this world. But of late she has become tired of the abuse and has given up⁷⁷ the struggle. She appears to have decided that if she cannot conquer the *great God Entertainment*, she may as well join forces with him, and make whatever use she can of his powers. So today we have the astonishing spectacle of millions of dollars being poured into the unholy job of providing earthly entertainment for the so-called sons of heaven. Religious entertainment is in many places rapidly crowding out the serious things of God. Many churches these days have become little more than poor theatres where fifth-rate 'producers' peddle their shoddy wares with the full approval of evangelical leaders who can even quote a holy text in defence of their delinquency. And hardly a man dares raise his voice against it...

The church is not a religious theatre where performers are paid to amuse those who attend. It is an assembly of redeemed sinners – men and women called unto Christ and commissioned to spread his gospel to the ends of the earth... Religious entertainment has so corrupted the church of Christ that millions don't know that it's a heresy.

⁷⁶ Witness the repugnant crooning of John Newton's 'Amazing Grace': 'That saved a wretch like me!'

⁷⁷ Original had 'over'.

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Millions of evangelicals throughout the world have devoted themselves to religious entertainment. They don't know that it's as much heresy as the counting of beads or the splashing of holy water or something else [is]. To expose this, of course, raises a storm of angry protest among the people...

I'm not interested in that church which brings somebody in from the outside and says: 'Will you come and perform for us?' Can you imagine a pastor bringing a clown and saying to the clown: 'Now come, clown into the holy place. Be reverent and do it for Jesus' sake'. I would walk five miles to keep from seeing him or hearing him and I wouldn't walk one inch to see him and I wouldn't give one dime to support him! All of this *extra-scriptural claptrap* that has been dragged into the church in recent times grieves the Holy Spirit... Without biblical authority, or any other right under the sun, carnal religious leaders have introduced a host of attractions that serve no purpose except to provide entertainment for the retarded saints... It is now common practice in most evangelical churches to offer the people – especially the young people – a maximum of entertainment and a minimum of serious instruction. It is scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend a meeting where the only attraction is God. One can only conclude that God's professed children are bored with him, for they must be wooed to meeting with a stick of striped candy in the form of religious movies, games and refreshments...

Any objection to the carryings-on of our present gold-calf Christianity is met with the triumphant reply: 'But we are winning them!' And winning them to what? To true discipleship? To cross-carrying? To self-denial? To separation from the world? To crucifixion of the flesh? To holy living? To nobility of character? To a despising of the world's treasures? To hard self-discipline? To love for God? To total committal to Christ? Of course the answer to all these questions is 'No'.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ A.W.Tozer: 'Entertainment and the Church', emphasis his.

Extract 51

Secularism has so permeated Christian thinking in our time that it has foreshortened the gospel picture. Even many Christians are more absorbed in this world than the other.⁷⁹

Extract 52

Sin is still here. It is just that people do not so willingly acknowledge that fact. A spade is no longer called a spade, but some euphemism. The little boy says to his mother: 'Why is it whenever I do anything bad, it's because I'm a bad boy; but whenever you do anything bad, it's because you're nervous?' It is 'nerves' rather than sin. It is 'our glands' rather than sin. It is what we eat, the environment, our bio-rhythm, rather than sin; it is anything but sin. Sin denies that it is sin.⁸⁰

Extract 53

When the Lord returns, will he find faith on the earth? The answer is 'No'. And to the degree the church is in the world, he will not find faith there either.⁸¹

Extract 54

If preachers insist on competing with psychiatrists as counsellors, with physicians as healers, with politicians as statesmen, and with philosophers as speculators, then these specialists have every right to tell them how to preach. If a minister's message is not based on 'Thus says the Lord', then as a sermon it is good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of the specialists in the department with which it deals.⁸²

Extract 55

⁷⁹ John H. Gerstner: *Theology for Everyman*, Moody, 1965.

⁸⁰ John H. Gerstner: *The Problem of Pleasure: Why Good Things Happen to Bad People*, Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2002.

⁸¹ John H. Gerstner, taken from the audio 'Handout Church History'.

⁸² John H. Gerstner, taken from Grace Quotes website.

North American culture does not offer congenial conditions in which to live vocationally as a pastor. Men and women who are pastors in America today find that they have entered into a way of life that is in ruins. The vocation of pastor has been replaced by the strategies of religious entrepreneurs with business plans. Any kind of continuity with pastors in times past is virtually non-existent. We are a generation that feels as if it is having to start out from scratch to figure out a way to represent and nurture this richly nuanced and all-involving life of Christ in a country that 'knew not Joseph'.

I love being an American. I love this place in which I have been placed – its language, its history, its energy. But I don't love 'the American way', its culture and values. I don't love the rampant consumerism that treats God as a product to be marketed... [the church as] an ecclesiastical business with a mission to market spirituality to consumers and make them happy, [and] a business opportunity that would cater to the consumer's tastes... Entertainment, cheerleading, and manipulation [are] conspicuous in high places... programmes [have] developed into the dominant methodology of 'doing church'.⁸³

Extract 56

Be resistant to the consumer mindset of church. Many of us reject the idea that tricks and novelty can in any way build a church, especially a healthy one. [Eugene] Peterson's life-long rejection of this idea to appeal to the consumer to build a church made him a bit of a renegade in the prime of his ministry... His conviction that Christ's church should not look like the world is an important caution and should be heeded by those who are intensely focussed on one primary generation in the church, or who might be driven by consumerism in a more subtle form than they realise.⁸⁴

⁸³ Eugene H. Peterson: *The Pastor: A Memoir*, HarperOne, New York, 2011 and 2012, pp4,111,254.

⁸⁴ Brian Croft: 'The Pastor: A Memoir', being a review of Eugene H. Peterson's: *The Pastor: A Memoir*, HarperOne, New York, 2011.

Extract 57

[Eugene] Peterson challenges conventional wisdom regarding church marketing, mega pastors, and the church's too-cosy relationship to American glitz and consumerism.⁸⁵

Extract 58

Congregations insist that we [prospective pastors] must do and be... the experts to help them stay ahead of the competition. Congregations want pastors who will lead them in the world of religious competition... They want pastors the way the Israelites wanted a king – to make hash of the Philistines. Congregations get their ideas of what makes a pastor from the culture, not from the Scriptures: they want a winner; they want their needs met; they want to be part of something zesty and glamorous... The understanding and conviction that brings us [that is, the authors] together in this book are that pastoral work originates in and is shaped by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. It takes place in the world's culture, but it is not caused by it. It is intimately involved in the world, but it is not defined by it. The gospel is free, not only in the sense that we don't have to pay for it, but also in the more fundamental sense that it is an expression of God's freedom – it is not caused by our needs, but by God's grace. The trinity – not the culture, not the congregation – is the primary context for acquiring training and understanding in the pastoral vocation... I have friends who think that it is virtually impossible to be an honest, God-honouring pastor in our present culture. They are convinced that the role itself, formed as it has been now in a century of buy-it consumerism and fix-it psychologism, has become so powerful that it defeats all individual efforts to work within it. The role of pastor is now so secularised and so politicised [and, I would add, so consumerised – DG] by the culture that, even with the best of intentions, it is no longer available as a venue for a genuinely Christian ministry... When I became a pastor, I found that most of

⁸⁵ Publishers' blurb for Eugene H. Peterson: *The Pastor: A Memoir*, HarperOne, New York, 2011.