

Essays
of the
Concordia Lutheran Conference

The Scriptural Teaching on the
Financial Support of Church Work
Versus
Merchandising in the Churches

I. What The Word Of God Teaches Us In Regard
To The Financial Support Of Church Work

II. Merchandising In The Churches
In The Light Of That Word Of God.

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***The Scriptural Teaching on the
Financial Support of church Work
Versus
Merchandising in the Churches***

Essay presented by Rev. Paul R. Bloedel to
the Convention, August 23, 1953.

Dear Brethren of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference:

All of us, through our contact with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, have undoubtedly found that in that synod there were many pastors who permitted all kinds of buying and selling to be carried on under the auspices of their respective congregations. At fairs they would have their booths on which the name of their church was printed in bold letters. They would permit their Ladies' Aids to hold large suppers and banquets for all kinds of civic organizations and social groups. They would have bake sales, bazaars, carnivals, chilli suppers, ice-cream socials, raffles, bingo nights, and the like. Yes, such things were and still are being carried on in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and also in other synods of the Synodical Conference. On the other hand there were also those pastors of the Missouri Synod and of the Synodical Conference who vigorously opposed such money-making or money raising schemes which were carried on by various congregations. These issues were often hotly contested by both pastors and laymen but, to my knowledge, agreement was never reached. To many it was regarded merely as an adiaphoron — something concerning which the Scriptures are silent.

The Bible, however, speaks very plainly on this subject, and in regard to everything which is plainly taught in Scripture we Christians must be "*perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*", as St. Paul tells us in I Cor. 1:10. It is, therefore, vitally important that our Orthodox Lutheran Conference takes a

firm and uncompromising stand also on this issue from the very start, in perfect harmony with the words which we have on our official emblem: “*It is written*” and “*Thy Word is Truth*”.

It is the scope and aim of this paper to point out the Scriptural principle of giving versus buying and selling in the congregations. Its purpose is to bring out plainly what the Bible teaches us in regard to giving for the support of Church work in contrast to the use of modern money-making schemes.

Our topic naturally divides itself into two parts:

PART I. What The Word Of God Teaches Us In Regard To The Financial Support Of Church Work, and

PART II. Merchandising In The Churches In The Light Of That Word Of God.

May God the Holy Ghost bless the consideration of His Word. . .

I.

The formation of Christian congregations and membership in a Christian congregation is a divine command and every congregation which is thus established has its own needs and expenses which are necessary to carry on its work. Congregations are to be formed by God’s command primarily for the establishment and support of the Office of the Public Ministry in their midst and for the faithful use of that Office.

But there are many other things which, either directly or indirectly, serve the Ministry of the Word, for example: the building and maintaining of church property, the beautifying of the house of worship and the church grounds, the establishment of a Christian Day School, care for the poor and needy especially among those who are of “*the household of faith*”, and the like. It is certainly also the work of the individual congregation to do its part for meeting the needs and helping in the work of the Church at large: for missions, for institutions of higher learning, for semi-

naries, for normal schools, for hospitals and other eleemosynary institutions, and the like. All of these needs serve, either directly or indirectly, the one great purpose of the Church which is to bear witness to Christ and to the Full Truth of His Word which alone is able to lead lost and condemned sinners to a knowledge of their sins, to sincere repentance, and to saving faith in Him whose blood has cleansed them from all their sins.

The Church, therefore, in order to carry on its work, vitally needs financial support, and such financial support is both urged and commanded by God in the Holy Scriptures. Thus it is certainly necessary and proper for us to speak of the financial support of Church work and humbly to submit to that which God's Word says to us in regard to this matter.

Concerning the financial support of the work of the Church, the command of God is very plain and simple, and it can be expressed in one word, and that one word is: "GIVE". Christianity should manifest itself in giving. In Matthew 5:42, Jesus says: "Give to him that asketh thee." To the rich young ruler, the Savior said (Matt. 19:21): "Go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor." In Luke 6:38, we read: "Give, and it shall be given unto you." In the Book of Hebrews, chapter 13, verse 16, we are told; "To do good and to communicate (to give) forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." In Acts 20:35; St. Paul admonishes the Ephesian elders "to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." In Galatians 6:6, St. Paul writes: "Let him that is taught in the Word communicate (give) unto him that teacheth in all good things." In this passage we have a clear command of God in regard to the support of the Office of the Ministry. Giving for the building and maintaining and beautifying of church property is set before us in the Scriptures by the example of the children of Israel In their building of the Tabernacle (Exodus 30ff.) and later in their building of the Temple (II Kings 12.). Giving for the work of the Church at large is beautifully portrayed in the Scriptures by the example of the early Christian congregations when they collected money to help those congregations which were suffering from

famine and where they helped to support the missionaries of the Church. Thus, St. Paul urges the Christians in Romans 12:13, to “*distribute to the necessity of saints.*”

In order to bring the matter of giving for the financial support of Church work into sharper focus, we will ask the following questions and find their answers plainly stated in the Word of God. These questions are: Who should give? How should we give? and What is the correct Scriptural motive for giving?

WHO should give? The Bible tells us in I Cor. 16:2, “Upon the first day of the week let EVERY ONE OF YOU lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.” Everyone should be concerned about the needs of the congregation and about the work of the Church at large. No one is exempt from giving or contributing for the financial support of Church work. Men and women, old and young should give. Parents should train their children in giving from early childhood. Young children should begin to contribute for the work of the Church as soon as they have something to give. Pastors, who are called to preach the whole counsel of God, should not neglect to instruct their people in regard to the Scriptural use of their money for the support of Church work. The pastor who does not teach his congregation about giving, as it is taught in the Scriptures, and does not urge such giving on the part of his people is neglecting a part of his official duties for which he will be called to give an account on the last day.

HOW should we give? ? God wants His people to give cheerfully and voluntarily, - of their own free-will. In II Corinthians 9:7, St. Paul writes: “*Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.” Our giving for the work of the Church is to be a cheerful and voluntary giving without any grudge in our hearts or feeling of compulsion. Therefore, gifts of money should not be obtained by force or constraint in the Church. The Church must not give orders pertaining to giving - not even so much as the command: “You must give one penny.” It is, moreover, contrary*

to the Word of God to divide the burdens of the congregation among the communicants or among the voting members. The congregation must not lay down a rule as to how much everyone should give, nor should the synod, which is only an advisory body, assess the congregation for a certain set amount. Under the Pope, everything is forced out of the people by the law. The tithing of the Old Testament belong to those things which St. Paul called a yoke for the Children of Israel. But in the New Testament, all collections in the Church and for Church work should be voluntary, free-will offerings in full accordance with the Word of God.

God also wants His people to give richly and generously. In Luke 21:4, the Lord Jesus praises the widow who, of her poverty, “*cast in all the living that she had*”. Likewise, St. Paul, in II Cor. 8:2, praises the liberal gifts of the Macedonians who, though they were very poor, nevertheless, gave richly. Thus, the gifts which we give to the Lord, for the work of the Church, should be truly sacrificial gifts - not gifts which flow from our surplus or from our leftovers. True Christian economy always gives first to the Lord before any other consideration. Such Christian economy should be our goal.

The Scriptures also teach us to give proportionately. God has diversely distributed temporal possessions and wealth. There will always be the rich and the poor among us in this world. Therefore, the Apostle Paul admonishes every Christian to give “*as God hath prospered him*”. (I Cor. 16:2.) The Scriptures also speak of proportionate giving in Deut. 16:17, where we read in regard to the 3 great feasts of the Old Testament: “*Every man shall give as he is able according to the blessing of the Lord thy God.*” And our giving must be done in the right spirit or frame of mind. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 12:8, “*He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity (sincerity).*” There is to be no ulterior motives, no thought of repayment or reward, no desire for vain-glory or praise in true Christian giving.

What, then, is the correct Scriptural motive for the financial sup-

port of Church work? What is the correct Scriptural motive for that giving which, on the basis of the Word of God, we have just briefly outlined above? The right Scriptural motive for giving in general and, likewise, for the financial support of Church work can be found only in the Gospel of salvation by God's grace, for Christ's sake, through, faith. It is the grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus which alone is able rightly to prompt and encourage Christians to obey the command of their heavenly Father also in regard to giving for the work of the Church.

In our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and in His precious work of Redemption we find the perfect example and motive which prompts true Christian giving. St. Paul points the Corinthian Christians to this right motive and example when he tells them in II Corinthians 8:8,9, "*Prove the sincerity of your love. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.*" He, to whom all the wealth of heaven and earth belongs, suffered poverty and want for us. He who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords bore shame and disgrace and persecution for us. He who is the eternal Son of God gave His life into death for us, shedding His blood on the accursed tree of the cross. How precious is that blood of Christ for you and for me? It is infinitely more precious than all the wealth of heaven and earth combined: It alone has the power to cleanse us from our sins and to make us heirs of heaven and eternal life.

When we rightly appreciate that which Christ has done and has given for us, then all that we have and are falls into its proper perspective. We will then realize that God is our gracious and merciful heavenly Father in Christ Jesus: that He who spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, He it is who freely bestows upon us all things both temporal and spiritual. He does it all for the sake of Christ. If it were not for God's mercy in Christ Jesus, this sinful world, and all that is in it, would have been utterly consumed long ago. Thus it is a result of God's favor, through our Savior Jesus Christ, that He has given us all that we possess; that He has given us our bodies and souls, eyes, ears, and all our

members, our reason and all our senses, and still preserves them; also clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all our goods; that He richly and daily provides us with all that we need to support our bodies and lives. We are, therefore, merely the stewards or caretakers of that which God, out of His divine goodness and mercy in Christ Jesus, has given us poor undeserving sinners, and thus we are to use that which God has given to us in accordance with His Word, out of love to our Savior.

The correct Scriptural motive for giving is instilled in our hearts only through the work of the Holy Spirit by means of the Gospel. It is the Holy Ghost who calls us by the Gospel, enlightens us with his gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith. It is that true and saving faith in Jesus, which the Holy Ghost engenders, nourishes, and keeps in our hearts, which shows itself in doing those things which are pleasing to God and in harmony with His Word. It is that faith which, therefore, shows itself in giving freely and willingly for the work of Christ and His Kingdom. Thus, St. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:10, "*We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*"

Our offerings for the financial support of Church work, should, therefore, be thank offerings of love to God for our Creation, Redemption, and Sanctification. We need only to look upon all the wonderful gifts, both temporal and spiritual, which God has given to us according to the 3 Articles of the Apostles' Creed and Luther's beautiful explanations of those 3 Articles which we have learned to know from his Small Catechism, and there we will find the true Scriptural motive for giving both ourselves and our temporal possessions to the Lord. To this end, the Apostle Paul constantly beseeches the Christians, by the grace and mercy of God, to give themselves as living sacrifices to God and to be rich in good works.

What a privilege it is for us Christians to give freely, willingly, and generously for the financial support of Church work! Thus

God uses us to do His work; to serve Him in His Kingdom. Such giving is a glorious testimony for Christ and for the Gospel. It is a mark of the Christian's profession of faith before the world and before his fellow Christians. It is a spiritual thermometer: for willing and generous giving is an indication of a living Christianity, whereas whoever will give nothing for the Kingdom of God is no longer a Christian. How gladly we, who have been blessed with the Full Truth of God's Word, should follow that which the Scriptures teach us in regard to the financial support of Church work to the glory and honor of the Triune God.

This certainly does not exhaust all that could be said, on the basis of Scripture, concerning the financial support of Church work. More points could be added and the various points which have been stressed could be greatly expanded, but what has been said should indeed be sufficient to give us a general idea as to how God wants the financial support of Church work to be carried on. This, then, leads us to the consideration of the second part of our topic, namely, Merchandising in the Churches as a means of the financial support of Church work.

II.

"Merchandising in the Churches" includes any and every type of buying or selling for the purpose of carrying on the work of the Church on the part of a congregation or by groups or societies within the congregation which either bear the name or are in any way under the auspices of the congregation. Not to be included in the expression, "merchandising in the churches", is the buying of certain items on the part of the congregation for its own use from those whose business it is to sell such items, for example, church furniture, communion wine and wafers, paint, building material, and the like. Congregations may also dispose of things which have become unneeded during the course of the years without becoming guilty of merchandising. "Merchandising in the churches", simply stated, is the endeavor to help carry on the work of the church by the means of any kind of buying or selling schemes by any group within the congregation or by the congregation itself.

Some of the many methods of merchandising which are prevalent among various congregations are as follows: (a few of the items mentioned, however, can be carried on in a God-pleasing manner when the element of buying and selling under congregational auspices is removed.) 1. Suppers sold to civic or social groups in the community or to members of the congregation. 2. Bake Sales, usually held in some store or market. 3. Bazaars, Raffles, Auctions, and Carnivals, often held in the church basement or in the school hall. 4. Fair Booths at county and state fairs. 5. Rummage Sales and Paper Sales. 6. The selling of vanilla, cook books, Christmas cards and Christmas seals, and the selling of books for the Publishing House. 7. School lunch programs. 8. The selling of tickets for plays and for other forms of entertainment. 9. Card parties, Bingo, and the like.

Numerous other merchandising schemes may undoubtedly be added to this list, but the question before us is: How can such merchandising in the churches be harmonized with the Scriptural teaching on the financial support of Church work? The answer is simple. The two simply cannot be harmonized. On the basis of the Scriptures, we have pointed out that the financial support of Church work is to be carried on by freewill giving. Such giving automatically excludes selling of any kind. In no instance does the word “give” mean to sell or to expect anything in return. When God plainly tells us to GIVE for the work of the Church, He certainly does not thereby want His Church to be given to merchandising, to buying and selling. It is an important fact to remember that whenever the Lord speaks of the work of the Church, He always speaks of “giving”, never of “merchandising” .

Moreover, that work or business for which the Church is instituted automatically cancels merchandising. The church or congregation which enters upon business ventures or enterprises for which it is not chartered is sailing under false colors and is practicing deceit. The Church has no God-given right to compete with restaurants, bakeries, dry-goods stores, or casinos.

Furthermore, the honor of the Lord is at stake. Whenever a congregation departs from the Word and will of God, the name of

God is profaned among them. In Jeremiah 7:11, God speaks of such a congregation as a “*den of robbers*” because they have robbed Him of His honor. Thus also Jesus speaks of the Temple as a “*den of thieves*” because of those who bought and sold therein. The Savior was vitally concerned about the reputation of His Father’s House, for He said: “*Make not My Father’s house an house of merchandise.*” (John 2:16.) And again He said: “*It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer.*” (Matthew 21:13.) When congregations resort to merchandising schemes, they earn for themselves the reputation of being “money-making churches” or “grafters” and thus they bring derision upon themselves and upon the name of the Lord whom they are to serve.

Merchandising in the churches also stimulates an unscriptural manner and motive for giving in the hearts and minds of the members of the congregation. When they are asked to buy something for the benefit of the congregation, they are no longer truly GIVING, for they are expecting something in return, and the thing which they buy becomes the motive for their giving - no longer the beautiful message of the Gospel.

Merchandising among the outsiders - among the unchurched and among the people of heterodox congregations - with the argument that it affords an opportunity for mission work, is utterly contrary to the Scriptures. It is outright UNIONISM! The financial support of Church work is a duty or obligation which God places only upon His children, never upon the unbelievers. Furthermore, the financial support of Church work is an act of religious work and worship. If we, therefore, ask the heathen or those of a different faith to aid us in this act of religious work and worship, we are sinning against the plain words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 16:17, where we are told to “*mark*” and “*avoid*” them, and we are ignoring II Cor. 6:17, which admonishes us to “*come out from among them and be ye separate. . . and touch not the unclean thing*”.

Dear brethren of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference, where the Doctrine of Justification is correctly taught, applied, and received,

there will be no danger of the wickedness of “merchandising in the churches”. Dr. Francis Pieper has said:

“When we desire to encourage Christian people to lead a life of sanctification and to do good works, then we first of all lift them up into heaven and remind them that through Christ, their Savior, they have graciously received forgiveness of all their sins, yes, heaven itself. Being reminded, of such a great blessing, Christians rejoice exceedingly, and their hearts are filled with thankfulness; they are willing now to give even their very life to their Savior. When we then tell our people that from the first they will not be asked to sacrifice their lives for Christ, - that may have to be done later, - but that for the present the Savior desires to use merely some of their earthly possessions, so that He can make His gracious advent into this world, they will rejoice and eagerly give Him what He needs - and more. Whenever, therefore, we ask our people to give their money to the Lord, we have an occasion to preach the Gospel in its entirety and unconditionally.” And again, Dr. Pieper writes: “When the question of giving our money for the sake of the Gospel confronts us, let us cast a glance at the head crowned with thorns; our gifts will then of themselves assume the right quality and be of the right quantity; we shall give willingly and liberally.”

May God grant us His grace that we of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference may testify boldly for the Full Truth of His Word also in regard to the financial support of Church work against every form of merchandising.

SOLI DEO GLORIA

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Proper Giving

The eternal Son of God gave His life into death for us, shedding His blood on the accursed tree of the cross. How precious is that blood of Christ for you and for me? It is infinitely more precious than all the wealth of heaven and earth combined: It alone has the power to cleanse us from our sins and to make us heirs of heaven and eternal life. When we rightly appreciate that which Christ has done and has given for us, then all that we have and are falls into its proper perspective.

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