

# Publishing Editor's column

**M**Y LOCAL newspaper has a big weekly property supplement, which generally features articles about one or two particularly outstanding properties. Sometimes these properties are vicarages built several hundred years ago and invariably large detached houses in their own grounds and priced at anything up to a million pounds. Each village at one time had one, located near to the church, but it is many years since they have been used by Anglican vicars. They go back to a time when the local vicar was second only to the squire of the local manor in wealth and status. And if that was how the ordinary parish clergy lived, what of the higher-ranking Anglican clergy or the cardinals of Roman Catholicism?

The city where I live has two large cathedrals and many churches, all prized for their architecture and sometimes for internal features such as sculpture and stained glass windows. Though the cathedrals are well-used and much visited, most of the churches are not nowadays. With the exception of the Roman Catholic cathedral they date to medieval times, when much wealth was directed to the church in exchange for assurances of absolution for sins and a quick route through purgatory to eternal bliss. Many more cathedrals can be found elsewhere in Britain and elsewhere of course, with some being famed worldwide, such as Notre Dame in Paris and St Peter's Rome.

The money to give the clergy their high standard of living and the apostate churches their magnificent buildings came from the congregations, mostly the rich, although the poor were expected to pay up too. It is instructive to contrast all this with the first century ecclesia, beginning with its founder, who stated "the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Mt. 8:20). About a billion people are deluded into believing that the pope, living in the magnificence of the Vatican City, is part of a line beginning with the Apostle Peter who once declared "silver and gold have I none" (Acts 3:6). The Apostle Paul, whose name is appropriated for great cathedrals where doctrines are taught which would have been totally foreign to him, preferred to work as a tentmaker rather than be supported by those to whom he brought the Truth for fear of being accused of seeking material gain, declaring, "I have coveted no man's silver or gold" (20:33). In the early days of

the Jerusalem ecclesia, wealthy people sold their lands but not to pay for the building of places to worship in nor to pay salaries to the apostles but to distribute to the poor (4:34,35).

In 1 Timothy 6 the Apostle Paul links desire for material gain with the entry of false doctrine into the ecclesia, writing of "perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness" (v. 5). He charges Timothy to urge "them that are rich in this world" to use their money for the benefit of others, "to do good, to be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous" (vv. 17,18, RSV), not to build places of worship for their glory. "The love of money", he says, "is a root of all kinds of evil" (v. 10, RV) and the truth of this can be seen in the Acts of the Apostles. Consider the following examples:

- Judas stole from the common purse, betrayed his Master for money and committed suicide in the field he purchased (1:18)
- Ananias and Sapphira died through trying to deceive the ecclesia into thinking they were more generous than they actually were (5:1-11)
- Simon thought he could buy the ability to bestow the Spirit gifts and make money from it (8:18-24)
- A poor deranged girl at Philippi was exploited for material gain by her masters who caused Paul and Silas to be thrown into gaol when curing her brought an end to their means of wealth (16:16-23)
- The craftsmen of Ephesus rioted when the spread of the Gospel diminished their gains from idol worship (19:24-29).

It is true that much money was spent on the temple and tabernacle of old, and the priests and Levites were supported by the rest of the nation of Israel. This befitted a nation that was effectively a theocracy and will, it seems, apply in the Kingdom. In the present age, when believers are a small and scattered minority, magnificent buildings and paid leaders are associated with corrupt religion. Use of our money in the service of the Truth is important; even more important is to devote our time, energy and abilities in the service of the Truth, recognising that "the riches of the glory of [God's] inheritance in the saints" (Eph. 1:18) far exceeds the riches of this world.

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