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Stewardship
Practices

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6833 W
MADISON
WISCONSIN 53092

STEWARDSHIP
OFFICE

E. B. Froehlich

THE ABUSE OF STEWARDSHIP PRACTICES

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Reluctantly I deliver this piece of goods to you. Why? What you are to hear today has been said over and over again--yesterday, day before, and the day before that. It's all old stuff and can hardly capture the interest of anyone who has heard it before in former essays treating the age-old matter of stewardship. And yet it must be treated and discussed because the Lord Himself treats it so richly in Holy Scriptures.

There will be this difference, however, in this treatment of this subject of Stewardship that, whereas others have treated it mainly as to its *proper* practice, today's remarks are directed especially to the *improper* practice of it. This directs us then to this essay assigned by the Committee.

ABUSES OF STEWARDSHIP PRACTICES

"American Protestants are getting concerned about the prevalence of 'commercialism' in church fund raising activities. . . Thousands of Protestant church bazaars, carnivals, summer fairs were slightly more respectable than Las Vegas."

Now, don't credit me with that observation, true as it may be, and though I wish I could have been the first to say it. The statement quoted above was made by the Christian Century magazine. This same publication goes on--"The practice of wringing (spelled with a "w" as in "clothes wringer") advertising dollars from merchants, particularly from those who are not members of the church in question, to finance church bulletins and magazines and dedication folders is also ripe for reform. Let's call it what it is--Extortion."

When a pastor is new at a place some congregation member may ask him, "What do you think of church

diners, bake sales, bazaars, etc?" Well, I believe that that congregation should have a lot of dinners, suppers, bake sales, bake loads of pies, torts, especially Schaum Torts, etc. And then all members should come together and all eat to their heart's content, everybody have a good sociable time and go home happy after such fine visit with fellow-members. And before they go home appoint another committee to arrange for the next such event in the not too distant future.

However, if someone asks me what I think of dinners, suppers, bake sales, bazaars *to make money for the church*--well, actually, what difference does it make what I think, or any pastor thinks, or any member? The question to be uppermost in the mind of any church member should be, "What does the Lord think? What does He think of these practices when used to get church bills paid?" After all, the pastor's opinion could be right, but it could also be wrong. The source of genuine authority must always be Scripture itself.

If we have anything to introduce into our church we feel much better about it if we have a *Bible precedent* for it, rather than bring it in just because it can satisfy our selfish nature and because others have done it right along for so many years.

I don't know how far back this practice goes to raise money for the church through church dinners, bake sales, bazaars, etc. But I'm quite sure that you won't find it mentioned in any of Apostle Paul's letters or in those of any other Apostle. If there were but one single fund-raising dinner or chili supper or the like which Paul had the congregation at Corinth put on, or at Galatia, Philippi or others; or if any of the other Apostles such as Peter, James, John had done so we might use their procedure as a precedent or an alibi. But even if they had done so, that still wouldn't mean that it had the sanction of the Lord, not in the face of other Scripture passages which make it quite clear what methods are to be used in raising money for the church.

Raising money for the church through the means mentioned show that stingy streak that is in every one of us. We're always looking for some way whereby we can get something for what we give even when giving it to the church, or when we *think* we're giving it to the church. When I buy a church-sponsored dinner or the like can I call that *giving* something to the church? I'm buying, I'm receiving something for that \$1.50, I'm not *donating* that \$1.50. And it's *donating* that the Lord is looking for. I'm getting a full stomach out of it too--out of my stingy streak and attitude, and out of my lopsided and warped view of stewardship. How can I be practicing genuine stewardship when I expect something in return for my money? Hasn't the Lord made it clear enough yet with His--"*Freelily ye have received, freely give!*"?

And when I put on a church dinner, etc., invite my neighbors of the surrounding area, when I publicize this affair in the local newspaper and through circulars, placards, posters in the stores and shops, then I can hardly be that naive as to suppose the readers of my ads and the eaters of my baked ham are under the happy delusion that I want them here for mere social purposes. Neither are they that gullible as they fill their gullet. They know that Bethany Lutheran of Hustisford is out to get their \$1.50. Oh no, it's not advertised that way. But if we can get enough of those one-fifties we can so much faster pay for that nice new all-purpose room, and for that nice new kitchen equipment of that nice new school.

Without question those who come to eat my tasty ham dinner, or chilli at the church have but one thing in mind--enjoy a palatable meal. (And I know that our ladies know exceptionally well how to prepare one, as do your ladies know how also.) Most likely most of my guests don't care how I raise money for my church just as long as they get *the* money's worth in what they buy, and they too most likely feel there's no easier way and more painless way than by selling through these church affairs.

But if any one of them would put just a little thought to it he'd have to arrive at this conclusion, "Well now, come to think of it, isn't it a bit cheap for Bethany Lutheran to try to pay for their bills and to keep their congregation going by selling cake, pie, ham, chilli? Why, you'd think that they'd have enough love for their church that they wouldn't have to depend on other congregations, even such as Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, or even on scoffers, unbelievers to supply them with a little extra cash. Yesser, things must be looking pretty rough over there in Bethany at Hustisford that we must all come over to give them a little boost. I just wonder what's wrong with those people that they can't make it on their own. Don't know whether I'd really care to be a member there, at that."

In fact that's the experience one pastor had somewhat similar to this as he called on a prospective member. Before joining his church this family wanted this question cleared up--"Do you have money-making schemes in your church?" They didn't care to have repeat performances of former experiences in their church which they were now leaving. They were fed up with feeding up.

"Would you mind, Pastor, if we put a poster in your church or in your school to advertise a pancake supper at our church?" This question is being put to me right at this very moment of writing. A lady from a neighboring congregation (not Wisconsin Synod) came to me with this question.

If only I didn't like pancakes so well. Hmmm, seems to me that I must mention also pancake suppers in this paper too, what?

But isn't it true, there is that certain love lacking for our church, for our Lord, if we can't support our own beloved congregation, and feel that every "Jude, Türk und Hottentot" must be invited to buy a meal or apron, or a couple pillow cases to keep us out of the red?

And just what was that figure that Bethany Lutheran pays in taxes every year on its buildings and property which she uses to sell all these things? And how much does she pay for her annual license fee to run a restaurant and eat shop? *Nothing?* Well, now, isn't that just dandy! That restaurant and eat shop down the street there, how much do they pay? They don't pay anything then either, do they? Oh no, I'll bet not! Only an extra fine besides the fees if they tried to sell without.

But Bethany Lutheran--she's special, what? Special *meals!* What right has she, paying no taxes, no fees-- what right to compete with legal establishments who *must* pay taxes and fees, and who must depend on this type of income to keep alive? Perhaps we should even boycott the restaurant owner if he and his family don't come to eat our ham dinner, or pancakes, or buy an apron to serve his own meals with, hah?

Raising money for the church through such questionable means is never going to train our people in genuine stewardship. Bringing their rooster, pie, cake to church, and then buying a ticket for the meal--this to many will constitute their contribution to the church for the year. And they actually feel they have given to the church. Oh, indeed they have. But was it with the spirit of really doing something for the Savior out of love and appreciation of those great gifts of forgiveness, peace, comfort, everlasting life won through the Savior's death? Or was it with the idea of getting something again in return for what he had given?

Furthermore, the Savior can quite easily be cheated out of His due share because of such money-making schemes. As a member of Bethany I am asked to donate various kinds of food and supplies to these affairs. Then I go to the dinner, bazaar, etc., buy a ticket for the meal. Naturally, the ladies are expecting me to buy a doily or pillow case, etc., at the bazaar. What am I doing? Paying for something, buying back

what I've already given, actually paying twice--good Washington economy deluxe. Then when Sunday morning comes I may have only dribblings to put into my weekly envelope. I may even skip the mission compartment altogether. After all, I did give it to the church, you know, last Friday night at that dinner, bazaar. But I've forgotten that I'm robbing my Savior of His just due. And what I gave under the circumstances might have been given with the wrong motive and spirit, and thus could have been tainted.

And do you know that a church member may even abuse this abuse of money-making schemes in regard to his own church-going? One particular family had been absent from church services too long. The pastor admonished them. Can you guess the reply? "Why Pastor, we *came!* We've attended every affair at this church all these years!" Could this fellow have thought that by attending the affairs of the church, supporting the church by buying a ticket to the dinner on earth--that this was going to be the ticket to that dinner which the Savior says He has prepared for us in *heaven?* Poor deluded fellow--full stomach, but empty head, empty heart, empty soul, empty place in heaven.

But suppose that it isn't the congregation as a whole that's putting on all these affairs. Usually it's the Ladies' Aid, isn't it? Yes, but who's the Ladies' Aid? Every Ladies' Aid I know has always been a bona fide (and sometimes at these dinners bona picking) organization of that respective congregation. And whatever goes into the treasury of the Ladies' Aid eventually trickles into the *congregational* treasury, that is, the Ladies' Aid is so often financing this or that project. And once the congregation has the Ladies' Aid paying some of these bills it's so nice to keep on going to Ladies' Aid Piggy Bank for lots of other things. And if for some reason the Ladies that year didn't make any money for the church (could be that they didn't put on a dinner, etc., because they had gotten into each other's hair the last time because some thought others hadn't done enough, or

because of some snooty remark by one or the other?)-- well, since the Ladies did nothing this one year the wail goes up, "Well, what's the matter with the Ladies' Aid? They haven't done anything for our congregation for a while!" Or as one president of a congregation put it one time, "You've really got to give our Ladies credit. They've done a lot for us. But it seems to me they could've done better." Now, there's what you must call a real he-man for stewardship, not? One who has an ample share of hee hees and haw haws coming for his brilliant understanding of genuine stewardship! It's time for such a fellow to become a bit more detached from mamma's apron strings (especially from those sold at the bazaar) and grow up in genuine stewardship, not?

Once we get into the rut of dinner-, supper-, bake sale-, bazaar-stewardship for the church it's not so easy to roll out. Perhaps we simply have to *jetk* ourselves out. To suppose that you just can't get that new carpeting, or new decorating job paid for except through these money-making schemas--well, then listen to what one pastor told me about one certain congregation that had these same fears, unfounded fears, depending on that greasy income from dinners, etc. This congregation finally jerked itself loose from the shackles of stomach stewardship and quite unceremoniously at that, to give the *Lord's* method a chance. Here is a three-year comparison--three years through money-making machinery and three years of straight-from-the-heart and straight-from-the-pocket-giving--

WKLly OFFERINGS	PLATE CASH	SYNOD	LOCAL BLDG. FD.
1. \$2,020.00	1. \$ 633.00	1. \$ 637.00	1. \$1,774.00
2. \$4,812.00	2. \$1,227.00	2. \$1,797.00	2. \$3,108.00

You will note that in every category the amount was almost doubled, and for Synod almost tripled. Pretty hard to argue against such glowing evidence with the plaintive cry and howl, "We can't raise money, not *enough* money, except through ham, beef, cake, pillow-cases, nightgowns, etc.!"

But, then, what about those organizations in your town which put on suppers, etc., to raise money for *the* treasury, such as Lion's Club, Kiwanis, American Legion? If the American Legion, Lion's Club, 4-H, Local High School Class want to put on a ham dinner, chili supper, ice cream social to raise money for their treasury, more power to 'em.

And if Bethany Lutheran of Hustisford wants to put on a ham dinner, chili supper, ice cream social, etc.-- again, I say, "All power to 'em." To fill an empty treasury? Never! But to fill an empty stomach, and to fill any longing of members to get together for Christian sociability and acquaintance? Then go ahead!

Note well, Lion's Club, American Legion, 4-H, etc., are not the Church. Bethany Lutheran *is!* For this reason Bethany Lutheran has an altogether higher purpose on earth than to bake pancakes and sell aprons, etc. The world round about her is to gather from her activities that our chief purpose on earth is to carry out that all-inclusive command of her Savior and Director, "Take care of your own souls and then those of the rest of all humanity." And to support this work, which includes also the upkeep of your local church property, can't you picture this risen Lord there on Mount of Olives on the day of His ascension slowly rising from the ground and with arms uplifted, open hands held over his astounded group, saying in parting, "My dear Christian friends, I'm sending you out to conquer the world. It's going to be a rough one; going to take a lot of money too. But if you at any time are up against it, well, you can always put on a chicken dinner, or so, or a bazaar. And in this way you can get something out of those whom you are to win by selling them a few tickets too. Let them all help along, you know."

He should speak like that? He who took that shameful spitting in the face before Caiphas, that bruising from fists, that mauling, flesh-tearing scourging from Pilate, those excruciatingly painful

nails through hands and feet; hanging there in the Palestine sun, tortured by parched lips and mouth in an unbearable thirst, tortured by the forsakenness of His God, and accordingly by the torments of hell because of our sins and guilt; He who set us absolutely and fully free from all this torture through His own; He who has given us this body and life and has been sustaining it ever since--should this sort of Lord now allow room for doubt as to His helping us to support His work whether local or universal, and to do it adequately according to His prescribed methods? He has given us a big book of instruction, thousands of verses. But not in a single one will you find any suggestion to do it through money-making schemes. All He says in various ways, and frequently, is "Freely ye have received, freely give." "Give, and it shall be given unto you." "It is better to give than to receive." He promised, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Do I believe all this? When I feel that I must raise money by dinners, etc., I'm saying, "I don't believe it." Who's right?

Let's give God's Word the glory that it deserves by trusting that it has power to change our distrustful hearts and to renew our minds that we go all-out with our freewill offerings, fully confident that this Lord will bless our efforts. Let's quit riding the square wheels of these money-making wagons; they're too bumpy, even though it looks like smoother riding. The smooth riding is that which we have on the perfectly shaped wheel of God's Word with its perfect instructions and suggestions. Just give it a *dance* to show its power!

And this reminds of that incident which some of you must have heard before. A lady had written to Horace Greeley, late editor of the Chicago Tribune--"Our church is in distressing financial straits. We've tried every money-making device we can think of--fairs, strawberry festival, oyster suppers, donkey party, turkey banquets, Japanese weddings, poverty sociables, mock weddings, grab-bags, box sociables, necktie

sociables. Mr. Greeley, would you be so kind as to suggest some device to keep our struggling church from disbanding?" Mr. Greeley wrote a most elaborate reply, just two words--"Try Religion!"

Try Religion! Do we think it's worth trying? All these money-making schemes--why, do you know that we are mere copycats? We say the *sectarian* churches do it and thought it a great idea. We forgot that *they* had forgotten to try *religion*. Did we forget to try religion? Some of these sects have discarded this practice of money-making schemes as though it were some old worn-out shoe or shirt. We have the pure Gospel. Now, are we, with all the richly appealing pointers of this Gospel at our command,--are we going to put on or keep on wearing these old rags, this junk, thrown out into the trash can by some of these sectarians who have learned to know better by sad experience? Our Lord never meant that we should be *beggars*. Then let's not *play* the part either! Away with the rags of *man's* schemes. We are kings in the King's kingdom! We have *royal* clothes to wear. *Wear* them!

In His Service and yours,
E. B. Froehlich
Bethany Church, Hustisford, Wisconsin

NOTE: Bethany was used in the essay only to supply a name. Fortunately, (at least now yet) she's not become a victim to dinners, etc., for money-making. E.B.F.

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Erhalt uns, Herr, dein Erbe,
Dein wertes Heiligtum,
Zerreib, zerschmeiß, verderbe,
Was wider deinen Ruhm.
Laß dein Gesetz uns führen,
Gönn uns dein Himmelbrot,
Laß deinen Schmuck uns zieren,
Heil uns durch deinen Tod. A. Gryphius.