

Albert BARNETT

Religion and Church--Great Balance-Wheel of Civilization

RELIGION AND CHURCH together constitute one of the two great balance-wheels of civilization—the other, of course, being womanhood, for it is the woman, as wife and help-mate, who has elevated man — as far as he has come—from the ignorance and brutalities of the stone-age.

Scanning the daily press, with its record of murders, rapes, thievery and almost all forms of violence with supposedly civilized nations grasping at each other's throats with mailed fists and for what, no one really knows, the spectacle, to say the least, is disconcerting and leaves much to be explained.

You have probably often wondered when will the peoples of all races, creeds and nationality groups get together, become reconciled and settle their grievances — fancied or real — over the counsel table, instead of on the battlefield.

But, back to religion and church worship. 'To each his own,' doubtless explains the present-day places of worship, from the 7,000 store-front churches in Chicago to the imposing edifices of marble and stone in all sections of the city, and topped by the multi-million dollar Baha'i Temple in Wilmette, Ill.

The modern church — from the lowest to the highest — is big business, doubtless ranking — if statistics were available — among the top ten of U. S. industry. Methods used for raising money run the gamut of all known devices, from collections, direct appeal, tithing, special assessments, rallies, raffles, keno parties and other means, some strangely akin to the banditry of the infamous Jesse James.

Some churches, it is reliably reported, have as high as FOUR COLLECTIONS at a Sunday morning service, and in one 'temple,' known to many Chicagoans, the 'take' assumes startling proportions.

There should be some common ground on which pastors and communicants can meet. A person's religion should be gauged by his FAITH, not his POCKET-BOOK. The great 'sawdust-trail' evangelist Billy Sunday, once said, "Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than going to a garage makes you an automobile."

Here's a case in point, showing how religious people of 'the other race' operate. It comes in the form of a release from the Rural Church Department of Drew Seminary, Madison, New Jersey, and states:

"The department has made a study of labor gifts to the church.

For example, some churches buy articles and resell them in order to raise extra money for their church. The result of this study shows the average church that uses this method makes \$65 a year on such sales. The average person who goes out selling these articles turns in \$3.79 to his church.

"This particular project rates minus 21 in social values, that is, it does more harm than good. A few comments by the pastors of these churches indicated that instead of earning \$65, it does more than \$65 worth of harm.

"It cheapens the Gospel," said a New York pastor.

"They reduce the church to beggary, to commercialism, money, money, always money!" states a pastor from Washington.

"The study shows that labor given, not to earn money, but to save money for the church by improving the church and parsonage property such as painting the church, building sidewalks, or beautifying the church grounds has many social values and yields excellent financial returns.

In a recent issue of the Chicago Defender, Robert Johnson, prominent Baptist layman and business man, authored a piece in which he plainly questioned the financial operations of some 'out-law' churches. Fred Poindexter, astute observer, who 'reads between the lines,' endorses Brother Johnson's stand, writes as follows:

"Mr. Robert Johnson, a trustee and Sunday School teacher at Ebenezer Baptist church, spoke the truth when he said that most churches have become money-raising organizations. May I add that eventually it will be proved that most of our ministers are nothing but super-confidence men?

"I personally know many ministers who have thousands of dollars in the bank and own a lot of real estate, but they are still begging for more money for their own selfish interests.

"Some of the people from whom they are begging are hardly able to pay their grocery bills and rent. There should be a law to punish these false pretenders. I welcome criticism so I can prove what I have said to the public."

There you have the pro and con of an interesting situation and you doubtless would like to know the truth. What is your reaction? You might even agree with Whately: "Every one wishes to have truth on his side, but it is not every one that sincerely wishes to be on the side of truth."