

OUR TRIVIALITY - A WEAPON FOR EVIL

How Nice Things Become Pretty Evil

Introduction

If you want to sell something, and you cannot - or will not - appeal directly to sex or horror, there is always a 'nice' alternative at the opposite extreme.

It is deceptively appealing - and pretty powerful. It is **prettiness**.

Because it is not obviously 'bad', Christians need to discern how its unreality, distortion, sentimentality and half-truth -

- is incompatible with Scripture
- can undermine the Lordship of Jesus Christ
- can weaken the proclamation of the gospel
- confuse the believer

An Undermining Strategy

In Hitler's day the 23rd Psalm in German spoke of the Fuhrer being one's shepherd. Hitler was 'Lord'. The British reaction to Hitler's power and rule was to undermine him by making him trivial. It is of immense spiritual importance to disclose this strategy.

Churchill, for instance, denied Hitler his lordship and dubbed him *Corporal* Hitler. Charlie Chaplin, in his film *The Great Dictator*, undermined Hitler's position and power by ridiculing him as 'Adenoid Hynkel' - for whom a Jewish barber is mistaken. Cartoonists energetically led the movement to undermine Hitler by invariably linking him with the trivial.

The devil uses the same tactic to undermine the lordship of Christ. If we allow Jesus to be made trivial, or mentally to be linked with the unreal, then we're on the devil's side demoting Christ from King to corporal. Such, alas, is happening; promoted by Christians for Christians. I'll explain, but first I must introduce you to Bambiology.

'Bambiology'

'Bambiology' provides an escape from reality. I've coined the name from Walt Disney's Bambi, the wide-eyed baby deer. Within Bambiology are to be found Father Christmas, Rudolf the red-nosed reindeer, the junk-art of many chocolate boxes, the sentimental guff of 'religious' cards, doe-eyed children, pink animals and teddy bears.

Such 'art', like pornography, is extremely powerful. Our eyes love it. It titillates the senses. It gives instant pleasure. It appeals to our deep desire to escape the pain of reality. It is shallow, empty, misleading and unreal.

Firms know that Bambiology appeals, so much is marketed accordingly. The television

washing-powder adverts suffer from a smokescreen of Bambiology. Detergents with magical powers are used by beautiful smiling mums in super-clean kitchens surrounded by their equally super-clean families with their beautiful or handsome tanned faces, sparkling eyes and flashing smiles.

Bambiology takes just the surface of God's world, super-cleans and super-tidies it, cuts out all dirt and pain, and tricks us into believing that what we see is real. Bambiology is the enemy of truth.

Teddy Bears and Twee-ology

Today Christian book markers, calendars, cassettes, videos, devotional books, posters, gifts and even Bibles are being produced with the instant trivia of Bambiology to sell them. What appears 'nice' and 'pretty' is in fact 'nasty' and 'pernicious'. When Jesus becomes linked with the trivial we undermine his lordship and his kingdom, however good our intentions in peddling unreality and untruth.

How many Christian shops, stalls, centres and homes unthinkingly display pictures of sub-scriptural 'verses' backed up by Bambiology pictures of pandas, pussy-cats or dry-cleaned nature ?

Christians peddle and buy such things because they are 'nice' and 'pretty'. They are blind-spots in their discernment. Such 'art' is like candyfloss - instant sugar; it cannot nourish us but weakens our tastebuds for what we need, what is good and what is wholesome.

We must avoid the instant and sensual titillation of 'prettiness', and not confuse it with beauty, which is true and lasting. Mere prettiness replaces theo-ology by twee-ology. As the word itself indicates, that which is 'charming' is likely to have the power to *charm* us.

Self-styled 'biblical Christians' have often readily accused others of departures from Scripture. Yet today there are countless Bible-loving individuals and groups who promote Christian goods whose message is quite contrary to Scripture.

The Bible speaks of reality, drama, conflict, poverty, pain, miracle, forgiveness, passion, crucifixion, resurrection, martyrdom, victory, and of dynamic forces that can turn the world upside-down.

The keynote of Scripture is *reality*: God is real, has entered our real life, suffered for us, and invites us to share with him the everlasting reality of Christ's kingdom. In contrast, the whole world order is something passing and of lesser reality. The central symbol of the Christian faith is the Cross. Our familiarity with it must not blind us to the fact that it is the most realistically cruel symbol of reality that exists.

Bambiology denies all this. It is another world - not ours. It abhors the real, shuns pain, denies the truth, and like a drug offers temporary escape.

What About Children?

Some might think that Bambiology has a place in our initial presentation of the gospel to children. They are sadly mistaken. If Jesus is initially linked with the unreal, when children put aside the unreal for real life, the Jesus Christ will be laid aside together with Father Christmas, the tooth fairy and the baby-carrying stork.

It is bad policy to teach something to children that they will later have to unlearn and replace. If we acknowledge that the Jesus we first presented them was not true, what basis have they for trusting us the second time round? If they should take no notice when we make Jesus trivial, will they take notice when we then proclaim him Lord?

No youngster would give their life to Father Christmas or sacrifice it for him. What thinking child would give their life to Jesus Christ if the Saviour and Santa Claus had been presented together in the same way? They are worlds apart and must be kept so.

Often twee-ology is presented to children by parents who wish to escape the difficulties of exposing them to reality. Children love reality and drama, they will lap up the reality of Scripture's narratives if adults' fears do not shield them from 'the real thing'.

What Can We Do?

- Discern carefully between that which is simple and that which is trivial. Simple things can mediate profound truth. There is a green hill far away is probably our finest hymn. It is scriptural reality expressed simply. That is the opposite of Bambiology which uses simplicity to avoid reality.
- Dwell on Scripture, its truths and stories, and then look again at your 'Christian' goodies and gifts and their presentation and packaging. Put aside your instant response to their prettiness. Is their style such that they lead you into the truth or away from it? Do they flow in harmony with Scripture and the spirit of Jesus? Would our Lord, Paul, Mary or Peter be enriched and strengthened in owning them? Is their world and the world of Scripture one and the same?
- If, with your physical and spiritual eyes open (acknowledging their attraction), you feel in your spirit that they are visual candy-floss, shallow, superficial, anaemic, unreal or trivial - throw them away.
- If your local Christian bookshop peddles the things of the real Christ amid such unreality, explain that to associate Jesus Christ with the trivial is to undermine his lordship and his kingdom. (If you can find nothing better, bid them read this article.)

Conclusion

The work of the Holy Spirit is to lead us *into all truth*. What I have called Bambiology deliberately leads us *away from all truth*. It is best left to secular society to wallow in when it wishes to escape. 'Charm is deceptive'

[Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Proverbs 31:30]

When 'Bambiology' is linked with Christian goods it undermines the Incarnation; it usurps the lordship of Jesus Christ; it is incompatible with Scripture; it weakens the proclamation of the gospel; it confuses the believer, and it runs counter to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

For this last fact alone, those in renewal ought to be foremost in ridding the church of this pretty but pernicious evil.