

# HUSH MONEY

What May be Rockefeller's  
Motives for Church  
Contributions

From The Commoner, April 14, 1905

The following letter, written for the Homiletic Review, in response to a request for an opinion upon the subject, is reproduced in The Commoner because of the current interest in the matter discussed.

Editor Homiletic Review, New York City:

Dear Sir: In response to your request for an opinion on the subject of gifts, like that proposed by Mr. Rockefeller to the American Board of Foreign Missions, I beg to say that the subject is one of exceeding importance and one upon the right decision of which much depends. Rev. Washington Gladden of Columbus, Ohio, has very forcefully presented several of the objections which may be urged to the acceptance of such a gift, and Dr. Epiphanius Wilson has, so far as I have seen, presented the most extreme view on the other side. There are several distinctions to be drawn in the consideration of the subject.

First—We should distinguish between the acceptance of money from a penitent wrong-doer and the acceptance of money from one who is not only not penitent but persistent in his course, and to all appearances denies that he is guilty of wrongdoing. We must also distinguish between the acceptance of gifts from those who are dead, and therefore no longer personally interested, and the acceptance of gifts from those who are alive and who may have a selfish purpose to serve. We may also draw a distinction between contributions that are made in such a way as to raise no obligation in return, and those which place the receiver under obligation to the donor. For instance, there would scarcely be a dispute as to the wisdom of accepting a gift from one who brought it to the church as a result of the working of his own conscience and because it was impossible to return the money to the ones from whom he had taken it. In such a case the gift would be accepted and applied to some good use, but the minister accepting the same would not only be free to condemn the methods by which the money was accumulated, but could use the incident as an argument against the accumulation of money in such a way by others.

The acceptance of a bequest after the death of the donor might be justified even though the money was acquired in a way that the church would not be willing to defend, although in this case there might be some doubt as to the wisdom of accepting, because of the encouragement that the church's action might give to others still living and engaged in accumulating money in the same way.

If one attending a church deposits money in the contribution box, his identity being unknown, his contribution imposes no obligation upon the church, and there would be no disposition to inquire into the source from which it came. If, however, the money came from one in regular attendance upon the church and came in such an amount as to make the minister hesitate about condemning the source from which it came or the occupation by which it was accumulated, a question would be raised as to the wisdom of accepting it.

Among the things to be considered in deciding this question are, first, the effect that the acceptance of the gift would have upon the donor; second, the effect that the acceptance of the gift would have upon the donee; and, third, the effect

that the acceptance of the gift would have upon the public.

We have a concrete case in the Rockefeller gift, and this will serve as a better illustration than any imaginary gift. Here is a gift from a man who is not only not penitent but, on the contrary, quite boastful of the benevolence of his business methods. He does not come with conscience money but poses as a public benefactor and as a representative of an industrial system. He is not dead but very much alive, and his gift, instead of being presented through the contribution box as if from "an unknown friend" is offered at the front of the stage before the footlights, and with his name boldly written on a card, and the card firmly attached to the bouquet. The acceptance of his gift by a prominent religious association so far from hastening repentance, would naturally strengthen him in his conviction that he is doing the Lord's service not only in his methods of distribution but in his methods of accumulation. Can a church organization, dedicated to christianity and teaching the doctrine of brotherhood and brotherly love, afford to put itself in the position of encouraging a corporation so unbrotherly and so destitute of love, compassion and pity, as the Standard Oil trust has shown itself to be? If Mr. Rockefeller were simply a stockholder who had grown rich by the methods of the company, without personal responsibility for its management, the question might present a little different aspect, but even then we could not shut our eyes to the responsibility of a man who would voluntarily and continuously accept the benefits of wrong doing.

But even more important than the influence exerted upon Mr. Rockefeller is the influence exerted upon the church. Can a church which accepts money from Mr. Rockefeller take an active part in condemning the methods employed by Mr. Rockefeller? Whether the gift is intended as "hush money" or not, does it not operate as such? A man who was recently asked for an opinion on the Rockefeller donation, hesitated whether he should give it or not, because some of the benevolent enterprises with which he was connected received substantial aid from an official of a great trust. He expressed himself as in doubt whether he should express an opinion upon the subject, and declared that it was the first time that it had ever occurred to him that the receipt of money from such a source influenced his own action. And yet he admitted that he recognized that to all intents and purposes gifts from an officer of a trust had on him somewhat the effect of hush money, because he did not feel free to criticize the methods employed by the Standard Oil company.

If christianity is going to do the work that the Master laid out for His church it must apply christian principles to everyday life, and Christ's gospel applied to everyday life is condensed into the commandment "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." The church cannot afford to proclaim this doctrine to the world and then shrink from the discussion of the violations of it. Man's relation to his God is a personal relation and one which the outsider ordinarily finds it difficult to investigate, but we have Bible authority for the statement that man's conduct toward his brother furnishes the surest test of man's relations with his Maker. In fact, the Bible speaks very positively upon this subject and declares that a man is a liar if he asserts that he loves his God and

yet hates his brother. The methods by which men prove their hatred of their brother are many and various, and probably no man of the present day has shown his hatred of his brother in more ways than Mr. Rockefeller. Is not the church likely to be hindered in its work of restoring justice and inaugurating an era of brotherhood by reliance upon gifts from men who have a large pecuniary interest in silencing the church's protest?

Neither can the church ignore the influence which its action may have upon public opinion. The church lives in the world and the world is prone to judge christianity by the conduct of those who profess it. If a church accepts money from a notorious offender against morality, and if the church after accepting the money so acts as to raise the suspicion that the receipt of the money influences the conduct of the church toward wrong doing, will not many outside of the church doubt the good faith of the church? Will it not be a cause of offense to many? Is not a divergence between profession and performance the most severe charge that can be brought against either individual or church?

Mr. Rogers, one of the controlling spirits of the Standard Oil company, virtually admits that the business was formerly aided by secret rebates, and the government is now investigating charges brought against the Standard Oil company for recent violations of the law. The anti-trust laws passed by various states indicate the feeling that there is among the people. If the object of the church is the regeneration of the world, and through this regeneration the establishment of love and peace in the place of selfishness and conflict, can it consistently form a partnership with trust magnates? Until the church has some maxim from higher authority it can afford to conform to the doctrine expressed in the declaration "if eating meat maketh my brother to offend, I will eat no meat."

It is hardly worth while to consider the argument that the church has no right to reject money offered to it. It would put the church in a pitiful position if it were so helpless that it could be made a partner in wrong doing without its power to refuse. But if any preacher is afraid that he will incur responsibility by refusing to accept Mr. Rockefeller's gifts, let him devote himself to Rockefeller, and he will not have any Rockefeller the denunciation of the methods employed by Mr. money offered to him. Let him preach the gospel of the One who, instead of attempting to absorb the wealth of others, gave Himself to the world and went about doing good, and he will never be put to the test, for the men who make millions by exploitation and then give a tithe of their plunderings to church or charity are not likely to embarrass with their gifts those who cry out and spare not. Elijah never had to ponder whether he should receive gifts from Ahab, for the truth which he proclaimed made Ahab his bitter enemy.

From every standpoint the acceptance of the Rockefeller money would seem to be unwise, while its refusal would bring to him, as he has never had brought to him before, the consciousness of his iniquities. The rejection of the gift would also leave the church free to preach a religion unadulterated by commercialism, and would go far to convince the public that the spirit of the meek and lowly Nazarene inspires today those who at the communion table recall His broken body and His blood.

W. J. BRYAN.

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## THE FIFTH NIGHT CLUB

The Members Have a Hot Discussion Over Populist Principles

That neat little populist magazine, The Ohio Liberty Bell, 36 Garfield Place, Cincinnati, Ohio, fifty cents a year, is at hand again. It has what purports to be the proceedings of the Fifth Night club. The thing is so good The Independent prints it in full.

March Meeting.—Subject: National Banks. In part, the paper asserted: "National banks were not organized upon the mature conclusions that their workings would be a benefit to the nation, but during the civil war the nation was in desperate need of funds,

and, in order that it might borrow the entire banking capital of the country, the national banks were created with a preference in the matter of taxation, which forced all banks then existing to become national banks and purchase government bonds as the basis on which to do business—practically a forced loan by the government. As a salve to heal the hurt of said forced loan, they were given many privileges, and these have since been greatly increased. Let us take a bank with a million dollar capital and see what are its profits and the sources thereof: First, it invests its capital of a million dollars in government bonds which, we will say, pay two per cent, and depositing these with the treasury it gets a million dollars in bank notes which it lends to its customers on short time, taking out the interest in advance, so that at the end of the year it amounts to at least ten per cent on its capital—total to date, twelve per cent—then, also, it receives deposits, and a bank with that capital should have deposits of at least four million dollars, experience having shown that a bank may with safety make short loans of at least 75 per cent of its deposits, so it will have three millions to lend and, lending in the same way as its own funds would realize an amount which would be thirty per cent on its capital of one million dollars, total to date—forty-two per cent. This, all will say, is a very good profit, but the financial vulture sees other feed. The United States government levies taxes, generally, in excess of its needs and when the money produced by these taxes has piled up until the government no longer has storage room for it, it selects favored national banks as gov-

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