

# To A Christian, What Does Harvest Mean?

ONE of the greatest periods in the history of the world is that parabolically referred to by Jesus Christ as HARVEST. And it is in the context of that parable of our Saviour, which has relation to the gathering of the sheep of God into His Organisation, that harvest is of significance to true Christians. But the pity of it is that, today, some people who profess to be the disciples of Christ have redefined harvest in tendentious terms of commercialism in the name of God.

Harvest means the reaping in of grain or other farm products; or the season for doing this. It is used both literally and figuratively in the Scripture.

Many people have been asking to know why the God's Kingdom Society does not hold harvest thanksgiving services as some churches do and whether it is commanded in the Holy Bible that harvest should be observed by Christians.

Without mincing words and without fear of criticism we must say that harvest festival is not a Christian institution neither are Christians commanded to celebrate it. That apart, the way the churches observe it is very unscriptural. There is nothing wrong in devising ways and means of making collections for the upkeep of a church organization but this must be done without the appearance of sin and must be in accordance with the Scriptures as ordained by God.

In certain church organizations, harvest is observed annually as a church festival during which money, flowers and fruits are brought to church services as thank-offering. Harvest festival is regarded as an occasion for raising of funds for church denominations. Special envelopes are printed and given out to members and non-members to solicit for donations. Such envelopes are also sent to the known wives of their polygamous members whom they do not allow to participate in the holy communion. In view of their tendency to get much money, bazaars are commonly organized to form part of the celebrations. Goods are sold at grossly excessive prices. For example, a tuber of yam costing about three shillings may be offered for sale at an unduly high prices.

The pastors or catechists or some other prominent church-men often act as salesmen on such occasions. They describe the goods being sold as having special blessing of heaven so that they are worth more than any amount of money anyone can offer for them. It is usually a time the rich make a parade of their wealth because the occasions in most cases take the form of an auction where the articles are sold to the highest of successive bidders.

A poor man may offer two shillings for a bunch of banana, the salesman holding an auctioneer's mallet will not let his hammer go down until someone else has offered 20 shillings and sometimes a third person takes it up with an offer of three guineas and perhaps a fourth person, wishing to show himself as a man of substance and in order to earn the praise of men, will wade in with an offer of 20 guineas. Of course, with such an exorbitant offer the hammer or mallet quickly goes down. And the poor man, though a faithful worshipper, is made to feel that he is not serving God or helping the church, all because he is poor!

Under such circumstances, the poor people are not happy being obsessed with inferiority complex. Granted that those articles have divine blessing, why should they be dispensed in such a way as to deprive the poor of them – the poor who are more often than not richer in faith? This in truth is far from being a Christian practice. There is a clear case in the Scriptures of a poor widow who gave a farthing and earned more praise and blessing than the rich when offerings were made in the days of Jesus. This was so, because, judged spiritually, the poor widow gave more than the rich. She gave ALL she had while the rich only gave insignificant portions of their abundance. – Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4.

There are instances too where certain church groups on the occasion of harvest festival, sponsored and organized ball dances; and the proceeds went into the coffers of the churches. It is most disappointing and very bad indeed that a church organization should sponsor a ball dance and give occasion for immorality to be practiced. What some people do with married and unmarried women on such occasions are a common knowledge and they are a transgression of Christian principles. In such places too people drink and get drunk and there can be nothing in such things that could tend to give glory to God and Christ. Yet these things are done in the name of God so that the churches may get funds!

But St. Paul said: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." – 1st Corinthians 10:31.

#### Profiteering

No language can be too hard to be used in condemning the sale of articles at extraordinarily high prices under the auspices of a church organization. If individuals do what the churches are practicing they will definitely be guilty of profiteering and we do not see how the churches can be absolved from such a guilt. In fact, with a church which is identified with the name of God and which should be a shining example to the believers in the practice of righteousness, it is even worse.

From the law of God concerning usury in the days of old, Christians can understand how to deal among themselves in a righteous way. The law prohibits the imposing of any interest on a loan, whether in money or in wheat or other commodities. As it is written: "Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury." (Deuteronomy 23:19; see also Exodus 22:25 and Leviticus 25:36, 37.) and in Proverbs 28:8, it is stated: "He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor."

There is no doubt that a gain of nine pounds and 17 shillings on a tuber of yam costing only three shillings is excessive and most unjust. Moderation is a Christian virtue. And St. Paul admonished: "Let your moderation be known unto all men." – Philippians 4:5.

Another detestable aspect of the whole show is that of the playing of games of chance for money. Such things as bagatelle, "lucky-dip", roffle and so on, are done some as a part of harvest festival in order to swell the purse of the Church! No faithful, true worshipper of God takes part in gambling because it is known to be unscriptural. (Proverbs 28:20, 22; 20:21; 1st Timothy 6:6-12, 17-19) And so the doing of it under the auspices of a church must be condemned without reservation.

The early disciples of Jesus Christ did not organize bazaars at any time to raise funds to carry on the work of God. The Jews who carried trade into the house of God in the days of Jesus Christ had an experience which should serve as a lesson to church groups that luxuriate in the exercise of buying and selling as a part of harvest thanksgiving.

Reporting the incident, St. John stated: "And the Jews' Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: and when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise" (John 2:13-17) It is sometimes said that it is because of what Christ did that certain people do not now make their bazaars inside their church buildings. But the question is, did Christ command them to do so at all?

#### Harvest Festival

The feast of harvest, we agree, was one of the festivals God Almighty commanded the Jews through Moses to observe. It was also called the feast of weeks and it was connected with the

agricultural season of the Jews. The law says: "Thou shall keep the feast of unleavened bread and the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field" – Exodus 23:15-19; see also Deuteronomy 16:9-12.

The law further states that the people should not appear empty-handed but that "every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which He hath given thee." (Deuteronomy 16:16, 17) There was no provision that the produce from the farms should be auctioned at exorbitant prices as the churches are doing.

The point which we must bring to light is the fact that there is no instruction that the harvest festival should be continued in the Christian Era. Jesus Christ did not observe it and his apostles never did either.

To all true Christians what harvest means is clearly indicated in the parable of Jesus Christ concerning the tares and the wheat. As it is written: "Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, the Kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn." – Matthew, 13:24-30.

Jesus Christ did give the interpretation of the parable to his disciples. As it is written: "Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world." – Matthew, 13:36-40.

#### Spiritual Harvest

It is of great interest to Christians to know that we are now in the harvest age and God is already gathering His sheep, the children of the kingdom, into His fold through the preaching of the gospel. This work will continue until the end when God through Jesus Christ and his angels will take vengeance on the devil's children, the tares. On this score, Jesus said: "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." – Verses 41-42.

The fire is a symbol of the torment and anguish the wicked shall suffer at that time as a reward of their sins before they shall die and go to everlasting destruction. And St. Paul said: "But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile." (Romans 2:8,9). It is not after death they would be cast into the symbolic fire but in their life-time because after death a man does not know anything neither can he feel pain. – Psalm, 146:3, 4; Ecclesiastes, 9:5, 10.

But concerning the children of God who believe and obey the TRUTH and have been gathered into His Kingdom organization, Jesus said: "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." – Matthew, 13:43.

It is the spiritual harvest – the gathering of God's children in this age – that is of importance to Christians. People who have this understanding must endeavour to be diligent in the studies of

the Scriptures so as to acquire the knowledge that will enable them to serve as fitting vessels in the Lord's field service. Despite the deteriorating state of the world in spiritual and moral values, there are millions of people who are yearning for the truth of Jesus Christ. But those gifted with the power of the gospel in the true sense of it are very scarce indeed.

This, as a matter of fact, is no surprise since it goes to fulfil the words of our Lord and Saviour:

"The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth labourers into His harvest." – Luke 10:2.

In the light of the foregoing, it will be wrong for Christians to continue to celebrate harvest as an occasion for bringing to church services money and other products, and for engaging in profiteering or in unjust commercialism in the name of God. The harvest that Christians should concern themselves with is not that of material things but the one that has to do with the salvation of the righteous in this last days of the present evil world that is now racing at a terrific speed to its destruction.