

# TENTMAKERS

Financial Counsel for Pastors, Deacons, and Seminarians

## DISCIPLINED SAVING

by Gary North

The principle of the tithe is basic to Christian civilization. It is understandable that the waves of secularism that have rolled over the churches and Christian colleges in this century have done so in the name of the tithe, or "tithe-plus." The secularists have felt no guilt in preaching a doctrine of universal salvation through compulsory giving. The secularists throughout the world have sent hordes of tax collectors into the land ever since Bismarck, in the name of Prussian conservatism, inaugurated a program of "conservative" social welfare in the 1870's. Taxes that dwarf anything imagined by the tyrants of Egypt have been accepted, almost enthusiastically, by millions of voters who are trying to atone for their own guilt, while simultaneously "cashing in" on the taxes supposedly paid by "the rich." The civil government collects the "tithes-plus" from citizens who complain when they hear sermons calling on them to tithe to Christ's voluntary institutions.

Modern men want their religion, but they want it cheap. What they get is the most expensive religion on the history of man, the religion of secular humanism. They pay for their real religion "off the top"; if anything is left over, it goes for their high standard of living, and finally to charity. However, they find that the tax man is never satisfied — not with 30%, 40%, or 50% of one's personal income. The god of secular humanism is an all-consuming god. It even demands the children. And Christians meekly comply. They send their children into the "free" government schools.

The discipline of the tithe teaches men to reduce their personal expenditures. They are not allowed to spend all that they receive as income. They must voluntarily reserve a portion of their income for the purposes of another. If they cannot spend as much as they receive as income, then quite obviously, they cannot spend beyond their means. There are limits placed on their expenditures. They are trained from an early age to put something aside. This absolutely crucial habit then spills over into other areas of life. A habit learned in one area of life is not easily restrained from all the others.

Tithing was basic to the formation of the Protestant ethic. It was the theological foundation for the coming of compound economic growth. Without this mental habit, the advent of modern industrialism would never have appeared. Tithing has served the churches well, and it has served the West even better. The churches have prospered; the per capita income of Western societies has grown incomparably rapidly —

wealthy beyond the dreams of nineteenth-century avarice. But avarice and guilt have also multiplied; without the restraining hand of God on greed and guilt, without Christ in the hearts of the masses, without law in the preaching of the orthodox, the politics of guilt and pity have overwhelmed the whole world. (On this point, see R. J. Rushdoony's book, *Politics of Guilt and Pity*, published by Thoburn Press, 11121 Pope's Head Rd., Fairfax, VA 22030: \$5.00.)

### Transferred Responsibility

If tithing is basic to the financing of the church, then it should also be basic to the expansion of family capital. Similarly, if bingo is basic to the financing of the church, then gambling will also be basic to the expansion of family capital. Similarly, if bingo is basic to the financing of the church, then gambling will also become basic in the quest for expanded family capital. If "letting the Spirit move us" is the basis of church financing, then letting men's spirits move them will become the basis of most church members' family thrift programs. If "paying God first" isn't the premise of Christian financing, then "paying your future second" will not readily become the basis of family investing. In other words, what we set forth as the standard of financing for the Kingdom of God will normally become the standard of financing for the family, the free economy, and the future.

A recent advertisement, featuring the words of an exceedingly inept financial advisor who recommends the exceedingly poor investment of "whole-life" life insurance policies, is headlined by these words: "95% of the people who die, die busted." This figure is often quoted in the life insurance industry. Of course, if salesmen of life insurance would recommend only low-cost term insurance, and then help the investor to put his money into far more promising investment programs than whole-life life insurance policies, the figure might be far less than 95%. But that is beside the point. The point is, that far too many Americans think that the Social Security compulsory wealth-transfer system will take care of them in their old age. They have trusted the State, along with their life insurance agents, and a person could hardly find less trustworthy advocates of the public's welfare. The State's wealth-transfer programs lead to inflation, which in turn destroys the savings portion of the whole-life policies that should never have been sold in the first place — policies that

help the average man to "die busted" because the return on the savings portion of the premium payments is so low. (If you think I'm being overly harsh on life insurance salesmen, see *Life Insurance Marketing and Cost Disclosure*, a report of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, House of Representatives, 95th Congress, 2nd Session, Committee Print 95-72, December, 1978 Order a copy free of charge, while the supply lasts. Then preach a sermon on it — ignoring the report's knee-jerk recommendation of even more government intervention into a far too regulated field of business. )

If a high proportion of Americans really do die without leaving much of an estate (though a debt-free house is a good capital asset to leave to one's heirs, which makes me wonder about the 95% figure), then some of me blame — indeed, much of the blame — can be laid at the feet of pastors who have refused to preach the obligation of tithing. If they have not called men to the obligation of the tithe, then they have almost certainly neglected to call men to the obligation of systematic saving. In fact, the pastors themselves are hardly good examples of what it means to save on a regular basis. "Jesus saves and pastors borrow" might be a reasonable summary of twentieth-century ecclesiology. Certainly "Jesus saves and churches borrow" fits the bill. If the church does not enforce tithing, then it will promote such horrors as "Church stewardship annuities" or church bonds by which to fleece the sheep, using the shears of price inflation to do the job efficiently. "Guaranteed Income," the widows are promised. Guaranteed paper money is what they get, meaning fixed quantities of paper money, meaning guaranteed poverty. All in the name of Jesus, who tells us to owe no man anything (Rom 13:8), and who permits emergency debt for only six years (Deut 15).

It is imperative that pastors begin a program of family thrift. Children must be taught the importance of savings. Churches must pay pastors enough so that they can have some income to save. The church that pays its pastor a small salary, and then promises to "reward" him for accepting such low payment by allowing him a place in the old pastors' home, is playing the old "Ponzi game" that the Social Security system is playing. "We hold your money for 30 years, and then, if we don't go bankrupt in the meantime, we will support you out of the gifts of future members, if we can attract any, if they pay. And when we speak of 'holding your money,' we mean spend it, or never collect it, just like Social Security does."

There are too many pastors who live in terms of the voluntary socialism of the church's charity system. They think in terms of guaranteed income in the future, just like the sheep who lend money to the church's annuity program. They think in terms of reliable money. They think in terms of transferred financial responsibility: "If I take less income now, somebody else will see to it that I get money in the future, when I can no longer work." A person who is not actively managing his own personal finances is taking enormous financial risks with his future and his family's welfare. He assumes that others know how to invest, or that others will voluntarily hand over fistfuls of money to him in his old age (when bucketful would be more appropriate, given the rate of price inflation).

The problems with such thinking are very great. First, who is to say that those managing church assets are any better

than the managers of bank trust departments? Second, who is to say that the church will have more members in twenty years? If you look at church membership figures since 1955 of, say, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, you have good reason to doubt the hope of continuing growth. Third, why should pastors set an example that cannot and should not be followed by all church members, but only (at best) by an impoverished, dependent minority? After all, why should the church become the primary welfare agency? Isn't the family the responsible agency for parental welfare? Doesn't the requirement of honoring father and mother spell out this responsibility clearly? Why should pastors expect the congregations to support them later on, when the congregations are unwilling to support them properly today? Fourth, how can any sane person expect future members to continue to fund church operations, including pastoral charity, when no one preaches the requirement of the tithe? Fifth, how can pastors expect the members of the future to have any capital left over, when the moral obligation of family thrift is not preached? Tithing and thrift go together, and modern churches emphasize neither. Sixth, why should parents invest if they expect the church, Social Security, and whole-life insurance policies to support them in their old age? Seventh, why should children save, if they expect the civil government to support their parents in the future? A man of twenty needs to save so that he can support parents when he reaches fifty. Will he? Why should he? Does anyone tell him to do so?

#### A Regular Program of Thrift

The first step a pastor should take is to start investing his own funds. This takes time and effort. There is no escape. We cannot see this nation escape the devastation of government planning until we start taking responsibility for our own planning. We must all set standards for our subordinates to follow, and this includes the pastoral ministry. No one in a position of leadership should allow anyone to control more than one-third of his capital, especially his retirement capital. In the multitude of individual counsel there is safety. In the decision of a retirement committee there is danger.

The second step is to start preaching the requirement of the tithe. Christians should know that God's share comes "off the top," not the bottom. His capital is not the remnant, the leftovers, of a family's income. The discipline of tithing must be inculcated as a matter of moral responsibility. (And if something is worth preaching, it is worth enforcing institutionally.)

Third, families should be required to sit down with deacons or trustees to look over their finances — families looking over the deacons' finances, and deacons looking over the families'. After all, the two institutions are interrelated. If the church is supposed to support only "widows indeed" (1 Tim 5:3), and if the deacons are morally responsible for this care, then they have the responsibility to see to it that potential "widows indeed" become "widows endowed" beforehand. If a father who does not care for his family's financial welfare is worse than an infidel (1 Tim 5:8), then why is it that there is no institutional church arrangement to police this very important area of potential transgression? Do modern pastors really believe 1 Timothy 5:8? I have my doubts.