

games and sports

extract from Proposition XV § viii, ix

§ viii. Our fourth affirmation has to do with the use of games, sports, comedies, and similar things, commonly used by all sorts of Christians under the name of entertainment and recreation. Let us consider whether these things are consistent with the seriousness, gravity, and fear of God which the Gospel calls for. Let us examine the ideas of those who call themselves Christians, whether Popish or Protestant, and see if there is any difference from the heathen, except in the mere name; don't we see in both of them an abundance of the same folly, the same vanity, the same use of precious time which can never be recovered? The same gaming, sporting, playing; and arising from that, the same quarreling, fighting, swearing, ranting, reveling? How can these things be corrected as long as the preachers and professors¹ and those who are the leaders of the people allow these things and do not consider them inconsistent with Christianity? . . .

The apostle commands us that "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we do it all to the glory of God."² But I believe no one will be so impudent as to affirm that God is glorified in the use of these sports and games. If anyone said so, they would be declaring that they neither knew God nor his glory. Experience abundantly proves that when they do these things people have nothing less in mind than the glory of God, and nothing more than the satisfaction of their own carnal desires, wills, and appetites. The apostle tells us, (1 Corinthians 7:29, 31) "Because the time is short, that those who buy should be as if they did not possess, and

¹ A word which Quakers used for people who claim that they are Christians, but in reality are not.

² 1 Corinthians 10:31.

those who use this world, as if they did not abuse it,” etc. How can people be in obedience to this precept, when they advocate the practice of these sports and games? It seems they think that the time is so long that they cannot find enough things to occupy it, neither in taking care for their souls, nor yet in the necessary care of their bodies; instead they invent these games and sports to pass away the time, as if they had no other work to serve God, or to be useful to the creation. Peter tells us “to pass the time of our sojourning here in fear” (1 Peter 1:17). . . .

There is no duty more frequently commanded, nor more incumbent on Christians, than the fear of the Lord: to stand in awe before him, to conduct our lives as if we were in his presence. But if people who practice these games and sports will speak from their consciences, I do not doubt that they can declare from experience that this fear is forgotten in their games. And if God secretly touches them by his Light or reminds them of the vanity of their behavior, they try to shut it out, and use their games as a mechanism to get rid of that troublesome guest. Thus they make merry over the Just One, whom they have slain and crucified in themselves. Furthermore, let us pay attention to Christ’s teaching (Matthew 12:35-36) that “the good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things,” and that “we shall give an account in the day of judgment for every idle word.” It may be easily gathered what treasure these inventions come from, and it may be easily proved that it is from the evil, and not the good. . . .

§ ix. . . . I will make this clear by one obvious example, which corresponds to everybody’s experience. It cannot be denied that people ought to be more in love with God than with any other thing, for we ought to *love God above all things*. Now it is plain that if a man has fallen in love, whether with a woman or with any other thing, if that thing has taken a deep place in the heart and possesses the mind,

it will be hard for a man who is so in love to drive the person or thing he loves out of his mind. When he is eating or drinking or sleeping, his mind will always tend in that direction. No matter how intent he is on business or on recreation, only a short time will pass before the mind will send some thought towards the beloved. Though this man must be aware of all the things that the care of the body and such things require, he will avoid, like death itself, doing anything that may offend the one he loves, or interfere with his efforts to obtain the thing he so earnestly desires. Though there may be some small use in other things, the great purpose which his eye is fixed on will focus him so that he will easily overlook and dispense with petty necessities rather than risk the loss of his greater love. No one will deny that this is the way people ought to be in love with God and the life to come, and the thing is apparent from these Scriptures: Matthew 6:20, "But lay up treasures in heaven for yourselves"; Colossians 3:2, "Set your mind on things above," etc. The scripture also declares that this has been the experience and attainment of some people (Psalms 63:1; 84:2; 2 Corinthians 5:14).

Experience abundantly shows that these games, sports, plays, dancing, comedies, etc. naturally tend to draw people away from the fear of God, and make them forget heaven, death, and judgment. They foster lust, vanity, and unrestrained desires, and therefore that kind of person most loves and uses them. The most serious and conscientious people can scarcely deny this.

Sources: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition XV § viii, ix (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 449-454 and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 348-352.