



The Merchant

God of accomplishment and endeavour
Those who strive to accomplish are beautiful in His eyes



A rich man came to me the other day, seeking to make a donation to the Church. He had with him two fine young sons, both near to the age of manhood, and since the man was of an age where his feathers had grown thin, I asked him what he planned to do with the wealth he had amassed after his death.

Now, this man is a regular attendee of services here at the church and in all ways he is an honest and devoted servant of the Merchant, but he looked embarrassed at this question. I saw at once what his problem was for he, like so many of you here, thought to make an inheritance for his two fine sons.

This is not a wicked man. He would not steal a Silver Ducatto even to save himself. He would not think to cheat those he does business with. Why then does he find this, the smallest, the easiest of God's commandments, so difficult?

None of us would give charity to a beggar. We can all see the wickedness of a life of unearned ease. Those who find themselves drawn to indolence will find no redemption if their life is made easier by charity and success they have not earned. Why then do we find it so hard to follow His laws with our own offspring?

Evil speaks to an avian's soul. How many of us, if we found that a merchant had given us too much change, would return the amount of his error? How many of us could swear we would not be tempted to profit by his misfortune?

None of us are immune to temptation; the desire to steal, to cheat, to rob and to make a dishonest profit is in every living being. This is why the Merchant gave us the commandments. Of all the evils of this world, none is more tempting and none more wicked than charity. When you find an idle youth asking for a handout because he cannot be bothered to work, it is easy to be virtuous; but how many of us faced with a half-starved crippled beggar asking for a crust have not felt sympathy for the fellow and wondered what harm a crust might do? What evil can there be in a discarded piece of bread?

How much mightier is the temptation to the sin of charity when the beggar is your own son? As I am your priest, I seek to see each and every one of you working hard and successful at your endeavours. So how much more must the father hope to see his sons and daughters wealthy and prosperous and successful?

The road to hell is paved with just such good intentions! Wealth corrupts a man; it beckons him to idleness and depravity. Only through the virtue of hard work can you protect yourself from this temptation. Only those who have worked hard know the true value of what they have; only those who have earned their wealth have earned the right to spend it.

If your sons and daughters are to follow you as prosperous and respectable merchants then you must set them a hard path to walk. Those who have everything given to them at birth, how will they learn the value of what they have? How will children, raised to luxury and privilege, appreciate what they have been given? If you indulge your offspring, will you be surprised when they become indulgent? If you remove their need to work, will you be suitably shamed when they do no work?

If that is not enough then consider this: if they inherit their wealth, what goals will they set themselves? If you amass every Ducatto in Alkyon to pass to your children, what will they accomplish? Make no mistake; the Merchant will judge you by your accomplishments and so your heirs will be judged. If you gratify yourself by indulging your paternal affection and generosity, you do not bequeath them an inheritance, you rob them of their opportunity to strive and to triumph. With nothing to accomplish how will they prove their worth to the Merchant? And what if they do not? If, because of your evil gift, they are damned to hell, what then? Would you see your own children damned to hell because you are not strong enough to withstand the seductive temptation of charity?

Spend your money on good living; you have earned it and are entitled to that. If you must give charity, then give it to the Church where it can do no harm. Let your sons and daughters start their lives with the same advantages that you enjoyed. A good and honest upbringing will serve them better than any inheritance could.

Beliefs

"Hardship is the price of success; without it, success is bitter in the mouth. Those who have conquered hardship have the right to enjoy the results of their triumph."

"Do not be tempted by the promise of an easy and short route to success. Nothing can be easily accomplished, because anything that is easily completed is no accomplishment at all."

"Wealth is neither good nor evil. It can lure the weak into evil ways, those that desire it without working for it become thieves, cheats and beggars. But those who desire it and are prepared to strive are driven to work hard to achieve what they desire. Good men are made better men by the appeal of money, evil men are made worse. Wealth is the means by which the Merchant separates the wheat from the chaff among the faithful."

"Accomplishment is the measure of a man or woman, not wealth. Some are born exceptional with power and wealth; have a care for the Merchant will expect extraordinary accomplishments from one so gifted. Those who are born impoverished or enslaved will be judged by

the same laws, but their challenge is not nearly so great. Only the Merchant will know what accomplishments every being is truly capable of."

"Theft and charity are entirely despicable. No man has the right to take the achievements of others from them and no man has the right to rob another man of the opportunity to achieve his own accomplishments."

"Those who have inherited all their wealth and their privilege deserve nothing but your utter contempt. Being born to the right parents, being a member of some elect class of people is not an accomplishment of which anyone should feel proud. If such people wish the approval the Merchant, they should dispose of their investments and begin their life again."

"The pleasures of a wealthy life are the earthly rewards from the Merchant to those who have striven to follow His teachings through endeavour. Their presence indicates His blessing."

"Those who have faced hardship and been defeated by it do not deserve to reap the benefits of success. Poverty is His punishment for their lack of devotion."

The Church

The Church of the Merchant is the most powerful church in the Known World. It is clear that the Church of the Teacher wields more political influence; command of an entire nation backed by the military power of the Paladins of Yugorsk and the wild tribes of Fidelia gives the Hierophant enormous power. But his teachings are sometimes disputed; there is often dissent and the dissent grows the further from Fidelia you travel. The Church of the Smith wields just as much military strength but is riven by internal conflicts over the nature and purpose of that strength. The Churches of the Weaver and of the Huntress are badly organized with few coherent views, goals, or even (some say) beliefs.

The Church of the Merchant enjoys a single, well-organized hierarchy under the leadership of the High Preceptor of Alkyon. The Church has massive funds at its disposal; it possesses more wealth in its vaults than nations such as Amun-Sa, Malathia or Kamakura. Furthermore, it enjoys the considerable support of the five main trade houses as well as countless of the smaller independent houses. Priests and devotees of the Merchant can be found on House Sacuza's vessels, in Rimici Capell's banks, Greenfield Shores' inns and on Raddock Bay auction blocks. And those who think that the Church of the Merchant possesses no military strength to pursue its goals might ponder for a while the links between Bakhana and the Church.

Unlike other churches, that of the Merchant enjoys a fair degree of uniformity in orthodox thought. In part this is because the faith has been spread uncorrupted by the Alkonian trading houses; in part it is because the considerable influence and support of the High Preceptors of the Merchant have allowed them to exert control over the faith across the world. The High Preceptor does not choose who to appoint to positions of authority in the Church of the Merchant in distant Rukh, but one of his succentors is always present to advise when such an appointment is made.

Under previous High Preceptors, the Church was content to strengthen its links outside Alkyon and invest its wealth wisely. The current High Preceptor, Khalid Mhaines, takes a considerably more active approach. Under his authority, the

wealth of the Church is spent promoting the interests of the Merchant in many different lands. Officially, the Church does not interfere in the political business of nations; to do so could risk confrontation with the rulers of that nation as well as with other churches.

However, it is common knowledge that the Church played an active role in the recent revolution in Freiboden, where virtually all the Free Merchants are members of the Church of the Merchant. The Church worked slowly and patiently to improve the position of the Free Merchants; but when the revolution began, pressure was brought to bear on every trade house to support the revolutionaries, and supplies of weapons and armour, darkpowder, and even food were purchased in Alkyon and delivered to unknown harbours on the other side of the Sharamoor Sea. Of course, you can't make an omelette without breaking an egg, and the significant losses incurred by Rimici Capell during the revolution have not brought the Church and that House together.

Consequently, the High Preceptor is expected to take a very strong interest in events now developing in the New World. In addition to supporting the wellbeing of the Alkonian, Rukhi and Freiboden colonies, the Church may well try to seize an opportunity to promote its own influence there. Far away from the moribund influence of their rulers, the people of the New World may well seek to take a more enlightened view of how their affairs should be run, and the priests of the Merchant will be keen to encourage such an approach.

One issue that is particularly troubling is the endemic problem of piracy. Piracy is anathema to all honest traders and no priest of the Merchant condones it. The Free Islands are a haven for pirates and buccaneers, but Malathia, Amun-Sa, Maya and Merisusi also all have raiding fleets of their own. The Church is active in trying to reduce piracy, but they have negligible influence in those lands prone to it, and attempts to convince House Sacuza to operate a more responsible policy regarding their ships have been unsuccessful to date. Given that piracy is likely to be a significant problem for everyone in the New World, there are suggestions that the High Preceptor is looking to find ways to deal with the issue.