

4th May 2021

Chance

**“Chaos umpire sits,
And by decision more embroils the fray
By which he reigns; next him high arbiter
Chance governs all.”**

John Milton, Paradise Lost

Like all of you, I'm sure, I receive – almost daily – mailings from charities. I've made a donation; they have my details on a database; so I now get more appeals. This week I had two similar approaches, not “please make a donation” or “set up a direct debit”, but “here are books of raffle tickets at £1 a ticket ... with name-and-address labels to put on the ticket stubs ... we can enter you in the prize draw.” Normally I'd ditch the tickets, make a donation anyway and keep the address labels. But this week I used them for the raffle books, sent of my donation *and* the ticket-stubs – and I'm now waiting with baited-breath for a call to inform me I'm £10,000 richer.

The fund-raising people know they're onto a profitable idea – so much, indeed, that a £10,000 surplus can be offered as an incentive. But what makes me – and presumably lots of others – more inclined to donate if I have a chance of winning something in a raffle? Discuss ...

The Church of Scotland doesn't much like games of chance – down to “guess the name of the Teddy” or “how many sweets in the jar.” Other Denominations are more pragmatic. I once attended a Roman Catholic Mass where the notices included the arrangements for a Confirmation Class, new times for Confession, a letter from the Bishop and ... “the lottery numbers this week are 3, 22, 40 and 51, and the lucky winner is Mrs Edna Campbell” – cue a round of applause for the lucky winner.

My thoughts? Milton is right. “Chance governs all.” So why not have a bit of fun at chance's expense – and derive some benefit from it too.

In the Early Church, the disciples needed someone to replace Judas. They couldn't make up their minds. So they had a raffle! They drew lots (we're not told how) and the result was that “the lot fell on Matthias” – cue another round of applause, no doubt, for the lucky winner.

A prayer for today

*Thank you, God, that chance doesn't determine your love for me.
Aren't I the lucky one? Amen.*

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