

14<sup>th</sup> December 2021

## Towers

**“Stack ‘em high, sell ‘em cheap!”**

*Jack Cohen, attributed*

The above quote has been attached to many people, but, as far as I’m aware, it was first used by Jack Cohen in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century before he went on to establish the *Tesco* empire. The principle is simple. Have a big space. Dispense with the “frills” of layout. Have plenty things to sell. Stack them high so that they’re well displayed. Cut the prices attract customers. And, the rest, as they say, is history.

When Laurence Houseman wrote his hymn, “Father eternal, ruler of creation” in 1919, he had a different kind of “stack em’ high” in mind.

*Envious of heart, blind-eyed, with tongues confounded,  
Nation by nation, still goes unforgiven,  
In wrath and fear, by jealousies surrounded,  
Building proud towers which shall not reach to heaven.  
Thy kingdom come, O Lord, thy will be done.*

This, of course, has its roots in the Old Testament account of the building of the *Tower of Babel*, with its powerful metaphor of people building the biggest tower imaginable, but creating confusion and division in the process. The “stack ‘em high” principle may work in sales and marketing (or it may not ... discuss!) but it certainly *doesn’t* work if we decide to build spiritual structures in our own strength and with own wisdom, believing that this will give us all the satisfaction we’ll ever need.

“Envious of heart”, “blind-eyed”, “by jealousies surrounded”, were Houseman’s descriptors. It would be easy enough to add to his list. But however we describe it, when we build our “proud towers” – in wrath or fear, or guided by any number of negative human emotions – our enterprise is doomed to failure. There’s no reaching our heaven “up there”, no matter how hard to try to “stack ‘em high”.

Perhaps in our run-up to Christmas we might be encouraged to focus on the spiritual as well as the material, our God-focussed efforts as well as so many human enterprises. For it would be a great shame – a disaster, indeed – if the towers we built were a failure, when a more basic and down-to-earth faith in a loving God was what we really needed.

### **A prayer for today**

*Keep me down-to-earth, Lord, and not stretching too high with my own efforts. Amen*

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