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Magazine

All the Pain Money Can Buy

by Desmond Ford

All the Pain That Money Can Buy is the title of a recent book. It tells the story of Christina Onassis, the heiress to Aristotle Onassis' shipping fortune. In this sad chronicle we find Christina presented as "the ultimate poor little rich heiress," who had "a cold mother and a monstrous father." While marrying time after time, and desperately pursuing bizarre adventures, this princess of wealth was far less happy than many a waif in the third world. X

Clothes and men seemed the chief objects in Christina's world, if the author's chronicle is to be trusted. But neither garments nor lovers could provide for the heiress any lasting happiness. At the age of 37, she was found dead in a bathtub in Buenos Aires in 1988.

Revealing unusual business acumen, Christina was not lacking in IQ. But her repeated binges on food and sex showed a starved soul vainly striving for that will o' the wisp—satisfaction. Her entire story seems a commentary on the words: "Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again," John 4:13. There is no substitute for the love that comes from above, and even the closest earth can offer falls far short. It seems doubtful that she even knew true earthly love. When he lost his son in death, Christina's father exclaimed, "Why couldn't it have been my daughter?" X

Appealing and lovable as a child, according to her photographs, Christina gradually accumulated layer upon layer of disillusionment as an adult. In the title of her biography we have the unsubtle hint that money not only isn't everything, but that it may ultimately minister to searing pain.

In contrast to this tragic cameo from the second half of the twentieth century is a story told by Rita Snowdon after visiting a children's hospital ward in New Zealand. Here it is:

In the wards of a great hospital I visited a little child. She was so very crippled, and so small. I took her fruit and picture books, and stopped and told her stories. I told her all I could remember And then to interest her, I began to show her the things in my pockets. I showed her my shiny pencil, and my penknife, and my tiny bunch of keys, and a pretty stone I'd found on the way. Then I came to my last pocket of all, and there were only two pennies in it—two paltry pennies. I think she was disappointed. She took them into her hands and turned them over, and fingered them rather wistfully, and then, in a way that I shall never forget, looking up at me said: 'But you are rich; you can walk!'

In her chapter Rita Snowden continues by quoting an apt verse:

The folks who spend their days
In buying cars and clothes and rings,
Don't seem to know that empty lives
Are just as empty, filled with things.

Another book of the decade is *The Patriarch, the Rise and Fall of the Bingham Dynasty*, by Susan E. Tifft and Alex S. Jones. When Richard Kluger reviewed this book for the New York Times Book Review, telling of the tragedies linked with the Bingham who for two generations ran Kentucky's Courier-Journal, he summarizes as follows:

... we are offered an engrossing social document, the prime lesson of which is that vast inherited wealth and power can have as destructive an effect on human character as a heritage of impoverishment and futility....

Kluger then tells the story of the downside of success, beginning with two of the three sons dying in strange accidents within about two years of each other, followed by the troubles of the third son and the civil wars within the family engendered by the daughters, one of whom had two failed marriages and ten years of psychiatric counseling to her credit. There follows "a quagmire of financial maneuverings and numbing fratricidal strike..., 'until we are overcome with wonderment at this spectacle of greed, stubbornness, distrust and stupidity....'" *New York Times Book Review*, April 14, 1991, 22, 23.

In Holy Writ we read of the rich young ruler who was ruined by his possessions. "He went away sorrowful for he had many things." Possessions are only things that moth and rust doth corrupt, and that thieves break through and steal. Paul could write about true believers "having nothing yet possessing all things." Peter and John exclaimed that silver and gold had they none but in the name of Jesus of Nazareth and then a miracle.

Apparently Jesus is enough. In having him, we have all things, but having all things without Him we have nothing. The only way to keep Jesus is to give him away as did Peter and John. Share him with those who don't know him, lest the best pain that money can buy swallow up the poor unbelievers.