Papers on Missions

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Concerning Unions: Worldly or Religious

(The Testimony Of Two Well-Known And Able Ministers Of God's Word Concerning Unions: Worldly Or Religious.)

Being a reprint from, "THE BIBLE TREASURY," of January, 1895.

What leads to these few words is a letter from Chicago, which discloses the deeply painful and astounding fact, that there are professors of Christ, gathered to the Lord's name, who are banded on oath with the recent conspiracy in that city, or elsewhere also, of so-called labour against capital. That this issued in robbery and arson, in mutilation and murder, and other forms, not of wickedness only, but of lawless and criminal violence, is only the natural and necessary result.

It appears that these unworthy abusers of the Lord's name have defied the meetings (leavened by their presence) to put them out from their midst, and dare to plead the names of J.N.D. and of the Editor of the Bible Treasury, as abettors of their ungodliness. For such a plea they have nothing but their own wilful falsehood. Not only has there never been a word orally from either to furnish the smallest pretence for their talk, but the published writings of both are well enough known (wherever in the English, French, and other languages, they are read among Christians). Both refute the calumny and prove how hateful such combinations must be in their eyes, even if clear of any punishable enormities. None living ever more decidedly or

constantly rejected their very principle as opposed to Christ.

We have always maintained that, as brought unto God, the Christian is bought with a price, the incalculable price of Christ's blood, and bound to glorify God in his body. As having the Holy Spirit of God, we are members of the one body of Christ even now and on earth; and no one estimating such a bond loyally and intelligently, as all profess by being gathered to His name, could consent to belong to another body, disparaging His, or yet more antagonistic to its nature, character, aims and hope. To any one rightly instructed it will soon appear that special societies for Bible or tract distribution, for missionary work at home or abroad, for training of the young or for help of the sick and suffering, are usurpations of the functions of God's assembly, or of its members as such; who are bound to do, in a better and holy way by His word and Spirit, what those societies attempt piecemeal and in a plan more or less human and worldly. Yet no fair mind doubts for a moment that in abounding grace God has deigned to bless these mixed and irregular agencies in the present anomalous and broken state of the church.

But nothing can justify a saint of God joining the irresponsible societies which resort to force and fraud in execution of their self-will, animated by motives alike short-sighted, selfish and sordid. Their springs are infidel, their objects are revolutionary, their means are fallen man's will, coercing all they can, without a thought or care for God, Who sanctions nothing but faith working by love. This of course cannot actuate the natural man. But here we are contemplating those who claim to be sanctified and redeemed. Do any Christians

claim under lying pretexts to be allowed also to trample God’s revealed word under the foot of men who bear on their forehead the stamp of destruction, veritable enemies of the cross of Christ? No meeting sheltering the known members of such guilty societies of the world has the least title to be considered an assembly of God — at any rate, after the question has been fairly raised before the Lord and His word. If the meetings persist in disobeying the holy word of God, they become defiled with great guilt, and cages of Satan.

W.K.

By Whom "Sent"?

A question raised in the Times of 8th February, and signed by “an evangelical churchman,” is not to be rightly sifted in a journal avowedly of the world. Nor need it be mixed up with “the Torrey-Alexander Mission” which gave rise to it, and elicits warm recriminatory feeling from such as look only at the blessed aim, indifferent to the worldly methods, and the extremely humanitarian self-confidence which expects to surpass all ever done on earth. At that presumptuous slight of our Lord and the Holy Spirit (to say nothing of inspired apostles) as such an expectation implies, one must be grieved though not surprised, that so great inflation should rest on the support of Christendom’s multitudes, and of an accompaniment to attract (solos, duets, and a carefully drilled chorus). One regrets it the more because of Dr. T.’s zeal and his earnest preaching when he adheres to it simply and solely.

But it appears to me that the questions are far graver than anything intended by an evangelical churchman, when he asks, “By what authority do they come? Who has ‘sent’ them? They have simply ‘come,’“ he evidently thinks decisive. What is his alleged ground? “The apostolic rule, which governs the Church and safeguards it from irresponsible and unauthorised teachers, is clearly laid down by St. Paul in, Rom. 10:14, 15. — ‘How shall they hear without a preacher? How shall they preach, except they be sent;’ and Heb. 5:4, No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron’ i.e. consecrated. Now in the case of these visitors there is plainly no commission, no

authority; they simply ‘come.’“ There we may stop, without encumbering ourselves with the detail of the London Evangelistic Council, which he says (and rightly as far as I know) is “a purely self-constituted body of excellent men.” But even he must allow that I have fairly and fully presented his principle and the Scriptures cited as his warrant.

Here this “evangelical churchman” falls into the same unbelieving error as the persons he blames — the error of Christendom almost ever since “the apostolic rule,” which governs neither his own church nor any other. And I marvel that safeguarding from irresponsible and unauthorised teachers did not, as he wrote the words, cover his face with shame and awaken pangs — in the heart of an evangelical. For he knows that its orders “authorise” at this moment thousands of clergymen, who know not but hate the gospel and “the truth as it is in Jesus.” Are they not disloyal to the Head, yea to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, as well as holy scripture? are they not divided into hostile camps of mutual adversaries, “higher criticism” sceptics, and disguised and dishonest papists in heart and in almost all save the Pope? This mixed multitude, some in the highest dignities, others in professorial seats of the Universities, far outnumber “evangelical churchmen,” many of whom totally fail through “a purely Church point of view,” and, as “loyal adherents to the Church’s order and discipline,” coquet with the Romanisers and the sceptics. Are they not all by the Church’s orders alike “responsible and authorised teachers? Is this right before God? Is it not a scandal?

Let us however search the scriptures, which I trust he accepts as divine and authoritative, and test our loyalty

to God and His Son, our Lord Jesus. Now it must have been the Thirty-nine Articles, or some preconception however else originated, which gave him to interpolate the church's authority or its ecclesiastical officers into Rom. 10:14, 15; for not a word therein either asserts or implies anything of the sort. The apostle treats of the solemn theme of the righteousness of faith in contrast with that of the law, and shows that with heart it is believed unto righteousness, and with mouth confession is made unto salvation. For everyone whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they believe not? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach unless they were sent? even as it is written, How beautiful the feet of those that bring glad tidings of peace, of those that bring glad tidings of good things!

Here is not the least expression of church authority in sending out preachers. Nor is the entire Epistle stamped with anything more marked than the absence of such an element. The church on the other hand is largely developed in the First Epistle to the Corinthians as verified by its simple inspection. This is a striking fact from the ambition ere long of those in Rome to seek control and at length universal dominion in direct opposition to the Lord's will. The Epistle is throughout occupied with the individual wants of the believer, to ground him in the faith, to reconcile the Jewish difficulty of their special promises with the indiscriminate grace of the gospel to all, and to draw out the moral consequences of all this body of truth. But church and official authority are nowhere in it.

Hence is it not quite arbitrary to assume an ecclesiastical source of mission such as tradition dreams of? Why did not a single-eyed believer think of “God” in the case, or yet more particularly of “the Lord” as the Head? Could any other source be more apposite, or invest the preaching with equal weight or dignity? It may be said that the passage is indefinite, and that to bring in a divine source of mission here is no more certain than a traditional reference. But as believers we wrong God and His word if we allow it to be so vague; or, as the Romanists dare to say in their vulgar contempt of revelation, a nose of wax. You have all the N.T. before you. Show in the Acts of the Apostles, in the Epistles generally, or in the Pastoral Letters, a single word implying the need of what is called “ordination” for preaching the gospel. I venture to affirm that no man can. Undoubtedly elders and presbyters were nominated by an apostle, or by his representative in a defined place and time like Titus and probably Timotheus. But I go farther, and point to the very numerous witnesses throughout, that evangelising is recognised fully and freely under “the apostolic rule” as open and unfettered.

Thus it is recorded in Acts 8:1, 4 that, when a great persecution rose on the day of Stephen’s martyrdom, the members of the church were all save the apostles scattered from Jerusalem over Palestine, and that they went announcing the glad tidings. At no time was true order so high; yet no apostle raised his voice to ask, By what authority do you preach? Nay more in Acts 11:19-21 we are told that “those who were scattered passed. through to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch preaching the word to Jews only. But there were certain of them, Cyprians and Cyrenians, who entering into

Antioch spoke to the Greeks, announcing the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus. And the Lord's hand was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord." What can be more conclusive? It was He only that sent them, and He who, as expressed, blessed their work. What authority can rival His? And is not this written for us? Is Scripture haphazard? Leave such thoughts to Romanists and Rationalists, and learn that tradition or reason is as unreliable in Christendom as in Jewry, and much more guilty; for we have the Spirit to make the word living beyond all experience before Christ.

Look at individuals. Who evangelised a city of Samaria, so that there was great joy that conquered the old wretched jealousy? and they were baptised, both men and women. It may be said that Philip had hands laid on him for serving tables in the peculiar work among the poor saints previously. What had this to do with his preaching? They were chosen to it that the apostles should give themselves, unhindered by such service, to prayer and the ministry of the word. He was not therefore ordained to preach. But as he is designated the evangelist," distinctly (Acts 21:8) from being one of the seven," he preached actively and in various parts. This was God's order, not in the least traditional or ecclesiastical. It was the apostolic rule, or rather the free working of the Spirit with which no apostle ever interfered.

Take another instructive instance in Acts 18:24-28. Apollos, though only knowing the baptism of John, diligently gave out what he knew, and learnt the way of God more perfectly through a plain Christian man and his wife, Aquila and Priscilla. Instead of getting him

ordained, the brethren wrote commending him from Ephesus to Achaia as a great preacher and teacher without any formal act whatsoever.

I do not speak of Saul of Tarsus or of Barnabas, because it might be rejoined that they are both called “apostles” in Acts 14:4, and that nobody denies their title. But if so, why do any pervert the action in Acts 13:2, 3, as if it meant their ordination? What of inferior teachers ordaining superior prophets and apostles who had been teaching them all for sometime before in Antioch itself? Is this what you call “order”? It was nothing of the kind, but a “separation” at the call of the Holy Spirit of those two for a special mission in Asia Minor, a recommendation of them to the grace of God as it is called in Acts 14:26, and repeated, it would seem, in Acts 15:40. But even the great and large-hearted apostle loved, in speaking of his ministry, to place it on the broadest ground of grace, such as would vindicate the scattered preachers, “We also believe, wherefore also we speak” (2 Cor. 4:13). This is “the apostolic rule,” not the hoary-headed tradition of Christendom, which has so completely forgotten the word of God in these things, or dares to count it obsolete: a crown not of honour but of shame.

But the apostle adhered to the divine will; and in one of his later Epistles (to the Philippians) we see it tested in a trying case. “I would have you know, brethren (wrote he from his first imprisonment in Rome), that the circumstances in which I am have turned out rather to the furtherance of the gospel, so that my bonds have become manifest in Christ in the whole praetorium and to all others; and that the greater part of the brethren, trusting in the Lord through my bonds, dare more

abundantly to speak the word of God fearlessly. Some indeed also for envy and strife, but some also for goodwill, preach Christ: these out of love, knowing than I am set for the defence of the gospel; those out of contention announce Christ, not purely, thinking to raise up tribulation for my bonds. What is it then? Only that in every way, whether in pretext or in truth, Christ is announced; and in this I rejoice, yea and will rejoice." Precluded from preaching freely as he was wont, he rose above all the pain of unworthy spirit and ways in the preachers. Though far from endorsing such fleshly pettiness, he could and would rejoice that Christ was proclaimed to such as never knew of a Saviour and of such a God as sent Him to suffer and to save the lost.

The question therefore is not whether all are qualified to preach, or whether those who preach do it always aright; but whether they are disqualified unless ordained. From the scriptures adduced it is perfectly clear that to hinder any Christian man who can preach is ecclesiastical disorder, and opposes the Lord's will as plainly shown by inspiration, the only unfailing standard for the Christian. Thence it is certain that they are entitled; and in the case of those who are endowed for the gospel more than others, it is well to consider what light Eph. 4:7-13 gives us, where the title of these evangelists, as well as of the other great edifying gifts, is laid down. They differ in measure and character, but they are all gifts (δόματα) direct from Christ without intervention; and therefore distinct from local charges like elders or deacons, which did require due authority to appoint them.

But not so apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, which are Christ's gifts and need no

authorisation of man. Apostles and prophets have the unique place of being the foundation, as Christ is the corner stone; and the foundation was so well laid, that neither succession nor restoration is anything but a fable and imposture. The evangelists are to call in from the world to God those who become members of Christ; as the pastors and teachers build them up in His grace and truth, holy and beloved. As may be noticed, bishops or elders, like deacons, are not “gifts” and nowhere included among them; but they required apostolic authority, direct or indirect, to appoint them: a very great difficulty to find either for many a day. But the edifying gifts from the ascended Christ are as unfailing as on the day of Pentecost, till the last members of His body who need them are made up.

It is worthy of “an evangelical churchman’s heed that his slur on “come,” instead of being “sent,” has been anticipated and condemned in the last Epistle of the last apostle. “Beloved, thou doest faithfully in whatever thou didst work toward thy brethren, and the strangers (who bore witness to thy love before the church), whom thou wilt do well in setting forward worthily of God. For they went forth for the Name, taking nothing from the Gentiles.” This was their merit, not in the eyes of Diotrephes the stickler for human authority, but of the apostle and so recorded by the Holy Spirit for our learning. They “came,” they were not “sent” save by God.

But even good men like an order of their own, and are impatient of continual dependence on the grace of God. While the apostles lived, there was a strong tendency to slip from the things of Christ into their own things. We see it in the Galatians where the same retrograde spirit

which sought to bring back the law dared to question the typical apostleship of Paul who did not know Christ at all in the days of His flesh, only when ascended. This is therefore of special interest and cheer to us who were called long after. As for us, all we boast is of faith, which looks to the unseen and eternal things. We therefore delight to read how the apostle encourages us as he did the early saints in Rome when he used the same term “call” for his own apostleship and for their saintship: not “called to be” as in the A. and R. versions, but in both cases “called” or by call, instead of a birthright as Israel’s privileges were. How this meets all difficulties, all countries, all ages, and all circumstances! Grace can work on the same principle, whatever the position that God may set us in.

We all know the currents and too notorious objections of unbelief. They are equally used as to a Christian and as to Christian ministry. How can you know a Christian? says the evangelical clergyman, whose position obliges him to receive every parishioner as a saint at the Eucharist, though he is sure that many decent in conduct are dead in trespasses and sins. If he were not a clergyman, he could see clearer and would act very differently; but the rubric! Will “an evangelical churchman” venture to call this obligation “of the church’s order and discipline” apostolic rule? I hope not; but if not, where is he? Why then was he so bold as to say, “The apostolic rule which governs the Church, etc. Such a rubric, which fends off the disreputable but admits and welcomes (particularly at Easter for reason given) every decent man though just as dead,” is a flagrant departure from the essential nature of God’s church.

But I must not overlook the reference to Heb. 5:4. O "evangelical churchman," where have you been taught to commit yourself and your teachers to an error so stupendous as to confound priesthood with ministry? In the Epistle it is Christ compared with Aaron. What has this to do with preaching? It is the Book of Common Prayer that has misled you; for it habitually and shamefully confounds presbyter with priest, though they mean wholly different and irreconcilable things. What a pity you do not read the Bible to better purpose! But your safe-guards, your Prayer-book and your "responsible and authorised teachers," have led you into the ditch. Let me tell you, that according to the N. T. there is no earthly priest acknowledged in Christianity, which boasts of the Great Priest interceding for us in heaven, and invites all Christian brethren now to enter boldly into the holies by the blood of Jesus through the rent veil. You betray yourself, though "an evangelical churchman," still under much of Popish darkness. Bear with "an old disciple"'s plainness: we owe it to one another, and above all to the Lord.

Yours with hearty goodwill

W. K.

P.S. That the straitened rules of decadent Judaism were not so stiff as fallen Christendom's, the very N.T. bears witness. John the Baptist preached the coming Kingdom of the heavens, yet without a miracle for his mission from God. And Christians preached in Jewish synagogues on the sabbath without question of human authority. To believe the word is blessed if we obey, an empty boast if we do not. And how grave is the fact that in none of the denominations, West or East, National or

Nonconformist, great or small, is there an approach to “the assembly” of scripture wherein the Holy Spirit is left free to glorify the Lord, dividing to each one severally even as He will! Yet how could this be in a Christendom which owns “the church of God” neither in principle nor in practice? So complete is the departure, not from the highest pretensions, but from the truth of the church as God has revealed it.