

# THE WESLEYAN.

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"WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPAL THING; THEREFORE GET WISDOM."

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## WESLEYAN TRACTS FOR THE TIMES.

"WHY DON'T YOU COME TO CHURCH?" A DIALOGUE BETWEEN A CLERGYMAN AND A WESLEYAN METHODIST.

Clergyman. Good morning Mr. B.: I hope you are well.

Wesleyan. Good morning, Sir. I thank you for your kind inquiries, and am glad to say, I am well. (Some further civilities were exchanged, and Mr. B. proceeded.) May I ask, Sir, to what I am indebted for the honour of this visit?

C. I have called, as the Clergyman of the parish, to enquire after your welfare, and especially to ask, how it is that I have not seen you at church?

W. Not seen me at church, Sir! Did you not see me there on Christmas-day?

C. No; I did not. Were you there?

W. Yes, Sir; and at the communion too; but you were too much occupied to observe me.

C. Well, I am glad to hear it. But, indeed, I did not observe you; and I am also rather surprised, for I understood that you were in the habit of going to the Wesleyan meeting. Is it not so?

W. It is, Sir. I occasionally attend at church, and communicate there too; but as a member of the Wesleyan society, I, of course, feel it to be my duty to worship steadily with them.

C. And do you habitually receive the sacraments at the meeting?

W. Why, Sir, I'll tell you. My first three children were baptised at church, but as my wife had joined the society before the last child was born, she was glad to have it baptised by a Wesleyan Minister at our own chapel. And as the Registration Law provides for the registration of births, and makes the Registrar's signature a good evidence as the parish-book, and her difficulties on that score are at an end.

C. I see, I see. And do you receive the Lord's supper there?

W. Yes, Sir; at every opportunity. You perceive, Sir, I have no objections to go to church sometimes; for I need not have taken the children there to be baptised, as I could have had them baptised by Wesleyan Ministers, and registered in London; and I need not have come on Christmas-day, nor on Good-Friday, as I generally do; but, on the whole I prefer Wesleyan Methodism.

C. You surprise me very much: and I must say I think you are very inconsistent with yourself; especially as you call yourself a Wesleyan Methodist. Were you alive, would you disown you, or you have departed altogether from his precepts and doctrines.

W. Indeed, Sir! I hope not; for, except the book of God, there are few, if any, writings that I prize so highly as his; and if you can show me that I am setting his authority at naught, I will retract my steps. At present I have no suspicion that I am doing so; nor is there any human title that I am more ambitious to deserve than that of "a true Wesleyan Methodist."

C. Ah, there it is! "That is the very spirit which St. Paul rebukes in the Corinthians: 'I am of Paul, and I of Apollus, and I of Cephas.'" What is the difference between saying, "I am of Paul, and I of Apollus," which is the mark of the schismatics at Corinth, and saying, "I am of Whitfield, and I am of Wesley!" I have often been told that you Methodists were in the habit of all but adorning Wesley, and now I see at plainly. You have no right, my friend, thus to glory in a mere man, and to use his name as a means of division. You must forgive me if I say that, in this instance, you are, like the heretics spoken of in the Epistle to Titus, condemned by yourself.

W. Sir, I will forgive you any thing you say, if you will only hear me.

C. That I will readily do; for I have much wished for an opportunity to have

some conversation of this kind with you. You know, Mr. B., that it is part of the duty of every Clergyman, as laid down in the Ordination Service, to endeavour to bring his flock to such an "agreement in faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there should be no place left among them, either for error in religion, or viciousness in life." of "viciousness in life," in the gross and ordinary sense of the word, I do not suspect you; but I fear you have been led into a serious "error in religion," and on that subject I shall gladly converse with you as long as you please, in the hope that it may please God to bless my endeavours for your recovery.

W. I thank you, Sir. And now, by your leave, I will explain what I said about my desire, or ambition rather, to deserve the title of "a true Wesleyan Methodist." It is not that I am fond of being called by a human name. I would much rather that all such distinctions were laid aside; but at present that cannot be. Divisions of opinion, and consequent differences in practice, notoriously exist among those who are equally the followers of a common Saviour: and while these things are so, divers names must be invested and borne by the several parties. So it has been for an early period of the church's history, as you very well know; and to take any other name or title than that of Christian, does not, therefore, necessarily show that a man is guilty of schism. The name "Wesleyan Methodist" is only a description of a certain class or order of Christians, and does not deny my Christianity, but rather presupposes it. Meanwhile it serves to convey to my fellow-Christians, in a few words, the amount of differences; and enables us to understand one another, agree, and better than we could otherwise. Christ, practically considered, is not divided; but the mystical Christ, that is, the church, is; and while it is, the names of its several sections are good or evil, as the system which they intended to denote are so, and no more. Now, I believe Wesleyan Methodism to be the purest and most efficient form of Christianity in existence. I have therefore no reason to be ashamed at the system, but rather every reason to be thankful for it. It is not in Wesley that I glory. He was the instrument in raising us up as a people, but it was God in him, and with him, who made him what he was. I glory in God in him, then, when I say, I wish to be "a true Wesleyan Methodist;" to enter fully into that doctrinal system which, in my judgment, resembles most nearly the system of the New Testament. In so far that he brought out and restored that system, I am his disciple: in so far as other Christians exhibit the traces of it in their creeds, codes, and practice, I rejoice to consider myself one with them.

C. But the church bears no man's name. She is the bride of Christ; and has continued from the beginning one and undivided. And all who have separated from her show that they do not build, as she does, on the one true foundation; for, by speaking of such and such persons as their founders, they confess their human origin.

W. In the mouth of a Romanist, such language would be consistent and natural; but from a Minister of the Established Church it sounds strange. For, suffice me to remind you, Sir, that you are necessitated to take distinctive titles, whether they are derived from the names of men or not. Merely to call yourself a Christian, or a member of Christ's church in England, is to convey no distinct idea of your faith and practice. The Romanist avows that he has a better claim to such titles than you; and that, in fact, you have none at all, being a mere schismatic. Suppose you follow the offensive fashion which the Scotch Episcopalians are trying to set you, and call your Church, "The Reformed Catholic Church," you (thereby) evidently acknowledge some

relation to the Reformers, and your boasting is as effectually excluded, as if you were designated Cranmerians, or Ridleyites. The term "Catholic" will give rise to similar disputes; and the party who are most anxious to revive it have felt this so strongly, that they have called their series of reprints, "The Library of Anglo-Catholic Theologians." Thus, it may be seen, that if names are an evil, they are a necessary evil; as indeed they have been ever since the days of the Father who said that Christian was his name, and Catholic his surname. It is just as scriptural for me to say, "I trust a true name, and Wesleyan Methodist my surname." He used the word "Catholic" to denote what he believed to be a true and complete, as distinguished from a spurious and a maimed, Christianity; and thus, and only thus, would I use the words "Wesleyan Methodist," when I say I am ambitious to deserve the title.

C. But Wesley would not have a people called after his name. I think that I have read that he reproved some of his Preachers in America, for calling a school that they built after their own name.

W. You are quite correct, Sir. And it should be known that he wished to avoid giving his spiritual children any name at all. His hope was that they would all live and die, as many of the first of them did, in the communion of the Established Church; and he therefore called them simply "The United Societies." They were at first called Methodists in derision; but the name soon took, and became universal. Still he carefully abstained from giving them any name himself. To the last he spoke of them as "The people called Methodists;" both in the titles of books published for their use, and in the legal instrument by which the Conference is constituted, he adhered rigidly to that form of speech. When, in process of time, there came to be more than one body of "people called Methodists," and some further distinctive epithet was necessary, the term "Wesleyan" was assumed to describe the societies continuing in the Connexion which he had founded; just as the surname of Catholic became necessary to those who before had been called simply Christians. I ment on this to show that it is by no act of that great and good man that we bear his name, but rather by the force of circumstances operating against his inclination.

C. You have convicted yourself again, by saying that it was Wesley's hope that his societies would live and die in the Established Church. Why have they not done so, but been, in the true spirit of self-will, they will not listen to his advice and warning? Did he not protest that his Preachers had no right to administer the sacraments; and that for them to attempt it would be to follow the example of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram?

W. Indeed, Sir, I do not think he did. You misunderstand him.

C. No, I do not. I will bring you the very words he uses to-morrow.

W. I believe, Sir, I am in possession of his writings: if you can find the passages, we will read them together.

C. Well, then, here is the first:—

"We believe it would not be right for us to administer either baptism or the Lord's supper, unless we had a commission or trust from those bishops whom we apprehend to be in succession from the Apostles."

"We believe there is, and always was, in every Christian church, an outward priesthood ordained by Jesus Christ, and a sacrifice offered therein by men authorized to act as ambassadors for Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

"We believe that the threefold order of Ministers is not only authorised by apostolic institution; but also by the written word."

—*Israel, Works, (Fourth Edition) vol. ii, p. 4.*

Here is another equally plain passage: he says, "They" (the Methodist Preachers) "no more take upon them to be Priests than to be Kings. They take not upon them to administer sacraments, an honour peculiar to the Priests of God."—*Works, vol. viii, p. 218.*

And again he addresses the Preachers in these words:—

"In 1744, all the Methodist Preachers had their first Conference. But none of them dreamed, that the being called to preach gave them any right to administer sacraments. One of our first rules was given to each Preacher, 'You are to do that part of the work which we appoint.' But what work was this? Did we ever appoint you to administer Sacraments: to exercise the priestly office? Such a design never entered into our mind: it was the farthest from our thoughts; and if any preacher had taken such a step, we should have looked upon it as a palpable breach of this rule, and, consequently, as a recantation of our connexion."

"I wish all of you, who are vulgarly termed Methodists, would seriously consider what has been said. And particularly you whom God hath commissioned to call sinners to repentance. It does by no means follow from hence, that you are commissioned to baptize, or to administer the Lord's supper. Ye never dreamed of this for ten or twelve years after ye began to preach. Ye did not then, like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, seek the priesthood also.' Ye knew, 'No man taketh this honour to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.' O contain yourselves within your own bounds!"—*Works, vol viii, pp. 265, 267.*

W. Indeed, Sir, these are strong words, and sound very much like what is now called *Peseyntism*. Don't you think that any Clergyman who should preach so now, would be called a *Peseyntist*?

C. Very likely he would; for that word is much in fashion just now. But it only describes a set of opinions which have been held more or less extensively in the Church ever since the Reformation; and there is nothing really new in the teaching of Dr. Pusey and his friends.

W. So I should suppose, Sir; for I find in Mr. Wesley's writings many passages which show that he held the same opinions nearly a hundred years ago. And he carried out his opinions into practice too, just as some clergymen do now. For instance, he accounted all the Ministers of the Continental Protestant Churches as mere laymen, because they were not episcopally ordained; and repelled a pious Lutheran Minister in America from the Lord's table, as unbaptized. He afterwards rebaptized an adult person in London, who had received baptism from a Dissenting Minister. In short, he declares that for some years he enforced the rubrics at the peril of his life; and that his views on certain points of church order were so rigid that he would almost have thought it a sin to save a soul, if it were done out of the church. I do not much wonder, therefore, at his saying such things as you have now read. But he did not always hold these sentiments. Indeed, if I am not mistaken, he avows very different, and even opposite opinions, in other parts of his writings. The threefold order of Ministers, and the lineal succession from the Apostles, of which he speaks in the first extract you read, he declares to be groundless notions. He even calls the latter "a fable," in the following passage:—"I firmly believe, I am a scriptural episcopacy as much as any man in England or in Europe. For the uninterrupted succession to be a fable, which no man ever did or can prove."—*Works, vol. xiii, p. 210.* This you see, Sir, flatly contradicts the quotation you made.

C. It is indeed a strange contradiction. How is it to be accounted for?