WHY ARE WE NONCONFORMISTS?

An address delivered at the Baptist Autumnal meetings at Reading, England, by Rev. T. G. Tarn.

(London Freeman.)

There are few questions which concern us more deeply as a denomination than the attitude of our young people to the distinctive principles which underlie our church life. The importance of the question is accentuated by the departure of not a few who quietly leave the church of their fathers and find their way into the established church. This drift of young life is not confined to our own churches; it is, perhaps, not greater to-day than in days that are past, yet it is sufficiently serious to awaken our earnest solicitude, and it is all the more serious because they do not go, to say the least of it, to a purer faith, and a deeper spiritual life. Many influences are at work to produce this drift toward the established church, and over some of them we have absolutely no control; but I am sure that an adequate knowledge of our principles would detain in our ranks the brightest and best of those who leave us. If we could only make them see the great barrier of principle which lies in the path that leads from Nonconformity to Conformity, and which to many of us seems an absolutely insurmountable barrier—(applause)—then we should only lose those who set more store by personal gratification than principle, and who allow social considerations to outweigh fidelity to truth and duty. And these we could afford to lose. We may fairly take to ourselves a large share of the blame if the thoughtful and earnest and truth-loving of our young people leave us because we have been so shamefully indifferent to their education in our principles. A few years ago Dr. Dale said of the Congregationalists, "I believe there is no community of Christians in this country so profoundly ignorant of its own history and principles as ourselves." I am afraid that in this respect the Baptists would have to be bracketed equal with with the Congregationalists. We air our principles at such gatherings as this, and then we go home and carefully wrap them in a napkin. (Hear, hear) At any rate we take no great pains to ground our young people in them. We are lacking in clear definite teaching as to why we are Nonconformists, and consequently there are many who have grown, up among us, or who have joined with us because of personal attachments and preferences, who remain in profound ignorance of our distinctive principles, and, therefore, have no sure anchorage when the current of temporal interest or social prestige flows strongly toward the established church. We depend utterly on great principles. It is almost a matter of life and death for us to diffuse a knowledge of those principles among the younger members of our churches and congregations. They should be taught what our Noncomformity really is—(applause)—what substantial grounds there are for it, and how imperatively necessary it is that we should be faithful to it. And I am glad that this question has so far come to the front that there is now in preparation a series of handbooks dealing with our history and principles, and I hope that when they are issued every member of this union will endeavor to secure for them a wide circulation and a deligent persual. We must make it clearly understood that our Nonconformity is not the offspring of sectarian pride or jealousy, of insubordination or self-will—(applause)—for attempts are sometimes made by opponents to represent it in that light. The spirit of the men who laid the foundations of Nonconformity was not contentious, but devout, and it was their devotion to Christ and the spirituality of His kingdom which led them to separate from the State church. Nor is our Nonconformity based upon difference of opinion on the question of church government. (Hear, hear.) I am bound to say that Congregationalism seems to me to reproduce most faithfully the ecclesiastical polity of the New Testament and the early church, and to embody in the best and noblest way the spirit and genius of Christianity, but I believe that large liberty was left to the church to determine the particular kind of ecclesiastical organization best suited to its case. Our Nonconformity is not a mere question of rites and ceremonies.

We cultivate the simpler forms of worship because we regard them as more conducive to spirituality. We see the danger of formalism lurking in the stately stiffness of a liturgy, which leaves no place for the free spontaneous outpouring of the heart to God in prayer, and greater danger still in a gorgeous and obtrusive ritual; but our vital ground of difference from the established church does not lie in the circumstantials of worship. If our separation arose from mere party feeling, or from exaggerated emphasis on minor points, we should be guilty of that sin, which is often attributed to us, the sin of schism. And I for one would not speak lightly of the sin of rending the body of Christ. But Nonconformity is no more schismatic than Protestantism.

It had its origin not in departure from the truth but in return to the truth. The first Nonconformists—like the first Protestants—did not fling away great principles; they re-discovered them, disinterred them from the mass of superstition and error in which they were buried, freed them from the dust of ages, and brought them forth in all their divine splendor to the light of day. And this is the strength of our position. We do not merely deny, we affirm (Applause.) We take our stand not upon negations, but upon positive truths—truths which are vital and fundamental to the Christian faith and the Kingdom of God. The time at my disposal will allow me to do little more than mention two or three of these positive principles on which our Nonconformity is based.

To begin with we lay emphasis upon the necessity of a converted membership for the Christian church. We believe that the Christian is one who has been "born again," not of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. We believe in the Holy Ghost as the author of this change. We believe that it is the duty of the church to proclaim the necessity for this change, and that only those who have experienced it have any right to a place in its membership. Our fathers laid stress upon what they called "gathered churches," and so do we. It is the very citadel of our position as Baptists. (Hear, hear.) See how this principle is violated in the established church! The child, when baptized, is declared by the priest to be "regenerated and grafted into the holy body of Christ's church." With strict consistency it is afterwards taught to say, "In baptism I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." In due time confirmation follows, and, assuming the regeneration of the candidate, the only condition required is that he "can say the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments, and can also answer to such other questions as in the Short Catechism are contained." And then, in the burial service, no matter how wicked the life of the man baptized in infancy may have been, provided he has not been excommunicated, and has not laid violent hands upon himself, the priest buries him "in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life," while a little child dying unbaptized, in all its innocence and sweet heavenliness, is denied Christian burial. (Shame.) I am not dealing with individual utterances, but with the recognized formularies of the church, and I say that, despite all the ingenious and subtle explanations of those words of the baptismal service and the Catechism with which we are familiar, they teach most unmistakebly the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, and, by substituting the ceremonial for the Spiritual, they go fatally wrong on the vital question of personal Christianity. The principle of the established church is that the child is regenerated in the act of baptism, and all subsequent dealing with it proceeds on that baseless and most dangerous assumption; the principle of the Nonconformist churches is to affirm the necessity of spiritual renewel, not through the observance of a rite, but through personal repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. This principle is so far reaching, so essential to spiritual Christianity, that, of itself, it amply justifies our position as Nonconformists. Closely linked with this principle is another—the soul's direct and personal relation to God without the intervention of priest or church. The system of the established church is thoroughly sacerdotal. It proceeds on the assumption that the modern bishops are the lineal descendants of the apostles. It affirms that the bishop is necessary to create the priesthood, and that ordination by the bishop conveys a mysterious power to the person thus ordained, by virtue of which he can administer the sacraments with efficacy. It affirms that the sacraments administered by priestly hands are necessary means for the creation and growth of spiritual life. Thus to make bishops and priests and sacraments essential to the religion of Christ is to interpose a huge system of Sacerdotalism between the soul and God. This is a flagrant evil which we most emphatically condemn. We are told that when Alexander the Great visited Diogenes, he stood in his light and asked what he could do for him, the sturdy philosopher, unappalled by the presence of the great warrior and king, simply said to him, "get out of my sunshine." And so our Nonconformist fathers realizing in the church the common priesthood of believers conscious of direct access to God through Jesus Christ, and needing nothing that a human hierarchy could supply, did not hesitate to say to the arrogant priest who sought to interpose between their souls and their God—"Get out of my sunshine." And they said it very emphatically. (Applause.) It needs to be said in this England of ours that priestcraft is an imposture, for God is accessible to every believer, and that the confessional is not only a menace to the morals of the nation, but an outrage upon the sanctities of the soul. It is impossible to conceive a more absolute breakdown than that which occurs when men come to the New Testament to substantiate their claim to be priests, apart from the general priesthood of all believers. The late Bishop Lightfoot says, "The kingdom of Christ has no sacerdotal system." "The only priests under the Gospel dispensation as such in the New Testament are the saints, the members of the Christian brotherhood." Nothing more remains to be said on this subject, but while these words are highly caeditable to the bishop's candour, they stamp with the seal of condemnation the religious system to which he belonged. (Applause). Over against a class priesthood, Nonconformity affirms that every bellicver is a priest unto God, that no human being is necessary as a channel of Divine grace, that the two ordinances derive their efficacy, not from the person who administers them, but from the spiritual condition of the recipient, and that each child of God may, for himself or herself, hear the Father's voice, saying, "Son, daughter, thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace." We ought to place next as a principle of Nonconformity the supreme headship of Christ in His own church. It is scarcely necessary to point out how often and how emphatically this truth is insisted on in the Word of God. "One is your Master even the Christ." "He is the head of the body, the church." but in the established church, the monarch for the time being is *ex-officio* and irrespective of personal belief and character the head of the church, possessing the supreme prerogative in ecclesiastical affairs, and this, Bishop Hinds, in his history of Christianity, admits to be "a momentous deviation" from the primitive church. The chief officers, the bishops and archbishops, are really appointed by the prime minister, though he may be a agnostic or an unbeliever. The Prayer-book can only be altered by parliament, and it is difficult to discern the special fitness of parliament for dealing with the formularies of the church. Lay patrons have the right to select and present men whom they think adapted for the cure of souls. Parishioners can choose their own doctors or their own lawyers, but their spiritual advisers must be chosen for them. The church cannot appoint her own highest functionaries, she cannot revise her own Prayer-book, she is bound hand and foot in legislative chains (applause). And so far as the established church is concerned, I can see no injustice in the position. It is a perfectly fair arrangement. She receives the patronage and support of the State and it is only right that she should have State control as well. That is the price she has to pay for her favored position, she must hand over the reins of government to the secular power. It is an enormous price to pay. Many of her more spiritual members writhe beneath the yoke that is thus bound upon the church. But it is inevitable. If she takes the money of the state she must submit to the mastery of the state; if she accepts Cæsar's gold she must have Cæsar's government. And this is our solemn and sorrowful indictment, that for a mess of pottage she has sold her birthright, surrendered her independence, invaded the crown rights of her Lord, and committed treason Over against that principle of the established church to hand over the reins of government to monarch and parliament for a consideration, we place this principle of Nonconformity: Christ the supreme Head and Law-giver of His church; the Bible, the only statute book; the members of the church to elect their own officers and manage their own affairs as taught by the Spirit of God, and not as directed by the civil government. There is just one more principle which I must mention, and that is what is termed voluntaryism, the principle that religion should be maintained and propagated by the voluntary offerings of Christian people, and not by the patronage and endowments of the state. All attempts to help it on by an alliance with the state are contrary to the Spirit of God's Word; and they contain an element of injustice, for why should a man be compelled to support a religious system in which he does not believe? Macaulay has well said, "The whole history of Christianity shows that she is in far greater danger of being corrupted by the alliance of power than of being crushed by its opposition." For an illustration of the truth of that statement, look at the early church. Without a single penny from the Imperial treasury, in the teeth of fierce and unrelenting opposition on the part of the Roman emperor, the church made such a rapid progress that in less than three centuries it had achieved a complete victory over Paganism. Then came its alliance with the State, and from that time it began to decline in spiritual influence, it lost its purity and aggressive force, its course was downward. Two great lessons taught by the history of the early church are—first, the sufficiency of voluntaryism; and, secondly, the awful danger to spiritual religion from entering into unholy alliance with the State. (Hear, hear.) And if the voluntary principle was sufficient in those days, surely it is sufficient to-day. The church has larger resources in men and means, it has not to encounter such fiery persecution, it has the same gospel and the same Divine Spirit to make that gospel effectual. It should be able to advance without State aid. And it is able! Look at what has been done in the United States. Voluntaryism has been on its trial in this young and rapidly increasing community, and it has proved itself equal to the heaviest demands made upon it. The American churches are doubtless not perfect, but they are, as Stowell Brown once said, "A splendid and conclusive testimony to the indestructible vitality, the unlimited power, and the practical efficacy of the voluntary principle." (Applause.) And if we look at what Welsh Nonconformity has done for the Welsh people; if we look at the marvellous growth of the free churches of Scotland in half a century; if we look at what the free churches of England are doing to meet the needs of both the urban and the rural population, we can have no manner of doubt that there is sufficient force in the church of Christ to spread the Christian religion without any help from the State. Our reliance is upon the omnipotence of gospel truth, the power of the Holy Ghost, the holiness and love and missionary zeal of Christ's disciples; and when this spiritual force is confidently trusted, when the church casts away the broken reeds on which it leans, then religion will win its way by its own transcendent power and heavenly grace. (Applause.) These principles should be carefully taught to our young people, and should be intelligently and firmly grasped by them. There is greater need of this, because, as Archdeacon Farrar has recently pointed out in the *Contemporary Review*, the dominant party in the church is "undergoing the work of the Reformation," engaging in a "systematic," and, alas! too successful attempt to repudiate in the Reformed church of their fathers, the very truths on which, and for which, it was founded," aiming at the "re-introduction of those deadly errors—yes, even of the 'blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits'—from which we were delivered at the Reformation by the battles and the martyrdoms of those who sealed with their blood their death defying utterance of truth." Doctrines are taught and rites are observed, which, fifty years ago, would have been deemed impossible outside the Romish church. The evangelical party is declining, while the sacerdotal party is proportionately increasing in numbers and influence, in boldness and aggressiveness. And it is perfectly natural that it should The leaven of Romanism is in the Prayer Book, and why should we wonder that it bids fair to leaven the whole church? The Reformers erred in not making a clean sweep, in yielding to the spirit of compromise. And with the sad results of their lack of thoroughness, we are face to face to-day in a "resurgent Sacerdotalism," which looks upon the Reformation as a calamity, and is endeavoring to lead back the people of this land to the bondage of Rome. (Applause.) The duty of the hour is not to minimise, but to emphasize the differences between the Evangelical and the Sacerdotal conceptions of the Christian church. There can never be anything but irreconcilable antagonism between these two conceptions. We gladly recognize and admire the devoutness, the earnestness, and the zeal of many Anglicans; but we are bound to say that between their beliefs and our own there is a mighty and impassable gulf which no compromise can span and no charity bridge over. By all means let us seek to diffuse through all sections of the church a more loving spirit; let us seek to bring all evangelical sections into closer union and more practical co-operation; let us say God-speed to the objects aimed at in the Grindelwald and Lucerne Conferences, in which some of our brethren find supreme enjoyment; but let us never say or do anything to obscure the vital difference between a free church and a fettered church, between the Evangelical and the Sacerdotal interpretation of the religion of Jesus Christ. It is pleasant to talk about catholicity, and concession, and compromise; but the fact remains that reunion is impossible with any section of the church which is bound by the trammels of the State, which contains monstrous errors in its formularies, and which openly proclaims and glories in the doctrines of Rome. Into the gulf that separates us must be flung all State fetter, Sacerdotal theories and pretensions, every ray of Popery, or it can never be bridged over, and we must remain Nonconformists to the end of the chapter. One word more. We must do more than instruct our young people in the principles of Nonconformity; we must seek to inspire in them an enthusiasm for those principles, so that they may be enshrined in the heart as well as accepted by the intellect. Our fathers were willing to endure pains and penalties innumerable rather than give them up. There is no more pathetic and instructive chapter in the annals of our land than the story of their conflicts and sufferings. They were fined, they were whipped and pilloried, they were imprisoned, their goods were confiscated, they were driven into exile, they suffered death on the scaffold and at the stake for the sake of the principles they knew so well and counted so dear. We live in easier times. Many of the penalties from which Nonconformists used to suffer have been swept away. "Still," it may be said, "the open avowal of these principles has its disabilities." What of that? They are worth living for, for they are of the very essence of the gospel, they are worth suffering for, they are worth dying for, if need be. Be true to them; be faithful and zealous in our advocacy of them; teach them to your children that so they may stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free and be not entangled with the yoke of bondage; write them upon the conscience of this great nation, and so hasten the coming of that glorious day, when we shall have a free church in a free State built upon these sovereign and eternal principles of the Word of God. (Loud applause.)

The Christian Sabbath.

One of your worthy readers, a young lady, requests from me "through the columns of the *Canadian Baptist*," an answer to this question: "What Scriptural authority have we for keeping the first day of the week instead of the seventh as God commanded?"

My reasons for observing as sacred the first day of the week are these:

1. The Moral Law promulgated from Mount Sinia (Exodus 20: 8, 9) enjoins upon us the santification of one-seventh part of our weekly life-time to Divine service. Observe in this passage and in others where the command is repeated, how carefully the particular day is not specified. The substantial meaning of this injunction is that at the completion of every six days' secular work, one entire day of holy rest should be observed.

There are very good reasons which I have; neither time nor space to give now, for believing that the Jewish Sabbath—I mean the particular day of the week—was *not* the Edenic and patriarchal Sabbath, but the day following.

This liberty as to the particular day of the week that is to be sabbatized is absolutely necessary if in the churches of to-day this ordinance is to be honored at all, for,

2. It is obviously a geographical impossibility for people to observe sabbatically the same twenty-four hours in Judea and in Vancouver or Japan. Between these points lie so many thousand miles, and every thousand miles of distance westward throws the Sabbath morning one hour later than in Jerusalem. If the churches of Australia determined to observe the seventh day, we in Canada, if we were determined to observe precisely the same period of time, must necessarily keep our Sabbath all through the evening, midnight and early dawn of the Friday, going to bed all day Saturday. After the Christian residents of Jerusalem have closed their Sabbath, we continue ours far into the morning hours of their secular Monday.

In short, it is utterly impossible for worshippers living on a globe like this to sabbatise simultaneously. The question then is: who is to keep the wrong day, if the seventh day be the right one?

3. The Lord Jesus Himself (who is the Law-giver of Sinai in person) especially honored the first day of the week, *first* by the stupendous miracle of His resurrection; *secondly*, by meeting with His disciples several times (during the forty days) on that particular day; *thirdly*, by bestowing the pentecostal baptism of the Holy Ghost on that day. *Fourthly*, it was the custom of the primitive Christians to assemble for the Lord's Supper on that day; and *fifthly*, the glorious Revelations were given to John in Patmos on that day. If we want Jesus to meet with us, "the first day of the week" is the most likely time to get His company.

So long as the Jewish Sabbath was the legalised rest-day in Palestine, the early Christians no doubt observed that day devoutly (they *dared not* work at secular things) by attendance at the services of the temple and the synagogue; but even then I think the fact can be historically demonstrated that they habitually assembled as Christians every first day—perhaps morning and evening, before and after work.

As poor people—tradesmen and bond-servants,—this was all they could possibly do during that period to honor the day of their Saviour-God's glorious resurrection.—*J. Denovan, in Canadian Baptist.*

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Open Air Workers' Association of America.

The Section Conference on open air work was held on Tuesday morning, October 10, in the Memorial Art Palace in Chicago. Rev. E. H. Byington, of Brooklyn, N. Y., presided and made the opening prayer.

Prof. Graham Taylor, D. D., of Chicago Theological Seminary, said: Open air preaching is indispensible to the entire fulfillment of the churches mission to society. It is practicable. It is advantageous to both church and community. It reaches non-church-goers of our large cities. Not many perhaps are converted at the open-air service, but many do follow the preacher to the church, become interested, and scores are thus brought to Christ. Once when preaching from the rear of a gospel wagon, Prof. Taylor invited his audience to come with him to an evangelistic meeting in the church. Instructing the driver to proceed slowly along the street, he kept on preaching. The crowd followed, and when they reached the church over 100 men entered. Roman Catholics in large numbers attend. They seem to welcome and appreciate effort and message. Some are converted and become Protestants; others are blessed and stay in their own communion. No need of trouble with police. If they are consulted previously, their authority recognized, and their co-operation requested, they will prove friends. Congregation, including Romanists, will join in Lord's prayer, which often is very helpful and inspiring. It is good for country as well as city. In one Connecticut town a union open-air Sunday evening service on the village green drew out 300, double the number who would have entered the church on summer evenings. Interest manifested in audience should be followed up invariably in after meetings indoors or by personal address.

Rev. C. H. Tyndall, of Broome Street Tabernacle, New York city, said: We hold open-air meetings the entire year, and always have good audiences, even when it is so cold the speaker's overcoat must be buttoned. It is a regular church service, the notice being on our bulletin with all the others. The meetings are near the Bowery. The audience consist mainly of men; not only those on the streets, but those in an adjacent hotel who raise their windows and listen. Several speakers, each taking about five minutes, we find the best arrangement. Our ladies speak, holding the interest and generally making the deepest impression. Audience is always quiet for them. Meetings are sustained by Yoke Fellows Band, assisted by a committee of the Christian Endeavor.

The Honest Man.

To the Editor of the Messenger and Visitor:

Please inform your readers that I will mail free to all sufferers the means by which I was restored to health and manly vigor after years of suffering from nervous weakness. I was robbed and swindled by the quacks until I nearly lost faith in mankind, but thanks to heaven, I am now well, vigorous and strong. I have nothing to sell and no scheme to extort money from anyone whomsoever, but being desirous to make this certain cure known to all, I will send free and confidential to anyone full particulars of just how I was cured. Address with stamps:

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Says HENRY HUDSON, of the James Smith Woolen Machinery Co., Philadelphia, Pa., who certifies as follows:

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to try Ayer's Sarsaparilla. I took three bottles, the sores healed, and I have not been troubled since. Only the scars remain, and the memory of the past, to remind me of the good Ayer's Sarsaparilla has done me. I now weigh two hundred and twenty pounds, and am in the best of health. I have been on the road for the past twelve years, have noticed Ayer's Sarsaparilla advertised in all parts of the United States, and always take pleasure in telling what good it did for me."

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