

## CAUTION!

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## CHURCH THOUGHTS BY A LAYMAN.

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## THE CHURCH AND THE BIBLE SOCIETY.

CHURCH and Bible sound as harmonious as Queen and country. No Churchman can be otherwise than loyally associated with the Bible Society. But it is always well to define our terms. The Church then we hold to be the only Bible Society known to the Bible, the only organization responsible in any sense for the propagation of Scripture truth. The Word of God was committed as a sacred trust to the Church of God. The Bible is the Book of the Church of God. The Church under direction by the HOLY SPIRIT selected the books of the Bible out of other sacred writings, the Church gave them authoritatively unity as one Book, and the testimony of that Church crowned that book with authority as THE BIBLE. The Bible was not given, nor is it conceivable that it was ever intended to be used to establish varieties of separate communions or sects based upon individual interpretations, but to be the charter and official Book of the Catholic Church. To recognise the theory that every man is an authorized interpreter of the Bible is to make God the God and Author of confusion, not of order or unity. It is surely a plain, common sense view of this matter that all members of the Church of God must, by the necessity of their relation, recognise that an official interpretation of the Bible must be obligatory upon each of its members. There may be private views held, but when any utterance is made by cleric or laymen speaking in any capacity the voice of the Church, we submit that the plainest common sense demands that these utterances should be distinguished by official harmony. This harmony must by necessity be produced by the voice of such official having been turned to some authorized standard. We repeat that while private persons have full liberty to interpret scripture as they like, it is a physical impossibility to prevent them, yet every one who in any spiritual office speaks *officially for the Church* must speak as the Church directs. There is a great outcry made by the sects against the wholesome doctrine that the Church is the authorized interpreter of scripture. The sects deny that that is her office, her function, and that the presence within her of the Holy Spirit is to enable this duty to be faithfully fulfilled. This truth is spoken of on sectarian platforms as an outrage on individual liberty, as "offence against freedom of conscience," as "priestcraft" and so forth. But those who indulge in these terrible accusations, charges which alarm many Church people into accepting the theory of individual inspiration and renouncing the corporate inspiration of the Church are conspicuous for holding the very same theory, with this sole difference, that while we hold fast by the Church of God they cling just as firmly to some sect of man. Every Baptist believes the Baptist body to have the sole clue to the right interpretation of scripture, the office bearers of that body of all ranks and the private members all tune their voices to the Baptist interpretation.

So also the Wesleyans, they accept Wesley and the Methodist Fathers as authoritative interpreters of scripture whom they are bound to follow. So also the infinite variety of sects each one of which running off into the obscurest phases of oddity of interpretation, claims to have a key to the meaning of scripture not possessed by any other body. As a matter of fact the formula, "Our Church the authorized interpreter of scripture," is the great watchword of the sects. They differ from us in this that we claim that there is a spiritual body still living which has carried on from Pentecost until now a distinct, corporate life inspired by the Holy Ghost and that to it is vouchsafed as a spiritual organized unit, the ever abiding Presence of Him who said "Lo! I am with you always until the end," which Body, which unit is that "ONE CATHOLIC, APOSTOLIC CHURCH," in which every Churchman constantly asserts his belief however he may deny it by his life and his works.

For some fourteen hundred years the Church had no means, she had no power, and no command to do so even if she had the power, to place a copy of the Scriptures in the hands of all her children. This highly important fact is not merely dropping out of sight, but the attempt is being made to blot out all remembrance of it and to prevent the knowledge of it spreading. But the relation of the Bible to the Church cannot even be stated, much less understood, without a thorough grasp of this great historic fact, that for fourteen hundred years, during a period in which forty-six or more times over the entire population of the world was cleared away by death, there was not a printed book in existence. Millions, therefore, of CHRIST'S people, who lived to His glory, and thousands who died as martyrs, never even saw the inside of a Bible. Millions more who could read were thankful to have a few verses or a short selection mingled with short prayers stitched as a horn book or tract. In those days the Word of God was used as a Lamp to the feet and as Food for the soul, not as is largely the case to-day as a book of controversy, a book of strife, a book utterly discredited by its most eloquent patrons, by being made the excuse of a thousand sects and the exciting cause of all the confusions and divisions of CHRIST'S people. So that it is the testimony of history, testimony emphasized by fourteen centuries of her most glorious experience and most sublime demonstration of spiritual power, that the greatest works of the Church, the most enduring achievements of missionary enterprise were accomplished without the aid of a general diffusion of the Bible. England was brought out of heathen darkness into gospel light without any Englishmen reading the scriptures, save a king here and a noble there who held a Bible as one of his great, his most costly treasures.

We have stated the general aspect of this question broadly. If a closer enquiry were instituted, it would be found that not only was the greatest missionary work of the Church from Pentecost onwards done without printed Bibles, without any pretence or approach to a general diffusion of the scriptures, but that some of the noblest triumphs, the most splendid victories of the Church were won before portions of the Bible, as we know it, were in existence at all, and before the several books of which it is made up were declared to be and accepted as the Canon of Scripture.

In those days when the sky of the Church was yet bright with the halo of the SAVIOUR'S presence his apostles and evangelists did the work He set them to do, the work they were inspired to carry on

by the fire, the illumination of the Holy Spirit by direct appeals to those they were sent to minister unto, by teaching them fully all the verities of the Christian faith. Christian disciples then carried on the mission work of the Church by precept and by example. The power which shook down the walls of heathenism was a personal one, it was spirit acting upon spirit, heart affecting heart, mind influencing mind and soul rousing soul. The days of the printed Bible ought to have been as the olden days with the added power. But it is not so. There has come into vogue a comfortable theory that the distribution abroad of copies of a book will do the work of evangelising as well as it was done when personal influence inspired by the Holy Spirit was alone the power of God in His mission work, an influence which brought such mighty things to pass that we are fain to attribute the success of the early Church to some miraculous agency which God has withdrawn from the modern Church. We say the theory is a comfortable one, that giving away Bibles wholesale or selling them at a low price is the grand work of the Church; for such is the language used at Bible Society meetings. It is a theory unknown to the apostles, unknown to the Church of God for fourteen centuries, it is a theory which virtually sets aside the Master's command, "Go ye and make disciples of all nations," for it substitutes for his words the formula, "Send Bibles translated in the languages of all nations." The Church has yet the red blood in her veins which this theory has failed to water down, and the divinely planted instinct is strong within her, and the faith of early days is yet an inspiring force, the spirit of truth is yet the life of the Church, teaching her to do her work as the Master bade her by personal Evangelists, baptizing and teaching all nations. The Church knows and feels that the blessing of His abiding presence was promised and is realized as the reward of obedience to this duty of personal discipleizing the nations, for, "Lo! I am with you always," follows "Go ye unto all the world." The Church has this work put upon her, she cannot share this honour with any human society, she is recreant to her trust when she sanctions any hands but her own touching the sacred ark of the Divine Commission, or to any degree substitutes the Bible for the living voice of her teachers. So far as making known the Bible goes, the Church of England stands supremely alone in fidelity and zeal, for in her offices she provides that from ten to twelve chapters of scripture are read every day for the instruction of her children. So far as free interpretation goes the Church of England is the only Church which imposes no interpretation upon her children as terms of Communion. The sects which cry out against the claim of the Church to interpret those scriptures which God gave to her to arrange and decide upon as the Bible and gave His spirit to the Church to guide her into all truth in regard to, they have each a private interpretation and private traditions of the acceptance of which they impose as preliminary conditions to salvation and membership. In the Church Catholic, liberty to interpret is the liberty restricted yet assured by law, in the sects, liberty to interpret is either lawless license or the severe despotism of sectarian "views."

For members of the mushroom, so-called, Churches born of the unrest of the last century or sprung from the violence, the corruptions of social disorder, to rebuke us for lack of zeal in the cause of the Bible Society, is a superlative effort of audacious presumption. The sects would do well to reflect on this fact that while the Church has been for seventeen centuries basing education upon the