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SOME REMARKS

ON

“A DEFENCE OF THE PREFACE TO THE EDINBURGH  
EDITION OF ASPASIO VINDICATED.”

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EDINBURGH, *May*, 1766.

I HAVE neither time nor inclination to write a formal answer to the Reverend Dr. Erskine's tract. My hope of convincing him is lost; he has drunk in all the spirit of the book he has published. But I owe it to God and his children to say something for myself, when I am attacked in

so violent a manner, if haply some may take knowledge, that I also endeavour to "live honestly, and to serve God."

1. Dr. Erskine says, "An edition of these Letters has been published in London, from the author's own manuscripts, which puts the authenticity of them beyond doubt." I answer, This is a mistake; impartial men doubt of their authenticity as much as ever. (I mean, not with regard to the Letters in general, but to many particular passages.) And that for two reasons: First, because those passages breathe an acrimony and bitterness which Mr. Hervey in his life-time never showed to any one, and least of all to one he was deeply obliged to. Surely this is not what Dr. E. terms his "scriptural and animated manner." I hope it was not for this cause that he pronounces this "equal, if not superior, to any one of his controversial pieces published in his life-time." Indeed, I know of no controversial piece at all which he published in his life-time. His "Dialogues" he no more intended for such, than his "Meditations among the Tombs." A Second reason for doubting of their authenticity is, that he told his brother, with his dying voice, (I have it under his brother's own hand,) "I desire my Letters may not be published; because great part of them is written in a short-hand which none but myself can read."

2. But the present question lies, not between me and Mr. Hervey, but between Dr. E. and me. He vehemently attacks me for saying, "Orthodoxy, or right opinion, is at best but a very slender part of religion, if any part of it at all." He labours to deduce the most frightful consequences from it, and cries, "If once men believe that right opinion is a slender part of religion, if any part of religion, or no part at all, there is scarce any thing so foolish, or so wicked, which Satan may not prompt to." (Page 6.) And what, if, after all, Dr. E. himself believes the very same thing! I am much mistaken if he does not. Let us now fairly make the trial.

I assert, (1.) That, in some cases, "right opinion is no part of religion;" in other words, there may be right opinion where there is no religion. I instance in the devil. Has he not right opinions? Dr. E. must, perforce, say, Yes. Has he religion? Dr. E. must say, No. Therefore, here right opinion is no part of religion. Thus far, then, Dr. E. himself believes as I do.

I assert, (2.) In some cases, "it is a slender part of religion."

Observe, I speak of right opinion, as contra-distinguished both from right tempers and from right words and actions. Of this, I say, "It is a slender part of religion." And can Dr. E. say otherwise? Surely, no; nor any man living, unless he be brimful of the spirit of contradiction.

"Nay, but I affirm, right tempers cannot subsist without right opinion: The love of God, for instance, cannot subsist without a right opinion of him." I have never said anything to the contrary: But this is another question. Though right tempers cannot subsist without right opinion, yet right opinion may subsist without right tempers. There may be a right opinion of God, without either love, or one right temper toward him. Satan is a proof of it. All, therefore, that I assert in this matter, Dr. E. must affirm too.

But does it hence follow, that "ignorance and error are as friendly to virtue as just sentiments?" or, that any man may "disbelieve the Bible with perfect innocence or safety?" Does Dr. E. himself think I believe this? I take upon me to say, he does not think so. But why does he talk as if he did? "Because it is a clear consequence from your own assertion." I answer, (1.) If it be, that consequence is as chargeable on Dr. E. as on me; since he must, *nolens volens*, assert the same thing, unless he will dispute through a stone wall. (2.) This is no consequence at all: For, admitting "right tempers cannot subsist without right opinions," you cannot infer, therefore, "right opinions cannot subsist without right tempers." Prove this by other mediums, if you can; but it will never be proved by this. However, until this is done, I hope to hear no more of this thread-bare objection.

3. Dr. E. attacks me, Secondly, with equal vehemence, on the head of justification. In various parts of his tract, he flatly charges me with holding justification by works. In support of this charge, he cites several sentences out of various treatises, abridgments of which I have occasionally published within these thirty years. As I have not those abridgments by me now, I suppose the citations are fairly made; and that they are exactly made, without any mistake, either designed or undesigned. I will suppose, likewise, that some of these expressions, gleaned up from several tracts, are indefensible. And what is it which any unprejudiced person can infer from this? Will any candid man judge of my sentiments, either on this or any other head, from a few sentences of other men,

(though reprinted by me, after premising, that I did not approve of all their expressions,) or from my own avowed, explicit declarations, repeated over and over? Yet this is the way by which Dr. E. proves, that I hold justification by works! He continually cites the words of those authors as mine, telling his reader, "Mr. Wesley says thus and thus." I do not say so; and no man can prove it, unless by citing my own words. I believe justification by faith alone, as much as I believe there is a God. I declared this in a sermon, preached before the University of Oxford, eight-and-twenty years ago. I declared it to all the world eighteen years ago, in a sermon written expressly on the subject. I have never varied from it, no, not an hair's breadth, from 1738 to this day. Is it not strange, then, that, at this time of day, any one should face me down, (yea, and one who has that very volume in his hands, wherein that sermon on justification by faith is contained,) that I hold justification by works? and that, truly, because there are some expressions in some tracts written by other men, but reprinted by me during a course of years, which seem, at least, to countenance that doctrine! Let it suffice, (and it will suffice for every impartial man,) that I absolutely, once for all, renounce every expression which contradicts that fundamental truth, We are justified by faith alone.

"But you have published John Goodwin's 'Treatise on Justification.'" I have so; but I have not undertaken to defend every expression which occurs therein. Therefore, none has a right to palm them upon the world as mine. And yet I desire no one will condemn that treatise before he has carefully read it over; and that seriously and carefully; for it can hardly be understood by a slight and cursory reading. And let whoever has read it declare, whether he has not proved every article he asserts, not only by plain express Scripture, but by the authority of the most eminent Reformers. If Dr. E. thinks otherwise, let him confute him; but let no man condemn what he cannot answer.

4. Dr. E. attacks me, Thirdly, on the head of Christian perfection. It is not my design to enter into the merits of the cause. I would only just observe, (1.) That the great argument which Dr. E. brings against it is of no force; and, (2.) That he misunderstands and misrepresents my sentiments on the subject.

First. His great argument against it is of no force. It runs thus: "Paul's contention with Barnabas is a strong argument against the attainableness of perfection in this life." (Page 41.) True, if we judge by the bare sound of the English version. But Dr. E. reads the original: *Και εγενετο παροξυσμος*. It does not say that sharpness was on both sides. It does not say that all or any part of it was on St. Paul's side. Neither does the context prove that he was in any fault at all. Indeed, "he thought it not good to take him with them," who had deserted them before. Now, certainly, there was no blame in this; neither was there any in his subsequent behaviour. For when Barnabas also departed from it, he went on still in the work. "He went through Syria and Cilicia," as he had proposed, "confirming the Churches."

Secondly. He misunderstands and misrepresents my sentiments on the subject. He says, "Mr. Wesley seems to maintain, that sinless perfection is actually attained by every one born of God." (Page 39.)

I do not maintain this; I do not believe it. I believe Christian perfection, or perfect love, (*sinless perfection* is an expression which I do not use or contend for,) is not attained by any of the children of God till they are what the Apostle John terms *fathers*. And this I expressly declare in that very sermon which Dr. E. so largely quotes.

5. Why Dr. E. should quarrel with me concerning natural free-will, I cannot conceive, unless for quarrelling's sake. For it is certain, on this head, if no other, we are precisely of one mind. I believe that Adam, before his fall, had such freedom of will, that he might choose either good or evil; but that, since the fall, no child of man has a natural power to choose anything that is truly good. Yet I know (and who does not?) that man has still freedom of will in things of an indifferent nature. Does not Dr. E. agree with me in this? O why should we seek occasion of contention!

6. That Michael Servetus was "one of the wildest Antitrinitarians that ever appeared" is by no means clear. I doubt of it, on the authority of Calvin himself, who certainly was not prejudiced in his favour. For if Calvin does not misquote his words, he was no Antitrinitarian at all. Calvin himself gives a quotation from one of his letters, in which he expressly declares, "I do believe the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. But I dare not use the

word *Trinity* or *Person*." I dare, and I think them very good words. But I should think it very hard to be burned alive for not using them; especially with a slow fire, made of moist, green wood!

I believe Calvin was a great instrument of God; and that he was a wise and pious man: But I cannot but advise those who love his memory to let Servetus alone. Yet if any one resolves to understand the whole affair, he may see a circumstantial account of it, published some years since, by Dr. Chandler, an eminent Presbyterian Divine in London.

7. Of myself I shall speak a little by and by. But I would now speak of the Methodists, so called, in general. Concerning these, Dr. E. cites the following words, from a little tract, published some years since:—\*

"We look upon ourselves, not as the authors or ring-leaders of a particular sect or party, but as messengers of God to those who are Christians in name, but Heathens in heart and life, to call them back to that from which they are fallen, to real, genuine Christianity.—We look upon the Methodists, not as any particular party, but as living witnesses, in and to every party, of that Christianity which we preach." (Page 3.)

On this Dr. E. remarks: "If the Methodist Teachers confined themselves to preaching, there might be some room for this plea; but hardly, when they form bands and classes;" that is, when they advise those who are "recalled to real Christianity," to watch over each other, lest they fall again into the nominal religion, or no religion, that surrounds them. But how does this alter the case? What, if, being jealous, "lest any" of their brethren should again "be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin," they should "exhort one another," not only weekly, but daily, to cleave to God "with full purpose of heart!" Why might we not plead still, that these are not to "be looked upon as any particular party, but as living witnesses, in and to every party, of that Christianity which we preach?"

What Dr. E. says of the mischievousness of this, and with great plausibility, (page 27,) depends upon an entire mistake, namely, that the Leader of a class acts just like a Romish Priest; and that the inquiries made in a class are of the same kind with those made in auricular confession. It all therefore falls to the ground at once, when it is observed,

\* "Advice to the People called Methodists."

that there is no resemblance at all, either between the Leader and the Priest, or between the inquiries made by one and by the other.

It is true, that the Leader "sees each person once a week, to inquire how their souls prosper;" and that when they meet, "the Leader or Teacher asks each a few questions relating to the present situation of their minds." So then, that questions are actually asked, yea, and inquiries made, cannot be denied. But what kind of questions or inquiries? None that expose the answerer to any danger; none that they would scruple to answer before Dr. E., or any other person that fears God.

8. "But you form a Church within a Church, whose members in South Britain profess to belong to the Church of England, and those in North Britain to the Church of Scotland; while yet they are inspected and governed by Teachers who are sent, continued, or removed by Mr. W." (Page 3.)

All this is, in a certain sense, very true. But let us see what all this amounts to. "You form a Church within a Church;" that is, you raise up and join together witnesses of real Christianity, not among Mahometans and Pagans, but within a Church by law established. Certainly so. And that Church, if she knew her own interest, would see she is much obliged to us for so doing. "But the Methodists in South Britain profess to belong to the Church of England." They profess the truth: For they do belong to it; that is, all who did so before the change was wrought, not in their external mode of worship, but in their tempers and lives. "Nay, but those in Scotland profess to belong to the Church of Scotland." And they likewise profess the truth: For they do belong to it as they did before. And is there any harm in this?

"But they are still inspected by Mr. W. and his Preachers." And they think this both their duty and their privilege; namely, to be still instructed, and built up in faith and love, by those who were the instruments, in God's hand, of bringing them from dead, formal religion, to "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." But still those Teachers are so careful, not to withdraw them from the Church to which they belong, not to make any division, that they neither baptize, nor administer the Lord's supper. If I were desirous to form a separate party, I should do both without delay.

9. I come now to add a few words, without any preface or ceremony, concerning myself:—

Dr. E. affirms, First, that I am a very knave; and, Secondly, that I am in a state of damnation. As to the First, he says, "Truth and honesty choose to enter openly and undisguised. 'He that entereth not by the door' of a plain, simple declaration of his sentiments, but insinuates himself by concealing his opinions, 'the same is a thief and a robber.'" (Page 5.) We have more to the same purpose: "Upon mature reflection, I saw no cause to flatter myself, that I could procure from him satisfaction as to what offended me. He had discovered himself no novice in the arts of subtlety and disguise." (Page 24.) Again: "I find little else than that shifting at which Mr. W. is so singularly expert." This is as genteel as to say, "Sir, you lie;" and it is just as strong an argument. It is indeed mere common-place, with which a man fond of such flowers may embellish his page on any occasion.

But what room is there for it on this occasion? By God's help, I will sift this matter thoroughly. And I trust no gentleman or scholar, who weighs what I say, will throw this dirt in my face any more.

For several years I was Moderator in the disputations which were held six times a week at Lincoln College, in Oxford. I could not avoid acquiring hereby some degree of expertness in arguing; and especially in discerning and pointing out well-covered and plausible fallacies. I have since found abundant reason to praise God for giving me this honest art. By this, when men have hedged me in by what they called demonstrations, I have been many times able to dash them in pieces; in spite of all its covers, to touch the very point where the fallacy lay; and it flew open in a moment. This is the art which I have used with Bishop Warburton, as well as in the preceding pages. When Dr. E. twisted truth and falsehood together, in many of his propositions, it was by this art I untwisted the one from the other, and showed just how far each was true. At doing this, I bless God, I am expert; as those will find who attack me without rhyme or reason. But "shifting, subtlety, and disguise," I despise and abhor, fully as much as Dr. E. And if he cannot see that I have answered Bishop Warburton plainly and directly, and so untwisted his arguments that no man living will be able to piece them together, I believe all unprejudiced men can, and are thoroughly convinced of it.

Let any candid man review the last article, and he will see



another instance of this. Dr. E. had given us a long paragraph about "forming a Church within a Church." It is to the same effect with the objection which the warm Churchmen have often urged against the Dissenters in England. It sounds extremely plausible, and the parts of it are carefully knit together. But it is not a gordian knot: A man moderately expert in arguing may untie it. And when the threads are separate, it plainly appears to have been fine, but not strong.

As to the Second point, I cannot at all complain of Dr. E.'s want of openness. He speaks plain and downright: "Seeming strictness of behaviour will not justify those who forget, 'There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof is the way of death.'" (Page 46.)

Again: "What claim can he have to genuine Christianity, whose professed experience gives God the lie? 'Say I these things as a man, or saith not the law the same also?' It is a deadly charity that flatters men with a persuasion that they are in the way of life, whom the Scripture pronounces in a way of destruction."

Dr. E.'s charity is of another kind! It is Mr. Sandiman's charity! It reminds me of the charity of an Antinomian in London; one, I mean, who was newly recovered from that delusion: "Sir," said she, "last week I would not have been content to kill you, if I could not have damned you too." I pray God to deliver me from such charity! charity, cruel as the grave!

But what right have I to complain of Dr. E.? He has no obligation to me. My speaking of him everywhere as I have done, was a point of justice, not of friendship. I had only the desire, but not the power, of doing him any kindness. I could not say to him, "Nevertheless thou owest me thine own soul also." I have it not under Dr. E.'s hand, as I have under Mr. Hervey's, "Shall I call you my father, or my friend? You have been both to me." If those related to me by so near, so tender, ties, thus furiously rise up against me, how much more may a stranger,—one of another nation? "O Absalom, my son, my son!"

#### POSTSCRIPT.

IN his twenty-first page, Dr. E. says, "How far Mr. Wesley's Letter was an answer to anything material in the

Preface, the reader will best judge by perusing it." I have annexed it here, that the reader may judge, whether it is not an answer to one very material thing, namely, the charge of "concealing my sentiments," for which Dr. E. condemns me in the keenest manner, and on which very account he makes no scruple to pronounce me "a thief and a robber." I need only premise, that I wrote it not out of fear, (as perhaps Dr. E. thought,) neither in guile; but merely out of love to him, and concern for the cause of God. I desire no favour from him or any opponent: Do me justice, and I ask no more.

EDINBURGH, *April 24, 1765.*

REV. SIR,

BETWEEN thirty and forty years I have had the world upon me, speaking all manner of evil. And I expected no less, as God had called me to testify that its deeds were evil. But the children of God were not upon me; nor did I expect they would. I rather hoped they would take knowledge, that all my designs, and thought, and care, and labour, were directed to this one point,—to advance the kingdom of Christ upon earth. And so many of them did, however differing from me both in opinions and modes of worship. I have the pleasure to mention Dr. Doddridge, Dr. Watts, and Mr. Wardrobe, in particular. How then was I surprised, as well as concerned, that a child of the same Father, a servant of the same Lord, a member of the same family, and (as to the essence of it) a preacher of the same gospel, should, without any provocation that I know of, declare open war against me! I was the more surprised, because you had told me, some months since, that you would favour me with a letter. And had this been done, I make no doubt but you would have received full satisfaction. Instead of this, you ushered into this part of the world one of the most bitter libels that was ever written against me;—written by a dying man, (so far as it was written by poor, well-meaning Mr. Hervey,) with a trembling hand, just as he was tottering on the margin of the grave. A great warrior resigned his crown, because "there should be some interval," he said, "between fighting and death." But Mr. Hervey, who had been a man of peace all his life, began a war not six months before he died. He drew his sword when he was just putting off his body. He then fell on one to whom he had

the deepest obligations, (as his own letters, which I have now in my hands, testify,) on one who had never intentionally wronged him, who had never spoken an unkind word of him, or to him, and who loved him as his own child. O tell it not in Gath! The good Mr. Hervey, (if these Letters were his) died cursing his spiritual father.

And these Letters another good man, Mr. ———, has introduced into Scotland, and warmly recommended. Why have you done this? "Because you have concealed your principles, which is palpable dishonesty."

When I was first invited into Scotland, (about fourteen years ago,) Mr. Whitefield told me, "You have no business there; for your principles are so well known, that if you spoke like an angel, none would hear you. And if they did, you would have nothing to do but to dispute with one and another from morning to night."

I answered: "If God sends me, people will hear. And I will give them no provocation to dispute; for I will studiously avoid controverted points, and keep to the fundamental truths of Christianity. And if any still begin to dispute, they may; but I will not dispute with them."

I came: Hundreds and thousands flocked to hear. But I was enabled to keep my word. I avoided whatever might engender strife, and insisted upon the grand points,—the religion of the heart, and salvation by faith,—at all times, and in all places. And by this means I have cut off all occasion of dispute, from the first day to this very hour. And this you amazingly improve into a fault; construe into a proof of dishonesty. You likewise charge me with holding unsound principles, and with saying, "Right opinions are (sometimes) no part of religion."

The last charge I have answered over and over, and very lately to Bishop Warburton. Certainly, had you read that single tract, you would never have repeated that stale objection.

As to my principles, every one knows, or may know, that I believe the Thirty-first Article of the Church of England. But can none be saved who believe this? I know you will not say so. Meantime, in the main point (justification by faith) I have not wavered a moment for these seven-and-twenty years. And I allow all which Mr. Hervey himself contends for, in his entrance upon the subject,—“Come to

Jesus as a needy beggar; hang upon him as a devoted pensioner." And whoever does this, I will be bold to say, shall not perish everlastingly.

As to your main objection, convince me that it is my duty to preach on controverted subjects, predestination in particular, and I will do it. At present I think it would be a sin. I think it would create still more divisions. And are there not enough already? I have seen a book written by one who styles himself, "*Ecclesiæ direptæ et gementis Presbyter.*"\* Shall I tear *ecclesiam direptam et gementem*?† God forbid! No; I will, so far as I can, heal her breaches. And if you really love her, (as I doubt not you do,) why should you hinder me from so doing? Has she so many friends and helpers left, that you should strive to lessen their number? Would you wish to turn any of her friends, even though weak and mistaken, into enemies? If you must contend, have you not Arians, Socinians, Seceders, Infidels, to contend with; to say nothing of whoremongers, adulterers, Sabbath-breakers, drunkards, common swearers? *O ecclesia gemens!* And will you pass by all these, and single out me to fight with? Nay, but I will not. I do and will fight with all these, but not with you. I cannot; I dare not. You are the son of my Father; my fellow-labourer in the gospel of his dear Son. I love your person; I love your character; I love the work wherein you are engaged. And if you will still shoot at me, (because Mr. Hervey has painted me as a monster,) even with arrows drawn from Bishop Warburton's quiver, (how unfit for Mr. ——'s hand!) I can only say, as I always did before, The Lord Jesus bless you in your soul, in your body, in your relations, in your work, in whatever tends to his own glory!

I am,

Dear Sir,

Your affectionate brother,

JOHN WESLEY.

\* A Presbyter of a pillaged and groaning Church.—EDIT.

† This Church which is torn asunder and groaning.—EDIT.