

October 5, 1740

The Moravian Church which is at Marienborn to the reverend Mr. John Westley, a presbyter of the Church of England.

It doth not at all seem strange to us when people tell us what they think; and thus we are very well satisfied with Mr. Westley's writing to us. We do not find it necessary to consider who they are that write or speak to us, but we mind the thing itself, and so we will do even now. We cannot answer for what our people that know you more particularly take you to be; we ourselves have not observed any such thing in you as you tell us you are charged with. However, we could wish you had mentioned those by name who have formed such a judgment of you, in order to know how they come to do so; but this is no material part either of the letter or of the one answer thereto.

1. We believe that sin is remaining in our members, but that it has no dominion over us. For thus we read in the Scripture, Rom. 6:12, 'Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof.'

2. We believe that we carry about infirmities, a liableness to assaults, faint-heartedness, and suchlike (which are plain proofs that we are sinners), though our heart be never so closely united to the Saviour.

3. That grace relates only to the present life, and not to that which is to come, no one of us can possibly have said unless at that time he were in a fit of a burning fever. But this is true, that our holiness from day to day, even to the end of our lives, depends on the protection and preservation of the Saviour, whom we must daily and humbly ask for it, and that the greatest of all saints may fall tomorrow into all manner of enormities, if he think himself something upon the account of his holiness.

4. When the apostle says that the law is not made for a righteous man (1 Tim. 1:9), the meaning is that all things that are a law, constraint, or commandment to the natural man are a pleasure, promise, and grace to all souls that have been justified in the blood of the Lamb. Now if a believer by the power of Christ do all things required by the law of the Spirit, he hardly is conscious of having done anything, for he doth nothing but what he is led and moved to by his own heart, in which the Lord Jesus lives, which he actuates, and impels, and in which is the same mind which was in our Saviour; therefore the thing itself is not lost hereby (for grace sanctifieth), but only the notion which people are wont to have of commandments, duties, etc. A man who is under the law is commanded to be holy, and he almost killeth himself by his endeavours so to be; but a child of God has got permission and power to be holy, Luke 1, and for this reason they rejoice throughout all ages.

5. We believe that it is much better to discourse out of the newspapers than to chatter and gabble about spiritual and holy things to no purpose; or to use a long and un-anointed prayer; or to speak upon this or that place of Scripture by way of conversation. The former is a common and human action as opportunity serves, but the latter is a taking of the name of God in vain.

6. We wear neither gold nor silver, nor any costly apparel, but we judge nobody that does it,

therefore let all these things alone, entirely suspending our judgment concerning them. And if in this or that particular case there is anything to be reprov'd, from thence we must not draw any general consequences.

That we have learned the art of avoiding persecution, as you charge us with, is a new accusation, and seems to be contradicted by daily experience. However, this we gladly own, that we never bring on any, if we see beforehand that according to the maxims of our Saviour it is to be avoided. But this we must confess, that we actually do not reprove all men that do wrong, even in our sight. The power of reprov'ing either relates to outward things, or to the heart. Nobody has any right to the former but the magistrate. To the latter the servants of Christ have a right in a private capacity, yet not absolutely, but *ex pacto* (by agreement); if in such instances one will speak to the heart he must be first sure that the Saviour has already got hold of it; for if we attack a dead and rebellious heart, and set ourselves up as judges of it, we provoke it to sin, knowingly and designedly, and this is an unseasonable, out-of-the-way zeal not enjoined to us.

But when people ask about this or that thing, then it is time to tell them our mind concerning it, but with great moderation, and avoiding the judging of strangers that are without. There is one instance more wherein the Moravian brethren are very cautious in speaking, disputing, reprov'ing, viz., in the matter of knowledge and opinions; because there are numberless strifes about words, because there is almost all the world over a general perplexity in notions, insomuch that there may be sometimes twenty-four people of the same religion or persuasion in the same room together contradicting one another in the same matter, and everyone in a different manner; and if one was to take four or five hours' time to hear out what they say, or how they explain themselves, one might perhaps find that they either do not differ from one another at all, or that this or that man really did not know what they spoke about. Therefore we think it very proper that our brethren preserve themselves in the pure knowledge of Jesus Christ, learn to speak as they find in their hearts, but at the same time keep themselves with all possible care from disputes, imputations, and attacks of other people in their thoughts and opinions. For the disputes with other people are many times quite idle and useless, especially if they be contradicted in anything which they have already advanced, when on the other hand they might have been brought to wholesome conviction sooner or later if the brother had only just happened to speak first.

We never should have taken so much freedom as to explode the wisdom of serpents, since our blessed Lord has recommended it. But as to this particular, we do not know how far we may have advanced therein, for it is no work of our own, but a gift which is to be expected and received from the Saviour, and for this very reason some have more, others less of it. The harmlessness of doves, because it cometh out of the heart, is more universal; and this is true, that it is the whole study of our hearts to be harmless towards all men. As for the rest, we do not pretend to be preachers of repentance to the world, reprovers of the magistrate, declarers of the Lord's judgments, fault-finders with constitutions, reformers of Liturgies, inventors of all sorts of methods to promote Christianity; but our chief business, wherein the Saviour seems to make use of us and to bless us, is to invite people that do not know what to do, to the grace and merits of Jesus Christ, and to his wounds, and there to procure a mansion for them, and in this sense one may say of us, *sinunt mundum vadere sicut vadit* ('They let the world go just as it goes.').

7. The sufferings of Jesus are properly our justifying faith; his truth, his intercession, his purchased right to us have justified us through the election before the foundation of the world. And in this sense all the children of God are justified before they know it. From that very moment they believe it they know it. But this faith is no work, no merit, by which we can (as it were) force the Lord to give us his grace, as some divines have incautiously asserted, and here and there confounded the miraculous faith with the faith on Jesus and his merits. Nothing is required to faith but the heart; the understanding doth but render the enjoyment of it more clear, more sensible, and more lasting. But the miraculous faith is lodged in the understanding; one may have it and yet be lost, 1 Cor. 13.

The miraculous faith requireth an absolute plerophory (fullness of assurance) without the least doubt. The faith unto salvation remaineth always the same in the heart, and sticks close to the wounds of Jesus, but in the understanding (especially according to the modern methods of conversion, or rather according to the great multiplicity of methods which have took place in our time) it is liable to various stumblings, from whence may come afterwards ἰλιγοπιστία ('smallness of faith') for many hours and days together; and in our congregation we esteem it as a most precious grace that our Saviour hath showed us the old, plain way, in which we keep close to our hearts, laying hold of the grace which we have received on the forgiveness of our sins; which we have experienced on the death of Jesus, which has been made present to us, not reckoning it worthwhile to reflect one minute's time upon anything that our understanding, temper, constitution of body, or the objections of other people may at any time have put in the way. But on such occasions we instantly groan and pray again to the Lamb which was slain for us, whom we love though we have not seen. This is called among us the abiding witness of the Spirit, who no more ceaseth from making intercession for us than the Saviour from praying for us.

8. Whatever is not of faith is sin, and it may suffice to tell Mr. Wesley that if a person's going to the Lord's Supper be not of faith it is sin, without desiring him to consider 1 Cor. 11.

In the Lutheran Church, in that of England, and in our Church, they teach that we must come to the Lord's Supper with a lively faith. Upon this account our brethren could not give any other advice to those of the Church of England than that they should examine themselves very well, lest this blessed sacrament become a hindrance to them, and a groundless persuasion of their salvation. But if the Methodists hold that this sacrament is a means of getting faith, we must leave them to act according to their present persuasion, and experience will at length decide the matter.

The answer, 'It is our duty to use the ordinances of God', is true *in abstracto* (in general), but not always *in concreto* ('in a particular instance'), for we must observe the ordinances of God according to the circumstances and the connection wherewith they are laid down in the Scripture. Now if the Lord's Supper be made an ordinance for all ungodly and unconverted men, there must be found a place in the Scriptures where unbelievers and unconverted people, or such as gratify their lusts, are bid to come to the Lord's Supper. We pay such an obedience to the Saviour and his words that if we should find therein any such thing (and not just the contrary, 1 Cor. 10, 11), we should be very well pleased with it. For poor, natural, unconverted men as such we don't at all despise, and we should make much less difficulty in going with a number of such people to the Lord's Supper than with a hypocritical, self-righteous, and puffed-up saint. And this may be enough in answer to this point.

As for the rest, we do not take upon us to defend all words with the connections uttered by any friends as may have heard us, and approve of our way. And upon your mentioning their names, in case this or that thing you truly lay to their charge be really wrong, if we then protest that it is wrong, and by no means agree to it, we shall have done all that we can do.

Most of your accusations are too general, as when you say, 'your brethren', 'some of you', etc., and for this reason we can't do more in regard to them than tell you our thoughts concerning them.

9. A religion and [a] church are not all one. A religion is an assembly wherein the Holy Scriptures are taught and expounded after a prescribed rule or form, which more or fewer profess. And all sincere divines acknowledge with one accord that there are several, nay, a great many, amongst them, which neither do believe that form of doctrine nor live up to it; and such societies, according to the difference of circumstances, are more or less publicly authorized. And though without controversy one of them may come nearer to the truth than the other (nay, this or that may be entirely in the dark), yet the Lord has such a peculiar hand in those several constitutions of religion that one ought to respect every one of them, and not cause any disturbance therein without an apostolical call. Whoever fancies he has got such an apostolical call, and cannot duly evidence it, such an one is a fanatic, and our congregation detests such a thing, and doth not like to join with the person.

A church (I will not examine whether there are any in this present age, much less whether we are one; *item*, whether there is no other besides ours, for the discussion of such a thing is not proper for such a letter as this is) we think is a congregation of sinners who have obtained grace and forgiveness of sins in the blood of Jesus, who have among themselves apostolical orders and regulations, with an apostolical authority and power. A church must have such a foundation as the gates of hell cannot prevail against.

She must approve herself as such everywhere by such a demonstration as is required in the Scriptures. She must have the unction from the Holy One and being built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles, she must adorn the Saviour's doctrine in all things. She must have her Head always present with her, in great and small things, even to the end of the world; and yet it might happen that such a congregation should be in an error, because it consisteth of men that carry about their treasure in earthen vessels, *et nihil humani a se alienum putant* ('And they believe that nothing human is foreign to them'). But we are satisfied that this cannot easily happen, from the consideration of the truth and faithfulness of its Head, and the supposed obedience which the members pay to him. Concerning the mutual obedience of the members, we hold that it has the nature of the obedience of each member to the whole body, and that the disobedience of one member to the other is an infallible sign of its being sick. Or we need not fetch the thing so far. The necessity of obedience in a society proves itself in each kitchen, in each stable, in each barn. For if it were permitted that each might do as he pleases in such like society, if it were deemed a tyranny, a constraint, an imposition, to require obediences on such occasions, then the whole world would certainly be soon thrown into universal confusion.

We think Mr. Westley's imputations concerning our new ecclesiastical discipline do not deserve any answer from us. But one thing we cannot entirely let pass without an answer. Whosoever has told Mr. Westley that our elder ordains has sadly imposed upon him. This has not happened within three hundred years. A bishop is ordained by some other bishops, and each minister (in a strict sense) is ordained by the bishop alone, without taking any elder

thereto. We are surprised that things of this nature are spoken to our face, and laid to our charge, without the least foundation. Ecclesiastically the elders are under the bishops in all canonical actions, properly so called. But why our congregation has a particular esteem for the one general elder, why he is revered by our bishop as a father, why the ministrations of the Spirit in the congregation that lies on him is owned by them—this is a particularity which soon may be explained and made clear to all modest people, that are concerned to know things from the bottom, but not proper matter for such a letter as this is. Notwithstanding this, the elder never meddles with any ordination, because this is a thing relating to religion, according to the present state of Christendom. But now affairs of religion relates to the rights of the magistrate, and in the occurrences here the knowledge of the world, learning, and a certain call are required, such as the world itself may allow, according to their principles and notions. To the word ordination Mr. Wesley has annexed the following parenthesis: '(or whatever you call it)'. It is not quite indifferent to us how a thing is called. We like to call everything by its proper name, and then ordination is an action whereby a person fit and lawfully called is enabled and consecrated, publicly to minister in holy things, by such superiors (bishops with us) as are lawfully appointed and confirmed to do it, in the presence of the congregation, and with the usual ceremonies. This, and no other action we style ordination.

The power of the Count has been fourfold within four years. In Herrnhut he was civil magistrate at the same time. After he had entirely renounced this office he was made forestander of the congregation there, by a lawful and ordinary vocation. But he was under the elders, because the function of a forestander is no more than that of the first of the deacons, or what we call 'Deiners'. When [in] 1737 he was made a bishop of the Moravian Church he ceased to be a forestander of Herrnhut, in fact, because (though the awakening of Herrnhut was made by the Moravian Church, and upon this account several wholesome orders of that church tending to the edification of souls have been introduced there, yet) the congregation of Herrnhut itself does not belong to the diocese of the Moravians, but to the Lutheran liturgy at Berthelsdorf. Furthermore, he is paterfamilias of a large household, and thus it may be that he was obliged sometimes to some acts which cannot be derived either from his bishopric or from his being forestander. But in case he had caused the lot to be cast over again in the election of an elder at Herrnhut, it ought to have been supposed that he did it neither as bishop, nor as count, nor king or pope (all which terms Mr. Westley is pleased to make use of in his letter), but rather upon the account of circumstances which rendered the first lot of no effect. But since there is nothing at all in the whole thing (for in our congregation the lot has never been cast over again or twice in Mr. Westley's sense in the election of an elder), there is no occasion to give any reason for it.

If Mr. Westley, speaking of the lot's being cast over again, has perhaps a view to our settling the offices of the congregation, upon which occasions those that are to be taken into the principal lot are first lotted out of all the candidates, in that case we cast the lot twice, not only in the election of an elder, but also on every other occasion of this kind. But this is somewhat ordinary, and proves no particular power of this or that member of the congregation.

As for the rest, the Count and the congregation which he liveth with (for there is no such thing to be hoped for from others) are not of the same way of thinking in regard to his authority and power. He thinks that they make too much of him, look too much towards him, lay too much business upon him, and such like; this he chargeth the congregation with, and repeateth

almost every day, but they believe the contrary of all this, and give very little heed to what he says on this subject.

10. We concern not ourselves either with the ancient or modern mystics. That people may mix nature with grace, that one may exceed in spiritual joy, that nature may attempt to mimic grace in a thousand ways, which mimickings in a delusion may be accounted divine operations, that one may think himself an apostle, and yet be a deluded fanatic—all this we do not learn from the mystics, but sound reason and daily experience can teach us, and if there was no other place in the Scriptures but that we should be warned enough.

11. It is impossible to hinder babes in Christ (especially if one is sure they are not converted to this or that man, but really to the Saviour, which latter is many times dubious in a certain sort of women) from rejoicing, and from declaring their joy in an ordinary way, but they must keep themselves from being carried out too far, or else there will come out of it a miserable gibble-gabble, idle talk, a scattering of all blessings, such as will render the party just fit to be compared to an uncorked bottle of spirits of wine. 'And Mary kept all these sayings, and pondered them in her heart' (Lk 2:19).

We must also allow to the witnesses of Jesus a declaration of their joy: she calls her friends and neighbours, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which was lost (which words are properly to be understood of our Saviour). But even this must not exceed the true limits, otherwise one may please oneself, gain the affection of women, fall into a thousand fancies, which at last put the Saviour and his doctrine to an open shame.

12. Concerning good works, there is a principle in our congregation, 'Could I do good, I gladly would', and those that give no alms amongst us certainly have no money. Whosoever giveth not to him that needeth is surely in want himself. Whosoever on any given occasion does not exhort or reprove either believes himself not able to do it, or without any right to do it. In short, in many things we offend all, but we take as right an aim as we can, and if we should not chance to hit the mark, yet our heart does not condemn us. Blessed be the Lord!

As we are far from meddling with other people's affairs, from judging, censuring, and exhorting another man's servant, where we are not called to it, so on the contrary the Saviour has made us altogether willing to hear and to ponder all remonstrances against us made by others, and therefore we are obliged to Mr. Westley also for the trouble he took in writing to us. Though we do not exactly know whom his letter belongs to, because the direction of it was to Marienborn, and yet he speaks in the letter itself to the congregation at Herrnhut. Now Herrnhut (as has been said) is neither the Moravian Church itself, much less the episcopal seat, or such a congregation which can answer for the orders and constitutions of the Moravian Church, though indeed some of the Moravians have settled there. We therefore beseech our dear friend Mr. Westley that if he will do us the favour of writing oftener to us, he may let us know more clearly: first, whom he would treat with; second, whom of us he objects against; third, the things objected.

We recommend him to the grace of our Saviour, and to the life which is in his blood.