

JOHN WESLEY, A PRESBYTER OF THE CHURCH OF GOD IN ENGLAND, TO THE CHURCH OF GOD AT HERNHUTH IN UPPER LUSATIA.

1. It may seem strange, that such an one as I am should take upon me to write to you. You I believe to be dear children of God, through faith which is in Jesus. Me you believe (as some of you have declared) to be "a child of the devil, a servant of corruption." Yet whatsoever I am, or whatsoever you are, I beseech you to weigh the following words; if haply God, who "sendeth by whom he will send," may give you light thereby; although "the mist of darkness" (as one of you affirms) should be reserved for me for ever.

2. My design is, freely and plainly to speak whatsoever I have seen or heard among you, in any part of your Church, which seems not agreeable to the Gospel of Christ. And my hope is, that the God whom you serve, will give you thoroughly to weigh what is spoken; and if in any thing "ye have been otherwise minded" than the truth is, "will reveal even this unto you."

3. And First, With regard to Christian salvation, even the present salvation which is through faith, I have heard some of you affirm, 1. That it does not imply the proper taking away our sins, the cleansing our souls from all sin, but only the tearing the system of sin in pieces. 2. That it does not imply liberty from sinful thoughts.

4. I have heard some of you affirm, on the other hand, 1. That it does imply liberty from the commandments of God, so that one who is saved through faith, is not obliged or bound to obey them, does not do any thing as a commandment, or as a duty. To support which they have affirmed, that there is* no command in the New Testament but to believe; that there is no duty required therein, but that of believing; and that to a believer there is no commandment at all. 2. That it does imply

* In the answer to this letter, which I received some weeks after, this is explained as follows:—"All things which are a *commandment* to the natural man, are a *promise* to all that have been justified.—The thing itself is not lost, but the notion which people are wont to have of commandments, duties," &c.

I reply, 1. If this be all you mean, why do you not say so explicitly to all men? 2. Whether this be all, let any reasonable man judge, when he has read what is here subjoined.

liberty to conform to the world,* by talking on useless, if not trifling subjects; by joining in worldly diversions in order to do good; by putting on of gold and costly apparel,† or by continuing in those professions, the gain of which depends on ministering hereto. 8. That it does imply liberty to avoid persecution, by‡ not reproving even those who sin in your sight; by not letting your light shine before those men who love darkness rather than light; by not using plainness of speech, and a frank, open carriage to all men. Nay, by a close, dark, reserved conversation and behaviour, especially toward strangers. And in many of you I have more than once found (what you called, “being wise as serpents”) much subtlety, much evasion and disguise, much guile and dissimulation. You appeared to be what you were not, or not to be what you were. You so studied “to become all things to all men,” as to take the colour and shape of any that were near you. So that your practice was indeed no proof of your judgment; but only an indication of your design, *nulli lædere os*; and of your conformity to that (not scriptural) maxim, *Sinere mundum vadere ut vult: Nam vult vadere.*§

* The brethren answer to this, “We believe it much better to discourse out of the newspapers, than to chatter about holy things to no purpose.” Perhaps so. But what is this to the point? I believe both the one and the other to be useless, and therefore an abomination to the Lord.

This objection then stands in full force, the fact alleged being rather defended than denied.

The joining in worldly diversions in order to do good, (another charge which cannot be denied,) I think would admit of the same defence, viz., “That there are other things as bad.”

† “We wear,” say the brethren, “neither gold nor silver.” You forget. I have seen it with my eyes. “But we judge nobody that does.” How! Then you must judge both St. Peter and Paul false witnesses before God. “And because those professions that minister thereto [to sin, to what God has flatly forbidden] relate to trade, and trade is a thing relating to the Magistrate, we therefore let all these things alone, entirely suspending our judgment concerning them.”

What miserable work is here! Because trade relates to the Magistrate, am I not to consider whether my trade be innocent or sinful? Then, the keeper of a Venetian brothel is clear. The Magistrate shall answer for him to God!

‡ This fact also you grant, and defend thus:—“The power of reproving relates either to outward things, or to the heart. Nobody has any right to the former, but the Magistrate.” (Alas; alas! what casuistry is this?) “And if one will speak to the heart, he must be first sure that the Saviour has already got hold of it.” What then must become of all other men? O how pleasing is all this to flesh and blood!

§ To let the world go as it will: For it will go

5. Secondly, With regard to that faith through which we are saved, I have heard many of you say, "A man may have justifying faith and not know it." Others of you, who are now in England, (particularly Mr. Molther,) I have heard affirm,* that there is no such thing as weak faith; that there are no degrees in faith; that there is no justifying faith, where there is ever any doubt; that there is no justifying faith without the plerophory of faith, the clear, abiding witness of the Spirit; that there is no justifying faith, where there is not, in the full, proper sense, a new or clean heart; and that those who have not these two gifts, are only awakened, not justified.

6. Thirdly, As to the way to faith, here are many among us, whom some of your brethren have advised (what it is not to be supposed they would as yet speak to me, or in their public preaching)† not to use those ordinances which our Church terms "means of grace," till they have such a faith as implies a clean heart, and excludes all possibility of doubting. They have advised them, till then, not to search the Scriptures, not to pray, not to communicate; and have often affirmed, that to do these things, is seeking salvation by works; and that till these works are laid aside, no man can receive faith; for, "No man," say they, "can do these things without trusting in them: If he does not trust in them, why does he do them?"

7. To those who answered, "It is our duty to use the ordinances of God," they replied, "There are no ordinances of Christ, the use of which is now bound upon Christians as a duty, or which we are commanded to use. As to those you mention in particular, (viz., prayer, communicating, and searching the Scripture,) if a man have faith, he need not; if he have not, he must not use them. A believer may use them, though not as enjoined; but an unbeliever (as before defined) may not."

8. To those who answered, "I hope God will through these means convey his grace to my soul," they replied, "There is no such thing as means of grace; Christ has not ordained any such

* In the preface to the second Journal the Moravian Church is cleared from this mistake.

† The substance of the answer to this and the following paragraphs is, 1. That none ought to communicate till he has faith, that is, a sure trust in the mercy of God through Christ. This is granting the charge. 2. That "if the Methodists hold, this sacrament is a means of getting faith, they must act according to their persuasion." We do hold it, and know it to be so, to many of those who are previously convinced of sin.

in his Church. But if there were, they are nothing to you; for you are dead; you have no faith; and you cannot work while you are dead. Therefore, let these things alone till you have faith."

9. And some of our English brethren, who are joined with yours, have said openly, "You will never have faith till you leave running about to church and sacrament, and societies." Another of them has said, (in his public expounding,) "As many go to hell by praying as by thieving." Another, "I knew one, who, leaning over the back of a chair, received a great gift. But he must kneel down to give God thanks: So he lost it immediately. And I know not whether he will ever have it again." And yet another, "You have lost your first joy: Therefore you pray: That is the devil. You read the Bible: That is the devil. You communicate: That is the devil."

10. Let not any of you, my brethren, say, "We are not chargeable with what they speak." Indeed you are: For you can hinder it, if you will. Therefore, if you do not, it must be charged upon you. If you do not use the power which is in your hands, and thereby prevent their speaking thus, you do, in effect, speak thus yourselves. You make their words your own; and are, accordingly, chargeable with every ill consequence which may flow therefrom.

11. Fourthly, With regard to your Church,* you greatly, yea, above measure, exalt yourselves and despise others.

I have scarce heard one Moravian brother, in my life, own his Church to be wrong in any thing.

I have scarce heard any of you (I think not one in England) own himself to be wrong in any thing.

Many of you I have heard speak of your Church, as if it were

* "A religion," you say, "and a Church, are not all one: A religion is an assembly wherein the Holy Scriptures are taught after a prescribed rule." This is too narrow a definition. For there are many Pagan (as well as a Mahometan) religions. Rather, a religion is, a method of worshipping God, whether in a right or a wrong manner.

"The Lord has such a peculiar hand in the several constitutions of religion, that one ought to respect every one of them." I cannot possibly: I cannot respect, either the Jewish (as it is now) or the Romish religion. You add,

"A Church (I will not examine whether there are any in this present age, or whether there is no other beside ours) is, a congregation of sinners who have obtained forgiveness of sins. That such a congregation should be in an error, cannot easily happen."

I find no reason, therefore, to retract any thing which is advanced on this or any of the following heads.

infallible; or, so led by the Spirit, that it was not possible for it to err in any thing.

Some of you have set it up (as indeed you ought to do, if it be infallible) as the judge of all the earth, of all persons (as well as doctrines) therein: And you have accordingly passed sentence upon them at once, by their agreement or disagreement with your Church.

Some of you have said, that there is no true church on earth but yours; yea, that there are no true Christians out of it. And your own members you require to have implicit faith in her decisions, and to pay implicit obedience to her directions.

12. Fifthly, You receive not the ancient, but the modern Mystics, as the best interpreters of Scripture: And in conformity to these, you mix much of man's wisdom with the wisdom of God: You greatly refine the plain religion taught by the letter of Holy Writ, and philosophize on almost every part of it, to accommodate it to the Mystic theory. Hence you talk much, in a manner wholly unsupported by Scripture, against mixing nature with grace, against imagination, and concerning the animal spirits, mimicking the power of the Holy Ghost. Hence your brethren zealously caution us against animal joy, against natural love of one another, and against selfish love of God; against which (or any of them) there is no one caution in all the Bible. And they have, in truth, greatly lessened, and had well nigh destroyed, brotherly love from among us.

13. In conformity to the Mystics, you likewise greatly check joy in the Holy Ghost, by such cautions against sensible comforts, as have no tittle of Scripture to support them. Hence also your brethren here damp the zeal of babes in Christ, talking much of false zeal, forbidding them to declare what God hath done for their souls, even when their hearts burn within them to declare it, and comparing those to uncorked bottles, who simply and artlessly speak of the ability which God giveth.

14. Hence, Lastly, it is, that you undervalue good works, (especially works of outward mercy,) never publicly insisting on the necessity of them, nor declaring their weight and excellency. Hence, when some of your brethren have spoken of them, they put them on a wrong foot; viz., "If you find yourself moved, if your heart is free to it, then reprove, exhort, relieve." By this means you wholly avoid the taking up your cross, in order to do good; and also substitute an uncertain, precarious inward

motion, in the place of the plain written word. Nay, one of your members has said of good works in general, (whether works of piety or of charity,) "A believer is no more obliged to do these works of the Law, than a subject of the King of England is obliged to obey the laws of the King of France."

15. My brethren, whether ye will hear, or whether ye will forbear, I have now delivered my own soul. And this I have chosen to do in an artless manner, that if any thing should come home to your hearts, the effect might evidently flow, not from the wisdom of man, but from the power of God.

August 8, 1740.

Thus have I declared, and in the plainest manner I can, the real controversy between us and the Moravian brethren; an unpleasing task, which I have delayed, at least, as long as I could with a clear conscience. But I am constrained at length nakedly to speak the thing as it is, that I may not hinder the work of God.

I am very sensible of the objection which has so often been made, viz., "You are inconsistent with yourself. You did tenderly love, highly esteem, and zealously recommend these very men: And now you do not love or esteem them at all. You not only do not recommend them, but are bitter against them; nay, and rail at them, before all the world."

This is partly true and partly false. That the whole case may be better understood, it will be needful to give a short account of what has occurred between us from the beginning.

My first acquaintance with the Moravian brethren began in my voyage to Georgia. Being then with many of them in the same ship, I narrowly observed their whole behaviour. And I greatly approved of all I saw. Therefore I unbosomed myself to them without reserve.

From February 14, 1735, to December 2, 1737, being with them (except when I went to Frederica or Carolina) twice or thrice every day, I loved and esteemed them more and more. Yet a few things I could not approve of. These I mentioned to them from time to time, and then commended the cause to God.

In February following I met with Peter Böhler. My heart clave to him as soon as he spoke. And the more we conversed, so much the more did I esteem both him and all the Moravian

Church : So that I had no rest in my spirit till I executed the design which I had formed long before : Till, after a short stay in Holland, I hastened forward, first to Marienborn, and then to Hernhuth.

In September, 1738, soon after my return to England, I began the following letter to the Moravian Church. But being fearful of trusting my own judgment, I determined to wait yet a little longer, and so laid it by unfinished :—

“ MY DEAR BRETHREN,

“ I CANNOT but rejoice in your steadfast faith, in your love to our blessed Redeemer, your deadness to the world ; your meekness, temperance, chastity, and love of one another. I greatly approve of your Conferences and Bands ; of your method of instructing children ; and, in general, of your great care of the souls committed to your charge.

“ But of some other things I stand in doubt, which I will mention in love and meekness. And I wish that, in order to remove those doubts, you would on each of those heads, First, Plainly answer, whether the fact be as I suppose ; and, if so, Secondly, Consider whether it be right.

“ Do you not wholly neglect joint fasting ?

“ Is not the Count all in all ? Are not the rest mere shadows ; calling him Rabbi ; almost implicitly both believing and obeying him ?

“ Is there not something of levity in your behaviour ? Are you, in general, serious enough ?

“ Are you zealous and watchful to redeem time ? Do you not sometimes fall into trifling conversation ?

“ Do you not magnify your own Church too much ?

“ Do you believe any who are not of it to be in Gospel liberty ?

“ Are you not straitened in your love ? Do you love your enemies and wicked men as yourselves ?

“ Do you not mix human wisdom with divine ; joining worldly prudence to heavenly ?

“ Do you not use cunning, guile, or dissimulation in many cases ?

“ Are you not of a close, dark, reserved temper and behaviour ?

“ Is not the spirit of secrecy the spirit of your community ?

“ Have you that child-like openness, frankness, and plainness of speech, so manifest to all in the Apostles and first Christians ?”

It may easily be seen that my objections, then, were nearly

the same as now. Yet I cannot say my affection was lessened at all, till after September, 1739, when certain men among us began to trouble their brethren, and subvert their souls. However, I cleared the Moravians still, and laid the whole blame on our English brethren.

But from November the 1st, I could not but see (unwilling as I was to see them) more and more things which I could in no wise reconcile with the Gospel of Christ. And these I have set down with all simplicity, as they occurred in order of time : Believing myself indispensably obliged so to do, both in duty to God and man.

Yet do I this, because I love them not? God knoweth ; yea, and in part I esteem them still : Because I verily believe, they have a sincere desire to serve God ; because many of them have tasted of his love, and some retain it in simplicity ; because they love one another ; because they have *so much* of the truth of the Gospel, and *so far* abstain from outward sin ; and, lastly, because their discipline is, in most respects, so truly excellent.

“ But why then are you bitter against them ? ” I do not know that I am. Let the impartial reader judge. And if any bitter word has escaped my notice, I here utterly retract it. “ But do not you rail at them ? ” I hope not. God forbid that I should rail at a Turk, infidel, or heretic. To one who advanced the most dangerous error, I durst say no more than, “ The Lord rebuke thee. ” But I would point out what those errors were ; and, I trust, in the spirit of meekness.

In this spirit, my brethren, I have read, and endeavoured to consider, all the books you have published in England, that I might inform myself whether, on farther consideration, you had retracted the errors which were advanced before. But it does by no means appear that you have retracted any of them : For, waiving the odd and affected phrases therein ; the weak, mean, silly, childish expressions ; the crude, confused, and indigested notions ; the whims, unsupported either by Scripture or sound reason ; yea, waiving those assertions which, though contrary to Scripture and matter of fact, are, however, of no importance ; those three grand errors run through almost all those books, viz., *Universal Salvation*, *Antinomianism*, and a kind of new-reformed *Quietism*.

1. Can Universal Salvation be more explicitly asserted than it is in these words?—

"By this his name *all* can and *shall* obtain life and salvation." (Sixteen Discourses, p. 30.) This *must* include all *men*, at least; and *may* include all *devils* too.

Again, "The name of the wicked will not be so much as mentioned on the great day." (Seven Discourses, p. 22.) And if they are not so much as *mentioned*, they cannot be *condemned*.

2. How can Antinomianism,* that is, making void the Law through faith, be more expressly taught than it is in these words?—

"To believe certainly, that Christ suffered death for us: This is the true means to be saved at once :

"We want no more. For the history of Jesus coming into the world, 'is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth;' the bare historical knowledge of this." (Sixteen Discourses, p. 57.)

"There is but *one duty*, which is that of *believing*." (Ibid., p. 193.)

"From any demand of the Law, no man is obliged now to go one step, to give away one farthing, to eat or omit one morsel." (Seven Discourses, p. 11.)

"What did our Lord do with the Law? He abolished it." (Ibid., p. 33.)

"Here one may think,—This is a fine sort of Christianity, where nothing good is commanded, and nothing bad is forbid. But thus it is." (Ibid., p. 34.)

"So one ought to speak now. All commands and prohibitions are unfit for our times." (Ibid.)

3. Is not the very essence of Quietism (though in a new shape) contained in these words?—

"The whole matter lies in this, that we should *suffer ourselves to be relieved*." (Sixteen Discourses, p. 17.)

"One must *do nothing*, but *quietly attend* the voice of the Lord." (Ibid., p. 29.)

"To tell men who have not experienced the power of grace, what they should do, and how they ought to behave, is as if you should send a lame man upon an errand." (Ibid., p. 70.)

"The beginning is not to be made with doing what our Saviour has commanded. For whosoever will begin with doing,

* N.B. I speak of Antinomian doctrine, abstracted from practice, good or bad.

when he is dead, he can do nothing at all; but whatever he doeth in his own activity, is but a cobweb; that is, good for nothing." (Ibid., pp. 72, 81.)

"As soon as we *remain passive* before him as the wood which a table is to be made from, then something comes of us." (Seven Discourses, p. 22.)

O my brethren, let me conjure you yet again, in the name of our common Lord, "if there be any consolation of love, if any bowels and mercies," remove "the fly" out of "the pot of ointment;" separate "the precious from the vile!" Review, I beseech you, your whole work, and see if Satan hath gained no advantage over you. "Very excellent things" have been "spoken of thee, O thou city of God." But may not "He which hath the sharp sword with two edges" say, Yet, "I have a few things against thee?" O that ye would repent of these, that ye might be "a glorious Church: not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

Three things, above all, permit *me*, even *me*, to press upon you, with all the earnestness of love. First, With regard to your doctrine, that ye purge out from among you the leaven of Antinomianism, wherewith you are so deeply infected, and no longer "make void the Law through faith." Secondly, With regard to your discipline, that ye "call no man Rabbi, Master," Lord of your faith, "upon earth." Subordination, I know, is needful; and I can show you such a subordination, as in fact answers all Christian purposes, and is yet as widely distant from that among *you*, as the heavens are from the earth. Thirdly, With regard to your practice, that ye renounce all craft, cunning, subtlety, dissimulation; wisdom, falsely so called; that ye put away all disguise, all guile out of your mouth; that in all "simplicity and godly sincerity" ye "have your conversation in this world;" that ye use "great plainness of speech" to all, whatever ye suffer thereby; seeking only, "by manifestation of the truth," to "commend" yourselves "to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

June 24, 1744.