

John Wesley to George Stonehouse

Cookham, November 27, 1750.

Dear Sir,

Several times I have designed to speak to you at large concerning some things which have given me uneasiness. And more than once I have begun to speak, but your good humor quite disarmed me; so that I could not prevail upon myself to give you pain, even to remove a greater evil. But I cannot delay any longer, and therefore take this way (as less liable to disappointment) of laying before you with all freedom and unreserve the naked sentiments of my heart.

You seem to admire the Moravians much. I love them, but cannot admire them (although I did once, perhaps more than you do now); and that for the following reasons:

First. I do not admire the names they assume to themselves. They commonly style themselves "The Brethren" or "The Moravian Church." Now, the former of these, "The Brethren," either implies that they are the only Christians in the world (as they were who were so styled in the days of the Apostles), or at least that they are the best Christians in the world, and therefore deserve to be emphatically so called. But is not even this a very high encomium upon themselves I should, therefore, more admire a more modest appellation.

"But why should they not call themselves the Moravian Church." Because they are not the Moravian Church; no more (at the utmost) than a part is the whole, than the Romish Church is the Church of Christ. A congregation assembled in St. Paul's might with greater propriety style themselves the Church of England -- yea, with far greater: (1) because these are all Englishmen born; (2) because they have been baptized as members of the Church of England; and (3) because as far as they know, they adhere both to her doctrine and discipline. Whereas (1) Not a tenth part of Count Zinzendorf's Brethren are so much as Moravian born; not two thousand out of twenty thousand (quaere, if two hundred adults if fifty men). (2) Not one-tenth of them were baptized as members of the Moravian Church (perhaps not one till they left Moravia), but as members of the Romish Church. (3) They do not adhere either to the doctrines or discipline of the Moravian Church. They have many doctrines which the Church never held and an entirely new scheme and discipline. (4) The true Moravian Church, of which this is a very small part, if it be any part at all, is still subsisting not in England or Germany, but in Polish Prussia. Therefore, I cannot admire their assuming the name to themselves; I cannot reconcile it either with modesty or sincerity.

If you say, "But the Parliament has allowed it," I answer, I am sorry for it. The putting so palpable a cheat upon so august an assembly, with regard to a notorious matter of fact, I conceive does not redound to their own any more than to the honor of our nation.

If you add, "But you yourself once styled them thus," I grant I did; but I did it in ignorance. I took it on their word; and I now freely and openly testify my mistake.

Secondly. I do not admire their doctrine in the particulars that follow:

1. That we are to do nothing in order to salvation, but barely to believe.
2. That there is but one duty now, but one command--to believe in Christ.
3. That Christ has taken away all other commands and duties, having wholly abolished the law.

(The sermon Count Zinzendorf preached at Fetter Lane on John viii. 11 places this in a strong light. He roundly began: "Christ says, I came not to destroy the law. But He did destroy the law. The law condemned this woman to death; but He did not condemn her. And God Himself does not keep the law. The law forbids lying; but God said, Forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed; yet Nineveh was not destroyed.")

4. That there is no such thing as degrees in faith or weak faith; since he has no faith who has any doubt or fear.

(How to reconcile this with what I heard the Count assert at large, "that a man may have justifying faith and not know it," I cannot tell.)

5. That we are sanctified wholly the moment we are justified, and are neither more nor less holy to the day of our death.
6. That a believer has no holiness in himself at all; all his holiness being imputed, not inherent.
7. That a man may feel a peace that passeth all understanding may rejoice with joy full of glory, and have the love of God and of all mankind, with dominion over all sin; and yet all this may be only nature, animal spirits, or the force of imagination.
8. That if a man regards prayer, or searching the Scriptures, or communicating as matter of duty; if he judges himself obliged to do these things, or is troubled when he neglects them, - he is in bondage, he is under the law, he has no faith, but is still seeking salvation by works.
9. That, therefore, till we believe, we ought to be still - that is, not to pray, search the Scriptures, or communicate.
10. That their Church cannot err, and of consequence ought to be implicitly believed and obeyed.

Thirdly. I approve many things in their practice; yet even this I cannot admire in the following instances:

1. I do not admire their conforming to the word by useless, trifling conversation; by suffering sin upon their brother, without reproof even that which is gross and open; by levity in the general tenor of their behavior, not walking as under the eye of the great God; and, lastly, by joining in the most trifling diversions in order to do good.

2. I do not admire their close, dark, reserved behavior, particularly toward strangers. The spirit of secrecy is the spirit of their community, often leading even into guile and dissimulation. One may observe in them much cunning, much art, much evasion and disguise. They often appear to be what they are not, and not to be what they are. They so study to become all things to all men, as to take the color and shape of any that are near them directly contrary to that openness, frankness, and plainness of speech so manifest in the Apostles and primitive Christians.

3. I do not admire their confining their beneficence to the narrow bounds of their own Society. This seems the more liable to exception as they boast of possessing so immense riches. In his late book the Count particularly mentions how many hundred thousand florins a single member of their Church has lately expended and how many hundred thousand crowns of yearly rent the nobility and gentry only of his Society enjoy in one single country. Meantime do they, all put together, expend one hundred thousand, yea, one thousand or one hundred, in feeding the hungry or clothing the naked of any sorry but their own

4. I do not admire the manner wherein they treat their opponents. I cannot reconcile it either to love, humility or sincerity. Is utter contempt or settled disdain consistent with love or humility And can it consist with sincerity to deny any charge which they know in their conscience is true to say those quotations are unjust which are literally copied from their own books to affirm their doctrines are misrepresented when their own sense is given in their own words to cry, "Poor man! He is quite dark; he is utterly blind; he knows nothing of our doctrines!" though they cannot point out one mistake this blind man has made or confute one assertion he has advanced

Fourthly. I least of all admire the effects their doctrine has had on some who have lately begun to hear them. For

1. It has utterly destroyed their faith, their inward "evidence of things not seen," the deep conviction they once had that the Lamb of God had taken away their sins. Those who before had the witness in themselves of redemption in the blood of Christ, who had the Spirit of God clearly witnessing with their spirit that they were the children of God, after hearing these but a few times, began to doubt; then reasoned themselves into utter darkness; and in a while affirmed, first, that they had no faith now (which was true), and soon after, that they never

had any. And this was not the accidental but natural effect of that doctrine that there are no degrees in faith, and that none has any faith who is liable at any time to any degree of doubt or fear; as well as of that dark, unintelligible, unscriptural manner wherein they affect to speak of it.

I expect you will answer: "Nay, they are the most plain, simple preachers of any in the whole world. Simplicity is their peculiar excellence." I grant one sort of simplicity is; a single specimen whereof may suffice. One of their eminent preachers, describing at Fetter Lane "the childhood of the Lamb," observed that "His mother might send Him out one morning for a halfpenny-worth of milk; that, making haste back, He might fall and break the porringer; and that He might work a miracle to make it whole again, and gather up the milk into it." Now, can you really admire this kind of Simplicity or think it does honor to "God manifest in the flesh."

2. Their preaching has destroyed the love of God in many souls; which was the natural effect of destroying their faith, as well as of teaching them to grieve the Holy Spirit of God by ascribing His gift to imagination and animal spirits; and of perplexing them with senseless, unscriptural cautions against the selfish love of God; in which it is not easy to say whether nonsense or blasphemy is the chief ingredient.

3. This preaching has greatly impaired, if not destroyed, the love of their neighbor in many souls. They no longer burn with love to all mankind, with desire to do good to all. They are straitened in their own bowels, their love is confined to narrower and narrower bounds, till at length they have no desire or thought of doing good to any but those of their own community. If a man was before a zealous member of our Church, groaning for the prosperity of our Zion, it is past; all that zeal is at an end: he regards the Church of England no more than the Church of Rome; his tears no longer fall, his prayers no longer ascend, that God may shine upon her desolations. The friends that were once as his own soul are now more to him than other men. All the bands of that formerly endeared affection are as threads of tow that have touched the fire. Even the ties of filial tenderness are dissolved. The child regards not his own parent; he no longer regards he womb that bare or the paps that gave him suck. Recent instances of this also are not wanting. I will particularize if required. Yea, the son leave his aged father, daughter her mother, in want of the necessities of life. I know the persons; I have myself relieved them more than once: for that was "corban" whereby they should have been profited.

4. These humble preachers utterly destroy the humility of their hearers, who are quickly wiser than all their former teachers; not because they "keep Thy commandments" (as the poor man under the law said), but because they allow no commandments at all. In a few days they are "wiser in their own eyes than seven men that can render a reason." "Render a reason! Aye, there it is. Your carnal reason destroys you. You are for reason: I am for faith."

I am for both. For faith to perfect my reason, that, by the Spirit of God not putting out the eyes of my understanding, but enlightening them more and more, I may "be ready to give" a clear scriptural "answer to every man that asketh" me "a reason of the hope that is in" me.

5. This preaching destroys true, genuine simplicity. Let a plain, open-hearted man, who hates controversy and loves the religion of the heart, go but a few times to Fetter Lane, and he begins to dispute with every man he meets; he draws the sword and throws away the scabbard; and if he happens to be hard-pressed by Scripture or reason, he has as many turns and fetches as a Jesuit; so that it is out of the power of a common man even to understand, much more to confute him.

6. Lastly, I have known a short attendance on this preaching destroy both gratitude, justice, mercy, and truth. Take one only, but a terrible proof of this. One whom you know was remarkably exact in keeping his word. He is now (after hearing them but a few months) as remarkable for breaking it; being infinitely more afraid of a legal than of a lying spirit! more jealous of the works of the law than of the works of the devil! He was cutting off every possible expense in order to do justice to all men: he is now expending large sums in mere superfluities. He was merciful after his power if not beyond his power --

Listening attentive to the wretch's cry,

The groan low-murmured and the whispered sigh. [From the Poems of Samuel Wesley jun., "To the Memory of Dr. Gastrell Bishop of Chester." The original reads thus: Listening attentive to the wretch's cry, The griefs low-whispered, and the stifled sigh. See W.H. S. v. 115.]

But the bowels of his compassion are now shut up; he has been in works too long already; so now, to prove his faith, he lets the poor brother starve, for whom Christ died! If he loved any one under the sun more than his own soul, it was the instrument by whom God had raised him from the dead; he assured him to the utmost of his power; he would defend him even before princes. But he is now unconcerned whether he sinks or swims; he troubles not himself about it. Indeed, he gives him -- good words; that is, before his face: but behind his back he can himself rail at him by the hour, and vehemently maintain, not that he is mistaken in a few smaller point, but that he "preaches another God, not Jesus Christ."

Art thou the man If you are not go and hear the Germans again next Sunday.