



PEW RENTS
AND
THE NEW TESTAMENT.
CAN THEY BE RECONCILED
?

ROBERT C. OGDEN



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Can They Be Reconciled?

BY
ROBERT C. OGDEN.

INTRODUCTION BY J. R. MILLER, D.D.,

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INTRODUCTION.

THIS address needs no introduction. It is on a subject which is at the front among the practical questions of the day in Christian work, and which is bound to be considered, whether those who look after church finances want to consider it or not.

A new conscience concerning the use of money is making its voice heard among thoughtful Christian men. There is also a manifest awakening on the subject of the relation and responsibility of the Church to the non-church-going and, in many cases, practically unchurched masses. First, Christian people must be taught to give according to the principles of the Gospel; and, second, the church doors must be thrown wide open to all who would accept the invitation to hear the Gospel.

The method of voluntary giving meets both these conditions and furnishes the only basis on which Christian work can be carried on in the churches, while at the same time it

is the only system which is in perfect harmony with the teachings of the New Testament.

The address is therefore most timely. Mr. Ogden takes high ground, but his position is unassailable. He is not a mere theorist; he works from the simple teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles, and at the same time advocates a method which has already been tried and proved.

It may require courage and a venture of faith in ministers and churches to break away from a traditional system with its grooves all cut and to accept a new one without the prestige of popularity, but if the new is the Christian way it ought to be accepted regardless of immediate results; and there is no doubt that if Christ be in it, its results will prove satisfactory.

My friend Mr. Ogden needs no introduction—only this word of hearty cheer, from his fellow-worker,

J. R. MILLER.

*AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE
THE PRESBYTERIAN SOCIAL UNION OF
PHILADELPHIA.*

BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT ALL TO WHOM I SPEAK ARE SEEKING TRUTH IN RESPECT OF THE RIGHT METHOD OF CHURCH SUPPORT, I WILLINGLY COMPLY WITH THE REQUEST TO PRESENT SOME VIEWS IN BEHALF OF THE VOLUNTARY SYSTEM.

THE PRESENT INTEREST ARISES FROM ANXIOUS AND HONEST INQUIRY. CONCLUSIONS SHOULD REST ON PRINCIPLE, NOT EXPEDIENCY. EXPEDIENCY IS IN THE SADDLE. THE TENDENCY OF THE PERIOD IS TO ADJUST THE METHODS OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE APPARENTLY PRACTICAL. CHRIST NEVER SURRENDERED AN IDEAL.

PEW RENTS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT.

THE relation of Christian progress to the numbers of people and the material growth of the nation arouses anxious solicitude upon the part of serious men. Study of social conditions from the Christian point of view does not give reassuring results.

The query forces itself and will not down at our bidding: Are we following cunningly-devised fables? I presume every man here has met that question and answered it in the negative. We are all satisfied that there is no inherent weakness in the Christian theory as given by Jesus Christ and His apostles. Plain men such as we are cannot establish the truth of Christianity by scholarship. We assent to what Christian scholars tell us of language, interpretation, criticism, and the history of the sacred canon; but our faith, belief, rests upon experience. We accept this Christian theory because it commends itself to our reason; it fits humanity. No human imagination could create Jesus Christ.

Scholars may dispute about the authorship of St. John's gospel, but our study of Jesus' last prayer with His apostles proves Him divine; nothing can make us doubt. The more seriously we examine, the clearer it all becomes; and so, without scientific theological scholarship, we believe. The principles are correct.

If, therefore, the Christian theory is not a misfit when applied to humanity, we must seek for the reasons of present discouragement elsewhere—that is, in Christian methods. Methods must be tried by principles. In considering any mode of Christian activity and procedure, we must ask, What has Christian experience and history to tell of it? Will it stand the judgment of the Master's code?

Such a test is difficult. The mind clings to notions made familiar by the usages of a lifetime or of generations. We look at truth through surrounding conditions. Our prejudices are often mistaken for principles.

A distinguished minister of our church* says: "If men are not brought up to a level with their religion, their religion they will bring down to a level with themselves. The truest, deepest things in any system impose

* Rev. C. H. Parkhurst, D.D.

a tax upon us, assert an expensive imperialism over us. This makes them irksome, and we go quietly about to devise some means by which, without throwing our religion overboard bodily, we can evade it in those respects wherein it makes inconvenient demands upon us."

These words, fresh with the breezes of eternal truth, should scatter the mists of expediency and compromise that obscure the outlines of the living issue involved in this discussion.

GOSPEL-PREACHING MUST BE FREE.

Holding, therefore, that the right answer to this question is vital to the Christian life of the individual and the Church, and that the answer deeply affects important personal and associated Christian responsibilities, I will state some reasons in support of the proposition:

That the free preaching of the Gospel by means of voluntary support is the only system that will meet the scriptural test, and therefore it *is* preferable to the pew-renting system.

By free preaching of the Gospel I mean that the only condition precedent to the enjoyment of the privileges of a house of pub-

lic worship is a willingness to accept such privileges.

By voluntary support I mean conscience-giving only, pure and simple.

The absolute need of the Gospel requires no argument in this presence. Without the Gospel humanity would be hopeless, and the movement of the race would be toward darkness and despair. With it, in the simplicity impressed upon it by the life and teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, there is hope and progress in all things, mental, moral, and spiritual.

That the preaching of the Gospel must be free to all would seem to be equally clear. Some church methods imply doubt as to this proposition. It therefore requires argument.

The nature of both God and man as revealed in the Bible, and more especially in the teachings of Jesus Christ and His apostles, would alone affirm the truth of this claim.

The universal fatherhood of God is clearly expressed by Paul, Peter, James, John, and Jude. It was taught most plainly by our Lord Jesus Christ, since the prayer He gave to all humanity begins "Our Father."

The Bible idea of man clearly includes universal brotherhood. Solomon asserts that "the rich and the poor meet together and

the Lord is the maker of them all." Paul declares to the Athenians, who claimed a superior and exclusive creation, that "God had made of one blood all nations of men." From the universal fall of man in the sin of Adam to the universal offer of salvation in the "whosoever" of the New Testament, the thought of brotherhood is all-pervasive.

The twin facts of the divine fatherhood and the human brotherhood which inhere in God as God and in man as man have a far deeper significance in the light of the complete revelation in Jesus Christ. The conception of God as a loving Father so clearly shown in the parable of the prodigal son, and of all mankind as brothers so explicitly taught in the parable of the good Samaritan, hallow and beautify the mutual relations which are inherent in the nature of both God and man as moral beings.

The commands of the Saviour for the universal teaching of the Gospel and the inspired instructions of all the New Testament writers are in harmony with the natural rights of man in respect of the knowledge of God.

Therefore the aggregate result of all these considerations, natural and revealed, is the fundamental principle that the preaching of the Gospel must be free.

It becomes us, therefore, to inquire as to the means required by the divine teaching for preserving the preaching of the Gospel in its freedom.

Of course in a general sense the plain answer to this question is, Christians are the means. Persons who embrace the salvation offered in the Gospel by accepting Jesus Christ as Mediator and Saviour and confessing Him before the world, enter into covenant with God and make a pledge to humanity to live by the principles taught in His Holy Word. To the extent of their ability and capacity, material, mental, and spiritual, they take the place of the Christ toward the world—each Christian a smaller Christ. By virtue of this covenant Christians are bound to recognize that the great Head of the Church did, by precept and by practice, enforce the duty of institutional work to preserve and extend His Gospel. Therefore Christians must give faithful and earnest support to such organization for the worship of God and the instruction of man as accord completely with the principles and methods indicated by Jesus Christ and by the apostles who so well knew His mind.

CHRIST'S GOSPEL INSTITUTION.

Happily the gospels give full information as to the organization that Christ used for His public teaching. It was the synagogue. Incidentally He taught on the hillside and by the wayside, using a boat by the lake shore as a pulpit or speaking to circles within the homes that made Him welcome; again in the temple as He had opportunity; but the synagogue was the organization that He used principally and systematically.

Luke records in a very general way, as indicating His constant practice, that He "taught in the synagogues of Galilee." We also read in Luke's gospel that "as His custom was, He went into the synagogue of Nazareth on the Sabbath day and stood up for to read," and that He followed the reading with wonderful instruction concerning the free proclamation of His Gospel. Jesus Himself said to the high priest, "I ever taught in the synagogue." The record of the four gospels is full and complete enough to establish the fact that Jesus used the synagogue as the proper organism for religious worship and instruction. The apostles, evangelists, and their converts followed His example so universally as to indicate it as the germ from which Christianity has developed, in all its

various systems, the individual church organization. The various church governments—Congregational, Episcopal, Presbyterian—recognize the congregation idea as derived from the synagogue to be the unit of organization.

The synagogue, existing in great numbers at the beginning of the Christian era, was remarkably complete in its methods of worship and instruction. Not only did it provide the opportunities of public worship, but its Bible-schools were the models for the modern Sunday-school. It had of course other functions than those referred to as germane to this discussion.

The synagogue congregation was a voluntary self-governing organization. It had no relation to the Levitical priesthood. It created its own government by elders, designated as men of leisure. It was supported upon a voluntary system of alms, which the elders, as one of their special duties, collected and disbursed. But it nowhere appears that the privileges of the synagogue were limited to such as contributed to its support. The presence in one synagogue of a man with an unclean spirit is not the only evidence that undesirable people were not excluded by caste. Uncircumcised proselyte Jews had the privileges of the syna-

gogue, and there is other evidence beyond that recorded by St. Luke that heathens and proselytes of the gate built synagogues which the Jews were willing to accept.

It is apparent that Jesus Christ did indicate the synagogue as the organized method by which His free Gospel should be preached in its freedom. He claimed that one of the testimonies to His divine mission was that "the poor have the Gospel preached unto them." It is evident that as the synagogue was His usual preaching-place, He preached in them not only to the rich, but to the poor as well.

LAW OF LOVE AS THE SUPPORT OF WORSHIP.

Apropos to the historic place of the synagogue in its relation to the simple principles of Jesus that require the free preaching of the Gospel in a free church, will be a consideration of the proposition that the "worshipper must support the worship."

It is, of course, admitted. The idea is clearly taught in the early heathen religions from which the tithe system was adopted into the Jewish system, from the elaborate instructions for tithing given in the Mosaic Law, from the recognition of the tithes given by Joseph and Mary in the case of the infant Jesus, and from the usage in the support of

the synagogue. But it appears that even the Jews were prepared for higher notions of duty, as witness Zaccheus, who said, immediately after his conversion "Behold the half of my goods I give to the poor." Already had the Jewish mind reached upward toward something better than legal bondage. The spirituality of psalmists and prophets had survived in some souls, and the early dawn appeared of the higher law that was perfected in the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

In the spiritual kingdom of God founded by Jesus Christ the slavery to letter and tradition had no place. The Sermon on the Mount was the emancipation proclamation of the soul. The royal edict was sealed in the blood of Calvary, and the legend of the seal was, "It is finished." The Mosaic principles survived, but bondage to the letter was forever ended. Burnt offerings and sacrifices, the Levitical priesthood and the tithes so intimately associated with each were all swept away when the veil of the Temple was rent in twain. Religion was lifted to the far grander ideal of the blood covenant of friendship between the divine Christ and each person who would love and serve Him.

Henceforward the principle was to be, "If ye love me, keep my commandments;" "Ye

are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you;" "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another;" "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." And at the last, after the completed glory of the resurrection and just before the final glory of the ascension, there was a testing command put upon all who make the covenant of friendship—it was to go and teach all nations; and this command His immediate followers heeded carefully: "They went forth and preached everywhere."

And so is it not clear that the Christian's covenant is a personal one, that his covenant involves the adoption of the Christ ethics toward the world, obedience to the Christ idea in all things, and most emphatically in respect of the spread of the Christ Gospel throughout the world? Is it not clear that the notion of the law of duty for duty's sake is absorbed into the higher conception, 'duty for love's sake?' Therefore as incidental to but absolutely a part of the new covenant of love, the Christian pledges himself by his very confession to support the worship, and thus forever disappears the technical tenet, "the worshipper must support the worship." The tithe principle is but a segment of the

chrysalis of legal duty from which the Christ brought forth the winged spirituality of love.

Therefore by just as much as the Christian fails to sustain the Christ idea that the *Gospel* preaching *must be free*, does he fail to be a Christian. He therefore fails to keep the covenant between his soul and his God.

That such was the apostles' view of the pledge to support the Gospel is evident from many passages in the Acts and the Epistles. A brief allusion will suffice to show that St. Paul considered that the Christian doctrine of giving must be voluntary giving, "not grudgingly nor of necessity." The measure of giving was prosperity. The spirit of giving must be generous, for "the Lord loveth a cheerful giver." All this finds apt illustration in his appeal to the Corinthian Church on behalf of the poor saints in Jerusalem.

The Epistle of James is a protest against the slightest distinction in the assembly of Christians. It is more. It is a command that in the congregation there shall be no respect of persons.

Attention has been directed to the various tithings under the Mosaic law and to "the generous offerings of the early Christian Church," as showing the duty of the worshipper to support the worship. I think this an erroneous association of ideas, which should

be carefully separated. The tithe was a tax, and it may be cited in justification of the duty of "the worshipper to support the worship;" nevertheless it cannot be made to justify the pew-rent system. The tithe did support the worship, but it did not secure a proprietary legal right to any particular, exclusive private portion of the temple for the use of the tithe-payer.

But the generous offerings of the early Christian Church were quite different; they were entirely of the free will. Their voluntary character was proof that the donors recognized no tax. The contributions were a joyful fulfilment of the pledge of their confession in which they said, "we will support the worship." Such gifts are privileges. To describe them as the "taxation" by which duty is performed is to mistake their character.

It is well to remember that tithes are mentioned in only two chapters of the New Testament—in Zaccheus' description of himself and in the ninth of Hebrews. The purpose of the latter was to prove that "the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, by which we draw nigh unto God." And we should further notice that the New Testament has absolutely no references to taxes or taxation, except in

a merely descriptive and historical sense. Even such allusions are very few, very brief, and purely incidental.

Assuming the correctness of the reasoning presented in support of the propositions that Christ and His apostles taught the free preaching of the Gospel by means of voluntary support—conscience contributions—let us examine a little into the application made by the early Church of these teachings.

FREE PREACHING A DIVINE COMMAND.

The frequency with which Jesus freely proclaimed a free Gospel indicates that there were Pharisaic Jews who sought chief seats in the synagogues. To rebuke this spirit and to establish the new dispensation upon a perfect basis of human equality He often repeated the proclamation of Gospel freedom. Six times the evangelists record his words, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." It is not fanciful to apply the "let him hear" not only to the individual, but to such of his fellow-men as might be indisposed to "let him hear." The enforced guests from the hedges and highways, the call to repentance of men everywhere, the preaching to all the world and every creature—these show clearly what is the Christ idea of the conditions upon which the right to hear the Gospel rests

—compulsory freedom—more than free, if possible. Such was the seed thought, the divine germ, which was to bring forth fruit an hundredfold.

The early Church responded quickly to these conditions, and the apostles, doubtless, often recalling the incident of Jesus and the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well, offered salvation through Christ to the Roman, the Greek, the Scythian as freely as to the Jew. A distinguished writer refers to the preaching of this Gospel alike to "philosophers, laborers, rulers, soldiers, and heathen slaves" in audiences that recognize "no distinction of classes, but senator and slave sit side by side in its assemblies. It lifts the humble without degrading the high. It acknowledges no limitations to race; but as soon as the minds of its earliest disciples have been enlightened it is by them proclaimed without pause to all who will hear it, whether in Asia, Africa, or Europe." * Such is the testimony of a great Christian scholar to the spirit with which the early Church entered upon the mission of the Master.

By this threefold standard evolved from the nature of moral beings divine and human, from the teachings of Jesus, from the history

* Rev. R. S. Storrs, D.D.

of the early Church, must the pew-rent system, all-controlling wherever it exists, be tried. If it can stand the test, well; if not, let it be anathema.

I hold that it cannot stand the test; that it contradicts and subverts the spirit of the Gospel; that it is opposed to the idea that the Gospel must be freely preached; that it has worked incalculable harm to persons; that it has introduced false standards of church association and ministerial success; and that it has largely perverted the Church in this country from its plain and simple work of serving humanity.

CHARITY THE SPIRIT OF REFORM.

But in an effort to make good these somewhat strong and positive statements I must be relieved of the suspicion of personal condemnation of any who may dissent from my views, nor must it be supposed that I question the sincerity of any church and minister practising the pew-rent system. The system is an inheritance, and no legacy is so bad as other people's mistakes, except only other people's quarrels. The custom of generations has crystallized it. Its promoters were little aware that they were bequeathing to their successors a fungus system which

found friendly soil and congenial atmosphere in the artificial social life which a sudden access of wealth has created out of the marvellous material development of our country.

Such an evil as I hold this pew-rent system to be, upheld as it is by the usages of more than two centuries, is not to be cured by denunciation. Rather accord what the question of its propriety is receiving here—honest, earnest, kindly, and intelligent discussion—in order that we may come at last to the light concerning it.

PEW RENTS A LEGACY OF ERROR.

Historical data concerning the pew system exist, but are not readily accessible. We know, however, that seats in churches were originally provided for the aged and infirm and for persons of rank. There is a record, doubtless the result of some definite case, bearing date of 1617, that it was an offence for a young lady to sit with her mother. There was perhaps no thought beyond that of easy collection of revenue in the pew tax of our colonial period, but it quickly made a proscription. The poor, relegated to galleries or free seats, were thus marked in the audience with the sad badge of poverty. How serious the strain upon the heavenly

grace in the case of poor saints, perhaps the choicest ungathered clusters from living branches of the true vine! How hopeless the influence upon others whose poverty of pocket was the fitting reflection of starving souls!

And so it has gone on to its logical completeness. The metropolitan centres show many examples of the full flower of the system in churches consecrated to God but devoted to human pride. There are churches that seem to have been especially contrived for the very large class seeking social precedence, and who are willing to buy at any price—and often the bigger the price the better—a conspicuous place in a conspicuous church simply and only for the social distinction it confers. Religion is too often the slave of Fashion. The pew system furnishes the fetters.

It is needless to pursue this line of discussion farther, and I will therefore briefly notice such considerations in favor of pew rentals as I have not already touched upon.

It is also said that pew rentals give opportunity for a gradation of payments according to ability. The reply is they do not; for an arbitrary bargain is made that ignores in respect of Gospel support the principle “as God has prospered,” and nobody but God who

has prospered and the recipient who has been prospered knows the prosperity. Yes, according to means let there be a gradation of payments, but leave the question of ability to give where the inspired apostle left it—between God and the individual conscience. “As a man purposeth in his heart, so let him give” is the command. It is dangerous to substitute any other principle in any duty involving giving.

The right to exact payment of the temple tax is given as an argument for the pew-rent system. The right was clearly admitted by Christ in the miracle of the fish and coin, but we must remember this was before the completion of the Old Dispensation. Where were those right safter the Crucifixion and Calvary? The temple in this respect at least was not in the Saviour’s thought of organization for His Church. All the organization, then, that we have clusters about synagogue, ecclesia, congregation; and the inspiration for their support is not tax or tithes, but love as the fulfilling of the law.

The higher law involved in the voluntary support of worship bears on all alike and makes the obligation absolutely universal. The entire congregation can be made to feel it equally when faithfully instructed in the duties implied in Christianity. The pew-

rental system is necessarily discriminating, partial, incomplete, and not universal. Concerning the supplementary offerings, I can say only that the theory of them is inadmissible; for does not the covenant of church membership expressly carry with it a complete consecration not only of person, but of property?

Regarding the several grounds of expediency which are urged in behalf of pew rentals, I would maintain:

That the unity of family worship can be equally well sustained by the voluntary as by the rental plan. Also, the sentiment of association may be pushed too far both in respect of the pew and the church edifice. Who of experience among us cannot recall numerous instances in which the beautiful sentiments of association have developed into inconsiderate selfishness? This in turn has often been translated into a worship of boards and bricks and stones that kept the Lord's capital only too safely invested in properties no longer useful.

Two other points of desirability claimed for the pew-rental system should be considered together, namely: that by it the personal interest in the sanctuary is deepened and the attendance upon the services increased. The personal interest, I claim, is just in pro-

portion to the investment of both money and personal service, and it certainly follows that the interest developed by voluntary sacrifice of money, time, sympathy, and service will vastly outweigh that created by a mere financial contract. The general experience also is that, given the right conditions of minister and people, the attendance upon public worship is increased by the free-pew system. European experience in free public sanctuaries is cited against free pews, but my own observation teaches otherwise. I have nowhere heard a more simple Gospel nor enjoyed more genuine privileges of worship than in the great popular congregations of the English cathedrals. The evangelical churches in Switzerland give beautiful illustration of the meeting on common ground in free seats of all sorts and conditions of men: Families sit together by coming early to service, and equality in the house of God is recognized by the universal simplicity of the women's dress, which challenges the stranger to distinguish by any outward token of garb which are peasants, factory hands, or the wives and daughters of the wealthiest families. Swiss Protestantism has lessons for America. One of the most highly respected ecclesiastical authorities states concerning the pew system in England, where

it has been known for many generations and where some of its worst abuses have ripened to maturity, that "to-day, in the Church of England, it is as verily a decaying and vanishing usage as is the use of the whipping-post or the imprisonment of men for debt." It is also asserted that in England, and "especially in the Church of England itself, there has been a marked—in many cases a vast—increase in the number of the public services and in the numbers of those who are in attendance upon them. And it is equally idle to deny that that increase has been synchronous with the growth of free churches." * This is the testimony that comes to me concerning the free worship of Europe. Certainly I would be the last to advocate state religion; but there is one thing sure, and it is that while state churches may create an aristocracy of priests, they certainly create a democracy of people in worship. St. Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey, the Court Church in Dresden and the Cathedral in Cologne, all prove the democracy in worship, and possibly neither would establish the aristocracy of priests.

To the claim that the pew-rent system gives opportunity to do good through the abundant

* Right Rev. H. C. Potter, D.D.

exercise of Christian hospitality, pews becoming a means of grace to their possessors, when sharing their privilege with others, I give most cordial assent. By all means let us have with the pew system the graces of Christian hospitality and courtesy. I yield to none in gratitude that there are many Christian pew-holders who conscientiously practise these graces. But to quote this hospitality is to condemn the ethics of the whole plan. The kindly card of invitation to a particular pew is a courtesy which denies my right to hear the Gospel in the church that contains that pew unless it has charity seats at my disposal. The invitation is on a par with the courtesy a manager may give me to a reserved seat in a place of amusement. The preaching of the Gospel by Christ's terms is free, and the Christian's covenant is a pledge to keep it free; but the rented pew is a barrier which takes away the right to share in the worship and listen to the Gospel, though haply it may be heard by courtesy or charity. The social equal may get the courtesy, the social inferior the charity.

It often happens that the courtesy is least where the attendance is greatest. Large popularity of church and preacher is unlikely to develop hospitality of people.

It must, however, be freely admitted that

in many pew-rent churches hospitality is shown to strangers. That does not at all reach the root of the matter. It involves the question, "On what terms is a worshipper to be admitted to God's house? Is he to be admitted there upon sufferance as the tolerated guest of some other fellow-being who owns in that holy place an exclusive right to the occupancy of so many square feet, or as a fellow-citizen of the household of God, in that Divine Republic in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, but where men are all one in Christ?" *

And were there nothing beyond the treatment now accorded to such strangers as commonly seek to attend public worship as guests, this discussion as a practical matter would be idle. But from an ethical standpoint it would in any case be important.

PERTINENT QUESTIONS.

What is to be the outcome of the prevailing pew-rent method? Has it any influence in deciding whether this generation is to hand over the Church to its successors improved or degraded? Are pew rents one of the forces that increase the growing class of

* Right Rev. H. C. Potter, D.D.

unchurched Christians? Are pew rents a help or a hindrance in the work of reaching the worldly millions—the degraded classes at both the top and the bottom of society and all the gradations of humanity between? Have pew rents anything to do with the tendency to create a wall of moral separation between classes in the church and between the church and the world?

These are not idle questions. At each new angle of this discussion some fresh issue challenges attention. Shall the world have the free preaching of the Gospel as a courtesy, a charity, or a right? Pledged Christians must answer.

Then, too, it is reasonably claimed that free seats encourage the human weakness that seeks to get church privileges without cost, and that the pew-rental system corrects the evil. But is it a correction that corrects in the Christ spirit? Can any one prove that the buying of a place in the house of God ever made a mean soul great or liberal? The proposed remedy is worse than the disease. I can imagine no surer cure for sinful selfishness than the faithful preaching of a Gospel that shall keep the stingy soul face to face with duty as commanded by God, and no compromising board of trustees to intervene, as the assignees of God's claim, to settle with

meanness by accepting a per cent.—five, ten, or fifty—upon a debt which should be paid, principal and interest, to the uttermost cent.

But it is asked, in view of the pew rentals, "Is not salvation free?" The reply is, "Yes, as water is free. Water is free to consumers, but the cost of delivery is not free, as witness the just taxes for water-mains and other expensive devices for its delivery." * But the simile stops short. Yes, salvation is free, free as water to suffering, thirsty men. Common humanity demands that all men possessing water shall not only furnish but *deliver* it to men who are, consciously or unconsciously, dying, of thirst.

Salvation must be free and the preaching of it free—free as the air which none may limit, free as the charity of Almighty God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not.

Time forbids detailed objections to the pew-rent system drawn from illustrative existing facts, such as instances of great preachers, renowned for piety, learning, and eloquence, who speak to sparse audiences in their own eminently proper pew-rent churches, and yet command crowds when preaching in public halls or in

* Rev. H. C. McCook, D.D.

churches of other cities. Of churches in which every seat is rented and annual auctions are held at which the choice is bid off at a premium. Of churches in which fashion and music combine to create popularity, and in which strangers are notified, by manner or word, that the privileges of art, social affinity, and the incident of Gospel-preaching are reserved for such as pay for them. Of great-souled preachers whose careers, marked for large success, are stunted, and whose work is dwarfed by the pew-rent limitations until failure more or less complete ensues. Of locked pews, no longer popular, which it is illogical to condemn, for the right to own or hire includes the right to lock.

A great catalogue of points of condemnation of the pew-rent system awaits a repetition which I will not make.

CONSCIENCE THE CHRIST CASHIER.

And now leaving the Social Demon, so powerful in the Protestant Churches of America, to a little repose in his stronghold, *Social Caste*, a fortification founded on pew rents, I ask attention, in conclusion, to the voluntary system.

If the nature of God and man, the teach-

ings and practice of Jesus and His apostles, and the precedent of the early Church have been truly stated, the commands that the preaching of the Gospel shall be maintained free in proper houses of worship, with proper organization, and that the maintenance shall be by voluntary gifts alone, are imperative.

Admit the facts, and these twin principles must control in every individual church organization. They are as binding as the Ten Commandments.

But a great chorus of objections is welling up from many minds. It will be immediately said that voluntary church support is not practical—it will not work. That is not in the case. If the principle is right it *must* work. For special purposes it might be handy to abolish the command “Thou shalt not steal.” But it exists and is binding—it must work and it does.

Again, we will be told that it has been tried and it has failed. I do not admit it. Facts drawn from the Protestant Episcopal Church in this country show wonderful progress in the extension of the free-church system. For notable instances examine St. Ann’s on the Heights, Brooklyn, or St. George’s, New York. Experience in favor of free churches grows rapidly in Great Brit-

ain. Some of our churches in Philadelphia give testimony to the same effect.

Conspicuous failures there have been. I regret that time forbids a reference to details within my personal knowledge. It is nearly twenty years since a very prominent preacher * put the question of this evening as a burden on my mind. Observation of unsuccessful experiments with so-called free pews has influenced me decidedly in the conclusion that the preaching of the Gospel must be free. The difficulty in these cases was that the voluntary system was not voluntary. Pledges were expected. Shall I say exacted? And a pledge is one or more degrees better than a pew rent according to the way in which it is secured. *It* also violates the Christian covenant and substitutes a human for a divine obligation.

Of all the churches practising the voluntary system I know of only one that accepts it in simple completeness. All others of which I have knowledge, and several that are progressing successfully toward the right, have some sort of pledge.

In some of them the relation between a lifting spiritual life in the congregation and the method of Gospel support is clear. But

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they have not yet attained to the best. The true standard is found only in the Christian's confession and the obligation to support the free preaching of the Gospel thereby voluntarily assumed. Maintain that standard by keeping the person face to face with duty. Then trust him.

Ask a man to put a white ribbon on his coat to show his Christian temperance and you discount his Christianity. Ask a man for pew rent or pledge to support the Gospel, you doubt his Christian profession. In the one case the temperance (in respect to the use of liquors), and in the other case the pew rent, is made to stand for Christianity. Any doubt thrown upon the Christian confession degrades it.

In this practical age compromise and expediency have obscured the ideal. The grand duty now before the Christian world is to restore the ideal. Accomplish that, and our discussion will not be upon tithes and pew rents. The question will be, Are we saving men?

The Christian's contract is with God. The man-made machine, trustees, organization, something, steps in with a human improvement on the divine method and says we want security. The session, the spiritual guardians of the church, receive the member.

The board of trustees, the secular guardians, step in, and want a money contract to secure the pledge of the church covenant for the rental of a part of God's real estate.

A secular side of a church organization is an anachronism. That the place in which a man may sit in a church has any relation to the money he gives for church support is an incongruity. When human needs and Christian graces can be calculated in coin that may come. Not before. These heresies should be abandoned immediately and forever.

The Christian church is a family. St. Paul says so. In the Church the family ideal should be recognized. The family obligation is expensive. The family instinct can usually be trusted. Bring in this lofty idea of obligation and trust the Christian grace. Then the working together of all things for good to them that believe will bountifully appear. Christian graces will be multiplied and church support will be vastly enhanced.

In the Holland church to which I have alluded the contributions for the support are voluntary entirely. The only pledges are those made secretly between the person and his God. The treasurer will keep, when desired, a record by numbered envelopes of

contributions, and will inform the giver once a year the gross sum given, but he is in honor bound not to divulge any contribution to any other than the donor. The church expenses are not large, something less than \$4,000 a year, but the contributions are ample. The church has never been in debt over the first of any month, and no demand has ever been made to make up a deficiency. And I have a guess, only a guess, that should the treasurer state the per cent. of the largest recorded contribution to the sum collected its smallness would surprise you. This to anticipate the question, Do not some one or two persons bear the bulk of the burden? No, the letter and the spirit are in perfect accord. Should the experience of a single young church be taken as conclusive on this subject? The answer is no. The Scriptures should settle; this church merely illustrates it.

It will also be asked, Will the adoption of a voluntary system such as has been described affect the support of the ministry unfavorably? In my opinion, no. Reliance upon the highest principles of Christianity and humanity would be better, far better, and give far greater money results than the present degenerate, material, compromising expedient.

Robertson says, in one of his lectures on the Corinthians: "Appeal to the highest motives, appeal whether they be there or no, for you make them where you do not find them." "Let men say what they will of human nature's evil, a generous, real, unaffected confidence never fails to elicit the Divine spark."

Can a better Christianity than Paul's be discovered? To him Christianity was Christ. It has been truthfully said that "Paul's own Christianity was: a few facts respecting his Redeemer's life, a few of his master's precepts, like 'It is more blessed to give than to receive,' out of which he educed all Christian principles."

Our evening will not have been wasted if we earnestly seek the Divine authority for our beliefs on this question, whatever those beliefs may be, and in this connection I would commend to thoughtful study the 9th chapter of II. Corinthians and the 2d chapter of James.

For myself, sincerely believing in the truth of the principles I have endeavored to state, I shall hope to see them prevail until, as a writer on this subject has said, "in the house of God at any rate the sound of buying and selling, of hiring and of leasing, shall be forever silenced."

And thus my hope is that it may come

about in respect of pew rents and other vital matters, that we may fulfil our duty to the ages by handing down our Christian statements, forms, and methods purer and better than we received them. For who of us here present desires that our successors of the 20th century shall say of us, as we say of our predecessors of the 18th century, that we left them an inheritance of mistakes?



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