

“THE DRIFT”

*Tracing the Drift in Modern
Methodism,
leading up to my Resignation
in 1954*



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RICH PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

In the year 1910 a great event took place in my life, when, under the preaching of a faithful Methodist Minister, in the person of Rev. G. T. Doherty, I was born of the Spirit, according to John 3: 7. Six years later, under the Spirit-controlled ministry of Rev. J. H. Cain of Wesley Church, Melbourne, I came into the experience of the fullness of the Spirit, in obedience to Ephesians 5: 18.

My acceptance as a candidate for the Methodist Ministry dates back to 1917.

PEAKE'S COMMENTARY OF THE BIBLE

About two years after my entry into the ministry, "Peake's

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Commentary of the Bible" (a modernistic book), was placed on the list of books prescribed for the young men in training for the Methodist Ministry. A great theological debate took place between Rev. W. H. Fitchett, B.A., LL.D., and Professor A. E. Albiston, M.A., at the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church of Victoria and Tasmania, about 1922, Dr. Fitchett moved that the General Conference be asked to remove "Peake's Commentary of the Bible" from the list of books accepted for the training of young Methodist probationers. He said, "Nothing so profoundly affects the character and very life of a Christian Church as the place held in its faith and life by one Book the Bible, and one Divine Figure, Jesus Christ. For either the Church or the individual no tragedy can be greater than to have a Bible robbed of its certainty and a Christ stripped of His Divine completeness and authority. Nothing can compensate for such a disaster — not money nor scholarship nor social position. Now the Methodist Church is in real

danger of this calamity. Here is a fact only half known and less than half understood that for the past four years all the probationers in the ministry of this church have been required to study both Christ and the Bible from a book that presents the spectacle of a Bible robbed of certainty and of quite another Christ than that of the great ages of the great Creeds which lie behind us. *"And if that view of the Bible and of Christ gets into the pulpits and saturates its teaching, gets into the Sunday Schools and is filtered into the minds of its children, gets into the religious personal experience of its members, that will be for the Methodist Church a spiritual disaster, deep, far reaching and enduring, which it will scarcely survive."* (From "The Southern Cross," March 23, 1923.) The voting resulted in 82 votes for the removal of Peake's Commentary and 107 for its retention.

One feels that the chickens are coming home to roost.

A TATTERED BIBLE AND A MUTILATED CHRIST

Dr. Fitchett was so concerned about the modernistic articles contributed in this volume by 61 more or less eminent divines (only five of whom belonged to its own branch of Methodism) that at his own expense he published, in 1922, a booklet entitled "A Tattered Bible and a Mutilated Christ".

The following are some of the examples quoted by Dr. Fitchett, from "Peake's Commentary":

"(1) Passages which deny, or cast doubts upon, the Virgin Birth of Christ. Thus, on page 15 of 'Peake's Commentary':

"As regards the Birth stories in Matthew and Luke, we find ourselves in doubt on many points, and there is reason to believe that a reverent imagination has been at work in traditional material."

Again, on the same page:

"It is no longer possible to insist on the literal accuracy of the Gospel incidents . . . This is particularly true

of the Virgin Birth and of the Resurrection."

"(2) Passages which can be construed as denying the authority of the Bible as the ultimate standard of religious truth. Thus, on page 8, this 'Commentary' says:

"Protestants, having repudiated the infallible authority of the Church, fell back on the Bible as the ultimate standard of religious truth . . . The rise of historical and linguistic criticism has finally destroyed these claims."

"(3) Passages which cast doubts on the reliability or sufficiency of the New Testament as an historical record. Thus on page 15 is the statement.

"We are still far from having any proof that we have the 'ipsissima verba' of Jesus Christ, or any guarantee that the events of His life are related with absolute accuracy in the Gospels."

"(4) Passages which deny the infallibility of Christ as a teacher. Thus, on page 663:

“Belief in the infallibility of Jesus is the modern form of Docetism”—Docetism being one of the early heresies of the Christian Church, with which, according to Dr. Peake himself, “the Christian faith could hold no truce.”

“(5) Passages which teach that Christ was ignorant, and which undertake to define His ignorance. Thus on page 8 we are told that we ‘cannot claim infallibility for Him on the authorship of the Old Testament books’—which prophesied His coming He is charged as a teacher, with ‘accepting the common delusions of His age’. ‘He knew nothing,’ we are assured, ‘of Greek philosophy or of Roman law’. Again, on page 663, ‘Jesus Christ accepted the popular diagnosis of disease as due to demoniac influence.’”

“(6) Passages which challenge the truthfulness of the narratives of Christ’s miracles of healing. Thus, on page 663, we are told:

“Suspicion and doubt of varying kinds and degrees are attached to many of them. We may doubt the

withering of the fig tree (Mark 11: 12-14) because it seems unlike Jesus . . . We may suspect the story of the coin in the fish’s mouth (Matthew 17: 27) because the occasion of the miracle is trivial . . . the basis is a *folk lore motive*. ‘The strange silence of the Synoptists,’ we are told, ‘may make us hesitate to accept the raising of Lazarus (John 11) as history.’”

Dr. Fitchett goes on to point out that “these views and others like them in ‘Peake’s Commentary’ are (1) the irresponsible speculations of individual scholars; (2) they are not accepted by the general mind of the Christian Church; (3) in the judgment of this Conference they are in conflict with the Christian faith for which the Methodist Church stands.”

In this book—“A Tattered Bible and a Mutilated Christ” Dr. Fitchett, in Chapter 1, answers the question—“Must We Abandon the Virgin Birth of Christ, and Mutilate Two of the Gospels in doing it?”; in Chapter 2—“Must We Give up the Bible as the

One Standard of Religious Truth?"; Chapter 3—"Shall We Surrender the Accuracy and Trustworthiness of the Gospels?"; Chapter 4—"Shall We Accept the Criticism which Accuses Christ of Ignorance?"; Chapter 5—"Did Christ Suffer from the Common Delusions of His Age?"; Chapter 6—"Are the Critics Agreed Among Themselves?". In Chapter 7 he deals with "Common Sense and the Higher Criticism: The View of the Plain Man".

In the concluding Chapter, 8, Dr. Fitchett deals with "The 'Modernist' Phase of the Higher Criticism: A Witches' Dance of Theories".

"Peake's Commentary" has been retained in Queen's College, Melbourne, over all the intervening years and is still a text book for theological students for the Methodist ministry.

A MARKED DRIFT FROM THE CHURCHES

In 1938, a resolution of the General Conference directed the following enquiry—"that this Confer-

ence views with alarm the constant drift away from our churches. Conference, therefore, resolves to appoint a special Committee, whose duty it will be to investigate the whole matter with a view to ascertain the causes and provide adequate remedies". A report of that Drift from the Churches Committee, which was given in 1941, is in my possession, no mention is made of a Modernistic trend in Methodism.

A CHALLENGE AND A CALL

In 1945, the rapid drift was so pronounced that from my pulpit in the Fitzroy Methodist Mission I preached a sermon on "Modern Methodism Whither?" in the form of a challenge and a call. This sermon was published in booklet form, and copies were posted to every Methodist Minister in Victoria and Tasmania.

MISSION TO THE NATION

In 1953, it was decided to hold a Mission to the Nation, which resulted in outstanding success numerically

and financially, but many evangelical Methodists, and fundamentalists of other persuasions were disappointed with the spiritual aspect of the mission, as little was made of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit to convict of sin and regenerate; the precious Blood of Christ to cleanse from sin; repentance toward God; and the personal return of our Lord.

It is interesting to note that, following on the Mission to the Nation, New South Wales has extended its hours of liquor trading from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m., Victoria has had Tattersall's Lottery introduced, and the General Conference of the Methodist Church in 1954, by a majority vote of 87 to 38, carried the following motion: "That dancing be included in the social programme of church societies, at functions held on Methodist Church property, when permitted, after prior approval by the local leaders' meeting."

There appears little evidence of "Australia Finding God" through the agency of this "social" type of evangelism.

"THE BOOK OF BOOKS"

Many devout and earnest Christians are exercised in mind and spirit over a certain text book entitled "The Book of Books", by Rev. H. A. Overend, B.A., and Rev. N. H. Joughin, M.A., B.D., which local preachers, and students in the Methodist Home Mission training college have to study.

On pages 16 and 17, in chapter 2, dealing with "The Dawning Revelation", under the heading "The Old Testament", we read: "We must commence by recognising that the Old Testament is part of the literature of the Hebrew people, similar in composition to the books that have come down to us from ancient Greece and Rome. It is a varied selection, including legend, parable and myth; epic and drama, history, essay and sermon." Then, on page 115, chapter 14, under the heading "The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible", we read: "For centuries the Church held that every word of the scriptures came direct from the Holy Spirit; that its writers, like modern steno-

graphers, were but recorders of what they were told. On this idea of verbal inspiration was built the doctrine of the infallibility of the Bible. This is still one of the sheet-anchors in the faith of many devout and earnest Christians. If, however, we have read our text book aright, it will be clear that such a doctrine can no longer be held."

MY POSITION IN REGARD TO MODERNISM

We are constantly being urged to come in and use our influence to bring the church back to its true position. However, this is not God's way when unbelief has reached the ascendancy.

Three things we must face: *Consent*, *Compromise*, or *Contend*. When all hope for a purged church must then be abandoned, and when apostasy and unbelief are in the ascendancy, then a real blood-washed, born-again believer in the Lord Jesus Christ who remains in membership in the modernistic church,

should face these questions in the presence of the Lord:

Shall my tithes and offerings which I have set aside for the Lord be given to finance the following:

1. Leaders who have departed from the faith.
2. Unbelief in the Word of God.
3. Doctrines opposed to the truth.
4. Unsound literature.
5. Unsound seminaries.
6. The social gospel.
7. The way back to union with Rome. (Affiliation with the World Council of Churches.)
8. Worldly inroads, such as dancing on church property.

Shall I take the Lord's money and give it to that which is antagonistic to the Lord? If I aid such a programme by my gifts, or even by my membership, do not I become a partaker and sharer of their sins?

This situation of the unequal yoke demands *separation*. It is not enough for a member to say "My local church

is sound, and that satisfies me". Each member is part of the whole system. He is a member of the denomination as a whole. We would do well as Christians to heed the word of Revelation 18: 4, "Come out of her My people that ye be not partaker of her sins".

DESPERATE DAYS DEMAND DESPERATE ACTION

The days are so desperate that desperate action should be taken, and one feels that the time has arrived when each individual member of the church is within his or her rights to lovingly and humbly approach his or her minister and ask him the following questions:

1. Do you believe in the infallibility of the Bible?
2. Do you believe in the Virgin Birth of our Lord?
3. Do you believe in His substitutionary death and Blood atonement?
4. Do you believe in His bodily resurrection?

5. Do you believe in His personal and visible return?

If the reply to these questions is in the negative, you are no longer then justified in supporting that ministry either by money or membership.

This situation I had to face after 37 years in the ministry, and, as a result, my resignation from the modern Methodist ministry was tendered, and accepted, in 1954, and the following statement was published and circulated:

MY STATEMENT

"On the issue of 'modernism' and all that goes with it, such as the preaching of the social gospel, affiliation with the World Council of Churches (with its overtures to Rome) dancing on Church property, sympathy with the Australian Peace Council, and the type of evangelism evidenced in the Mission to the Nation, conducted by the Methodist Church throughout Australia in 1953, I feel that I cannot consistently

and conscientiously continue to be associated with Modern Methodism. I will continue to be an old time Methodist, standing for all that original Methodism stood for, that of 'leading many to righteousness and spreading scriptural holiness throughout the land'. I owe under God all that I enjoy spiritually to the evangelical Methodist church, having as a young Anglican been born again in 1910 in a Methodist Church under the faithful ministry of the late Rev. G. T. Doherty, and having entered into the experience of sanctification six years later under the ministry of late Rev. J. H. Cain of the Central Methodist Mission.

"As an act of protest, and with strong and deep conviction, I therefore have tendered my resignation from the modern Methodist Church as from the connexional year, March 31, 1954. After travelling, by invitation, over 30,000 miles during the past three years, in every State in the Commonwealth, including Tasmania, in connection with Conventions for the deepening of spiritual life, and united evangelistic missions

under the auspices of ministers' Fraternal, I have found remnants of evangelical Methodists smarting with a Divine discontent under liberalism and modernism.

"I strongly advise readers of this statement to look up the following quotations from the Word of God, which passages greatly challenged me, and finally led me out: 2 Cor. 6: 14; 7: 1; Eph. 5: 11; 2 Tim. 3: 1-5; Rev. 18: 4; Hebrews 13: 12 and 13."

Martin Luther, in his speech to the Diet at Worms, which lasted for 2 hours—hopeful that the church might, even at that late hour, yield to the necessity for reform, made this striking statement: "By proofs of scripture, it is neither safe nor prudent to do ought against conscience; here stand I, I can do no other, God assist me."

A WORLD-WIDE SEPARATIST MOVEMENT

When the news of my resignation spread, an invitation came from U.S.A., inviting me to speak at the 3rd Plenary Congress of the Inter-

national Council of Christian Churches, to be held in Philadelphia, August 3-12, 1954. The Bible Union of Australia then appointed me as a delegate to be their representative at the Congress. It was a great inspiration to meet men and women from 44 nations, and out of 54 denominations, who, too, had lifted their voices of protest and resigned from modernistic denominations. With one clear voice, all the delegates and representatives expressed their belief in the infallibility of the Bible, the Virgin Birth, the substitutionary death, the bodily resurrection, and the personal visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Unity was the key-note of the 3rd Plenary Congress of the I.C.C.C.

DR. BOB SHULER OF U.S.A.

For thirteen weeks after the I.C.C.C. Congress, by invitation I fulfilled preaching engagements in 14 States of America, travelling over 12,000 miles in that great land. It was my privilege, by appointment, to have one hour with Dr. Bob Shuler,

who, for over 30 years, has ministered at Trinity Methodist Church, Los Angeles. In defence of the Methodist evangelistic position, in matters of doctrine, and to promote true Methodist evangelism, he has edited "The Methodist Challenge" for many years. This magazine is regularly received by me, and in the January, 1955, issue, he has some strong things to say on modern Methodism in America.

On page 9 he writes: "I am living in a day when a new Methodism has appeared, very much like the world about it. Our leaders now call themselves liberals. They no longer demand that Methodists walk in a straight and narrow way, but grant great latitude. They boast of their broadness. They fellowship freely with Unitarianism. They are building a social "Kingdom of God". Many of them boldly question the Articles of Religion which have been declared the Constitution of the Methodist Church. Moreover, they demand conformity to the pattern they have set up. They call upon us to dance about

the golden calf of their making. Under such circumstances, a demanding restlessness seizes me. I cannot conform to the new Methodism.

“Housed within most modern Methodist Church buildings are well equipped social halls, especially fitted for the worldliness that our fathers prohibited. Many of our Methodist Schools boast dance halls and club facilities that will rival the night clubs of America. Social gambling has become a feature of modern Methodism. The dance, watched by every policeman on the vice squad, is now part of the authorized youth programme of modern Methodism. Our people are serving cocktails and engaging in every worldly practice known to their daily associates. I confess that I came up in a very different character of Methodism. I am still loyal to the Methodism I knew fifty and more years ago. I am restless and dissatisfied with modern substitutes for the old ways. Conformity with me is impossible. Nor can I remain silent. I must protest. My heart’s unrest must voice itself.”

WESLEY’S FEAR

John Wesley once said: “I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist, but I am afraid lest they should exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion, without the power. The Rev. J. H. Cain reminded us as students of this in 1916. One fears that this has actually come to pass.

The answer to Modern Methodism is a Revival of Original Methodism.



