

this to our royal law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself?" O tell it not in Gath! Let it not be named among those who are enemies to the Christian cause; lest that worthy name whereby we are called be still more blasphemed among the Heathen!

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## A LETTER

TO

THE REVEREND MR. POTTER.

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NORWICH, November 4, 1758.

REVEREND SIR,

1. TILL to-day I had not a sight of your sermon, "On the Pretended Inspiration of the Methodists." Otherwise I should have taken the liberty, some days sooner, of sending you a few lines. That sermon, indeed, only repeats what has been often said before, and as often answered. But as it is said again, I believe it is my duty to answer it again. Not that I have any acquaintance with Mr. Cayley or Osborn: I never exchanged a word with either. However, as you lump me and them together, I am constrained to speak for myself, and once more to give a reason of my hope, that I am clear from the charge you bring against me.

2. There are several assertions in your sermon which need not be allowed; but they are not worth disputing. At present, therefore, I shall only speak of two things: (1.) Your account of the new birth; and, (2.) "The pretended inspiration" (as you are pleased to term it) "of the Methodists."

3. Of the new birth, you say, "The terms of being *regenerated*, of being *born again*, of being *born of God*, are often used to express *the works* of gospel righteousness." (Pages 10, 11.) I cannot allow this. I know not that they are ever used in Scripture to express any outward work at all. They always express an inward work of the Spirit, whereof baptism is the

outward sign. You add, "Their primary, peculiar, and precise meaning signifies" (a little impropriety of expression) "our redemption from death, and restoration to eternal life, through the grace of God." (Page 13.) It does not, unless by *death* you mean sin; and by *eternal life*, holiness. The precise meaning of the term is, "a new birth unto righteousness," an inward change from unholy to holy tempers. You go on: "This grace our Lord here calls, 'entering into the kingdom of God.'" If so, his assertion is, "Except a man be born again,—he cannot" be born again. Not so. What he says is, Except a man experience this change, he cannot enter into my kingdom.

4. You proceed: "Our holy Church doth teach us, that—by the laver of regeneration in baptism, we are received into the number of the children of God—This is the first part of the new birth." What is the first part of the new birth? baptism? It is the outward sign of that inward and spiritual grace; but no part of it at all. It is impossible it should be. The outward sign is no more a part of the inward grace than the body is a part of the soul. Or do you mean, that regeneration is a part of the new birth? Nay, this is the whole of it. Or is it the "laver of regeneration" which is the first part of it? That cannot be; for you suppose this to be the same with baptism.

5. "The second part, the inward and spiritual grace, is a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness." What! Is the new birth the *second part* of the new birth? I apprehend it is the first and second part too: And surely nothing could have prevented your seeing this, but the ardour of your spirit, and the impetuosity with which you rush along and trample down all before you. Your manner of writing reminds me of an honest Quaker in Cornwall, whose words I would recommend to your consideration. Being consulted by one of the Friends, whether he should publish a tract which he had read to many in private, he replied, "What! Art thou not content with laying John Wesley on his back, but thou must tread his guts out too?"

6. So much for your account of the new birth. I am, in the Second place, to consider the account you give of "the pretended inspiration" (so you are pleased to term it) "of the Methodists."

"The Holy Ghost sat on the Apostles with cloven tongues as of fire;—and signs and wonders were done by their hands."

(Pages 16, 17, 18.) Wonders indeed ! For they healed the sick by a word, a touch, a shadow !—

They spake the dead alive, and living dead.

“But though these extraordinary operations of the Spirit have been long since withdrawn, yet the pretension to them still subsists in the confident claim of the Methodists.” This you boldly affirm, and I flatly deny. I deny that either I, or any in connexion with me, (for others, whether called Methodists, or anything else, I am no more concerned to answer than you are,) do now, or ever did, lay any claim to “these extraordinary operations of the Spirit.”

7. But you will prove it. They “confidently and presumptuously claim a particular and immediate inspiration.” (*Ibid.*) I answer, First, so do you, and in this very sermon, though you call it by another name. By inspiration, we mean that inward assistance of the Holy Ghost, which “helps our infirmities, enlightens our understanding, rectifies our will, comforts, purifies, and sanctifies us.” (Page 14.) Now, all this you claim as well as I; for these are your own words. “Nay, but you claim a particular inspiration.” So do you; do not you expect Him to sanctify you in particular? “Yes; but I look for no immediate inspiration.” You do; you expect He will immediately and directly help your infirmities. Sometimes, it is true, He does this, by the mediation or intervention of other men; but at other times, particularly in private prayer, he gives that help directly from himself. “But is this all you mean by particular, immediate inspiration?” It is; and so I have declared a thousand times in private, in public, by every method I could devise. It is pity, therefore, that any should still undertake to give an account of my sentiments, without either hearing or reading what I say. Is this doing as we would be done to?

8. I answer, Secondly, there is no analogy between claiming this inspiration of the Spirit, who, you allow, “assists, and will assist, all true believers to the end of the world;” (page 18;) and claiming those extraordinary operations of the Spirit which were vouchsafed to the Apostles. The former both you and I pretend to; yea, and enjoy, or we are no believers. The latter you do not pretend to; nor do I, nor any that are in connexion with me.

9. “But you do pretend to them. For you pray that ‘signs and wonders may still be wrought in the name of Jesus.’” True; but what signs and wonders? The conversion of sin-

ners; the "healing the broken in heart; the turning men from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God." These and these only are the signs and wonders which were mentioned in that prayer. And did I not see these signs and wonders still wrought, I would sooner hew wood, or draw water, than preach the gospel. For those are to me very awful words which our Lord speaks of Prophets or Teachers: "Ye shall know them" (whether they are true or false Prophets) "by their fruits. Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire." What fruit you have brought forth at Reymerton, I know not; God knoweth.

10. "Your followers, however, do pretend to the grace of a miraculous conversion." Is there any conversion that is not miraculous? Is conversion a natural or supernatural work? I suppose all who allow there is any such thing believe it to be supernatural. And what is the difference between a supernatural and a miraculous work, I am yet to learn.

"But they say, that at such a time, and in such a manner, the divine illumination shone upon them; Jesus knocked at the door of their hearts, and the Holy Ghost descended upon their souls;" that is, in plain terms, raillery apart, at a particular time, which they cannot easily forget, God did, in so eminent a manner as they never experienced before, "enlighten their understanding," (they are your own words,) "comfort and purify their hearts, and give his heavenly Spirit to dwell in them." But what has all this to do with those extraordinary operations of the Holy Spirit?

11. "Under these pretended impressions, their next advance is to a call to preach the word themselves; and forth they issue, as under the immediate inspiration of God's Spirit, with the language of Apostles, and zeal of Martyrs, to publish the gospel, as if they were among our remotest ancestors, strangers to the name of Christ." (Pages 20, 21.)

The plain truth is this: One in five hundred of those whom God so *enlightens and comforts*, sooner or later, believes it to be his duty to call other sinners to repentance. Such an one commonly stifles this conviction till he is so uneasy he can stifle it no longer. He then consults one or more of those whom he believes to be competent judges; and, under the direction of these, goes on, step by step, from a narrower to a larger sphere

of action. Meantime he endeavours to use only "the language of the Apostles," to speak the things of the Spirit in the words of the Spirit. And he longs and prays for the "zeal of Martyrs," continually finding the need thereof; seeing our present countrymen are as great strangers to the mind that was in Christ, as our ancestors were to his name.

12. "But the Holy Spirit no longer comes from heaven like a rushing mighty wind. It no longer appears in cloven tongues, as of fire." I wonder who imagines it does. "We now discern not between his suggestions and the motions of our own rational nature." Many times we do not; but at other times, God may give such peace or joy, and such love to himself and all mankind, as we are sure are not "the motions of our own nature." "To say, then, that the Holy Spirit began his work at such a time, and continued it so long in such a manner, is as vain as to account for the blowing of the wind." Hold! *accounting for* is not the thing. To make a parallel, it must be, "is as vain as to say, that the wind *began to blow at such a time, and continued so long in such a manner.*" And where is the vanity of this? Why may I not say, either that the wind *began to blow at such a time, and blew so long in such a manner*; or that *God began at such a time to comfort my soul*; that *He continued that consolation so long, and in such a manner*, by giving me either peace and joy in believing, or a lively hope of the glory of God?

13. "Not that we are without a memorable instance of this instantaneous impulse in the sudden conversion of St. Paul." (Page 23.) A poor instance this; for it does not appear that his was a sudden conversion. It is true, "a great light suddenly shone round about him;" but this light did not convert him. After he had seen this, "he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink." And, probably, during the whole time, God was gradually working in his heart, till he "arose, and, being baptized, washed away his sins, and was filled with the Holy Ghost."

14. But to return: "Their Teachers claim a particular and immediate inspiration in their nauseous effusions." (Page 22.) Certainly they claim either a particular and immediate inspiration, (as above explained,) or none at all. But this is no other inspiration (call it *influence*, if you please, though it is a far stronger term) than every one must have before he can either

understand, or preach, or live the gospel. "But there is not in Scripture the least promise or encouragement to expect any particular inspiration." Yes, surely, such an inspiration as this; you have allowed it over and over. And what external evidence of this would you have? I will believe you are thus inspired, if you convert sinners to God, and if you yourself are "holy in all manner of conversation."

15. Is there "no need of this inspiration now, because the prejudices of mankind are in favour of the gospel, and the profession of it is under the protection and encouragement of the civil power?" *The prejudices of mankind are in favour of the gospel!* What! the prejudices of the bulk of mankind? To go no farther than England: Are the bulk of our nation prejudiced in favour of the genuine gospel; of the holiness which it enjoins; of chastity and temperance; of denying ourselves, and taking up our cross daily; of dying to the world, and devoting all our heart and all our life to God? Are they prejudiced in favour of presenting our souls and bodies a constant, holy sacrifice to God? What less than this is gospel holiness? And are the prejudices of mankind in favour of this?

16. Likewise, how far this real Christianity is "under the protection and encouragement of the civil power," I know not. But I know, "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," domestic persecution, if no other; for "the foes of" such "a man shall be they of his own household. There shall be," and there are now, "five in one house, three against two, and two against three;" and that not for being Methodists, for having a nick-name; (although that may be the pretence, for want of a better; for who scruples to throw a man into the ditch, and then beat him, because his clothes are dirty?) but for living godly; for loving and serving God, according to the best light they have. And certainly these need the assistance of God's Spirit to strengthen and comfort them, that they may suffer all things, rather than turn aside, in any point, from the gospel way.

17. "But the Scriptures are a complete and a sufficient rule. Therefore, to what purpose could any further inspiration serve? All farther inspiration is unnecessary; the supposed need of it is highly injurious to the written word. And the pretension thereto (which must be either to explain or to supply it) is a wicked presumption, with which Satan hath filled their hearts, to lie of the Holy Ghost." (Pages 27, 28.)

High sounding words! But, blessed be God, they are only *brutum fulmen*: They make much noise, but do not wound. "To what purpose could any further inspiration serve?" Answer yourself: "To enlighten the understanding, and to rectify the will." Else, be the Scriptures ever so complete, they will not save your soul. How, then, can you imagine it is unnecessary; and that "the supposed need of it is injurious to the written word?" And when you say yourself, "The Spirit is to teach us all things, and to guide us into all truth;" judge you, whether this is "to explain, or to supply, the written word." "O, He does this by the written word." True; but also "by his holy inspiration." So the compilers of our Liturgy speak; who, therefore, according to you, are guilty of "wicked presumption, with which Satan filled their hearts, to lie of the Holy Ghost."

18. These, also, are the men upon whom you fall in the following warm words:—"The power of enthusiasm over an heated imagination may be very great. But it must be under the ferment of that old, sour leaven, hypocrisy, to rise to that daring height." I think not: I think they were neither hypocrites nor enthusiasts, though they teach me to pray for, and consequently to expect, (unless I am an hypocrite indeed,) "God's holy inspiration," both in order to "think the things that be good," and also "perfectly to love him, and worthily to magnify his holy name."

19. You go on: "They boast that their heart is clean, and their spirit right within them." Sir, did you ever read Morning Prayer on the tenth day of the month? You then said, "Make me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Did you mean what you said? If you did not, you was guilty of the grossest hypocrisy. If you did, when did you expect God would answer that prayer? when your body was in the grave? Too late! Unless we have clean hearts before we die, it had been good we had never been born.

20. "But they boast they are pure from sin, harmless, and undefiled." So, in a sound sense, is every true believer. "Nay, they boast that their bodies are a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God." Sir, is not yours? Are not your soul and body such a sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God? As the Lord God liveth, before whom we stand, if they are not, you are not a Christian. If you are not a holy, living sacrifice, you are still

"dead in trespasses and sins." You are an "alien from the commonwealth of Israel, without" Christian "hope, without God in the world!"

21. You add, "Thus have I exposed their boasted claim to a particular and immediate inspiration." (Page 30.) No, Sir, you have only exposed yourself; for all that we claim, you allow. "I have shown what a miserable farce is carrying on, beneath the mask of a more refined holiness." No tittle of this have you shown yet; and before you attempt again to show any thing concerning us, let me entreat you, Sir, to acquaint yourself better with our real sentiments. Perhaps you may then find, that there is not so wide a difference as you imagined between you and,

Reverend Sir,

Your servant for Christ's sake,  
JOHN WESLEY.

LAKENHEATH,  
November 7, 1758.

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## A LETTER

TO

THE REVEREND MR. DOWNES,

RECTOR OF ST. MICHAEL'S, WOOD-STREET :

OCCASIONED BY HIS LATE TRACT,

ENTITLED,

"METHODISM EXAMINED AND EXPOSED."

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REVEREND SIR,

1. IN the Tract which you have just published concerning the people called Methodists, you very properly say, "Our first care should be, candidly and fairly to examine their doctrines. For, as to censure them unexamined would be unjust; so to do the same without a fair and impartial examination would be ungenerous." And again: "We should, in the first place, carefully and candidly examine their doctrines." (Page 68.)