

# Why I am a Methodist

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# WHY I AM A METHODIST.

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN AN EPISCOPALIAN AND  
A METHODIST WHO FORMERLY BELONGED TO  
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

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*Episcopalian.*—Well, Mr. A., as I know you: formerly belonged to our Church, I have often thought I would ask you why you left the Church of England and became a Methodist? I can see nothing to be gained by such a course.

*Methodist.*—I will answer you frankly. I was ‘brought up in the Church of England, and attended its services regularly from childhood to manhood. I joined in the formal prayers that were read, and heard prosy and pointless sermons preached every Sunday. We were always addressed as if we were all children of God, and needed no change. I never was made to feel that I needed forgiveness or regeneration. When I went among the Methodists, I learned, through

3

their preaching, that I was a guilty sinner, and needed forgiveness. They preached as if they meant it. I felt that I was a child of wrath. The way of faith was clearly pointed out to me. I trusted in Christ, and felt my heart strangely warmed with the joy of salvation. I united with the Methodist Church the first opportunity, because it had been the instrument of my salvation.

*E.*—But I cannot see that your getting religion as you call it, among the Methodists, who are only a sect and no Church, should have led you to leave the Church to which your parents belonged. You might have got all this in the Church of England.

*M.*—I am not speaking about what might be, but about actual facts. I hold that what the Church exists for is to teach me the sinfulness of sin, guide sinners to Christ, and help its members in the way to heaven; and the Church that is most successful in doing this work is the best Church, just as that is the best axe that cuts the best. The Methodists not only led me to Christ, but I found sympathy and help from godly men and women in their Class-meetings and Prayer-meetings, I therefore resolved that this people should be my people, and their God be my God. Had I

remained in the of Church of England, I should only have been mocked as an enthusiast by those who Bay they were regenerated in baptism, but are ignorant of spiritual religion. They have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof. I should be more likely to be led into wordly folly than helped heavenward by associating with such people.

*E.*—I see you have been carried away by feeling. You should examine the historic claims of the Church carefully, and you will find that your so-called Methodist Church is deficient in some essential marks of a true Church. Nobody but a bishop, who is in the regular succession from the apostles, has a right to ordain to the ministry. Your ministers have not been ordained by such a bishop. They are not, therefore, true ministers; the sacraments they administer are not true sacraments; and your Church is not a true Church. You are therefore, depriving yourself of grace which only the true Church can bestow.

*M.*—Your objections rest upon a false and unscriptural theory of the Church. All true believers in Christ belong to His Church. There is not a text in the New Testament that teaches any such notion as that an unbroken succession of episcopal ordinations is essential to a true ministry. It is a merely human invention. The

theory that God deposits special grace with bishops and priests, to be conveyed to others by ordination and baptism, is erroneous and unscriptural. Christ is the supreme Fountain of grace, and all may go directly to Him; for He "is rich unto all that call upon Him." If you can quote one text, which fairly teaches this "succession" dogma, I will accept it; but not without scripture proof. This "succession" theory has been the cause of the priestly assumptions and corruptions of Romanism. It puts human agency between man and his Maker. Many of the greatest divines of your own Church utterly reject it. As long as God calls and qualifies men for the ministry of Methodism, and makes their ministry the power of God unto salvation to sinners, we say to all priestly pretenders, "What God hath cleansed that call not thou common" or unclean.

*E.*—I cannot quote any text in support of apostolical succession; but you know there is only one true Church. These modern sects cannot be true Churches; because unity is an essential characteristic of the Catholic Church.

*M.*—Unity of faith and spirit is essential to a true Church; but there is no scriptural authority for the Romish dogma, that corporate unity is an essential thing. The only bond of unity between

the apostolic churches was submission to apostolic authority, and a common experience of salvation by faith in Christ. If unity is the mark of a true Church, so much the worse for your Church. The Methodists everywhere preach the same truths, and are really one; but in the Church of England, instead of unity, you have evangelical Calvinism, sceptical nationalism, and Romish Ritualism, all taught by her ministers. The less you say about unity the better; for you have no real unity to show.

*E.*—I cannot deny that there is a great want of unity in the teaching of the ministry of my Church; but you Methodists profess to be followers of Wesley, yet you know that John Wesley never separated from the Church of England, that he warned the Methodists not to leave the Church, and said, he feared if they forsook the Church, God would forsake them.

*M.*—I am glad you mention this; because I never knew any minister of your Church who would candidly state the whole truth on this subject. I ask your special attention to a few facts: 1. We do not hold that John Wesley was infallible, and that we are bound to think as he thought on all points. 2. Wesley repeatedly admitted that there were unanswerable arguments



in favour of complete separation from the Church..

3. I admit that he counselled his people to remain connected with the Church; but he could not have meant by this what High Churchmen assume he meant; because he organised the Methodist Connection independent of, and separate from the Church of England.

4. It is true that Wesley was ordained by an English bishop, and never was expelled; but he really separated from the Church, as Lord Mansfield and his brother Charles maintained, when he ordained preachers to administer the sacraments, apart from the Church.

5. It was Wesley himself who provided in his famous Deed, that Methodism should be forever independent of the Church of England.

6. A large proportion of those who became Methodists never belonged to the Church of England.

7. Methodism never had any organic connection with the Church of England, and could not, as a body, separate from it.

8. Wesley's fears about the bad results of separation have been shown to be a mistake, by the wonderful spiritual success of Methodism since his death. So you see there is neither force nor fairness in the way some of your ministers quote Wesley's example against separation.

*E.*—I confess I was not aware of these facts.

They put a different face on the matter. I depended for my information on a little tract our rector, Mr. Green, has been circulating. But he says that modern Methodists have departed from Wesley's doctrines, especially in regard to baptismal regeneration and the sacraments.

*M.*—There is no truth in this. Wesley's sermons are in our course of study for young ministers; and all the distinguishing doctrines of Methodism are faithfully preached among us. Wesley never formally renounced the doubtful opinions of his early years; but he made a selection out of his works of certain sermons, as expressing his matured views, to be a standard of doctrine among his people. These alone have authority among Methodists. Among these there is a sermon on the New Birth, in which, though admitting the teaching of the Church as to the regeneration of infants in baptism, instead of speaking of baptism as the means of regenerating the unregenerate, he really combats and rejects this dogma. He says: "It follows that baptism is not the New Birth;" and he further urges this from the fact that, "baptism the sign is spoken of as distinct from regeneration the thing signified." He maintained this to be the doctrine of the Church of England. From the arguments advanced, he

concludes "that as the new birth is not the same thing with baptism, so it does not always accompany baptism: they do not constantly go together. A man may possibly be 'born of water,' and yet not be 'born of the Spirit.'" He admits that in the baptismal service the Church "supposes" the regeneration of infants, and then adds: "But whatever be the case with infants, it is sure all of riper years who are baptised are not at the same time born again. 'The tree is known by its fruits,' and hereby it appears too plain to be denied, that divers of those, who were children of the devil before they were baptized, continue the same after baptism; 'for the works of their father they do:' they continue servants of sin, without any pretence to inward or outward holiness." This shows that Wesley in his teaching practically rejected, what in theory he seemed to admit. But no matter who has taught this dogma, I hold that it is a dangerous heresy, leading thousands to trust in their baptism, while they are guilty and unregenerate sinners.

*E.*—But you cannot deny that many of your ministers and members have joined our Church, and renounced Methodism.

*M.*—Some undoubtedly have done so. But many Episcopalians have also become Methodists.

There is a difference, however. When an Episcopalian becomes a Methodist, it is almost always because he has been converted and found spiritual help among the Methodists. When Methodists become Episcopalians, it is generally because they have lost religious life, and want to get into a Church, where they can dance, play cards, attend the theatre, and have the credit of being church members. Many of your ministers seem more anxious to proselyte members of other Churches, than to lead the worldly and unconverted members of their own Church to a saving knowledge of Christ. I have never known a Methodist minister to go to your Church from conviction about doctrine or discipline. It is commonly because men of small talents are more in demand, and get a better position in your Church than they could get in the Methodist Church; sometimes for less worthy reasons.

*E.*—You are rather hard on our Church. These views which you condemn are conscientiously held by many learned men, who believe that divisions and sects are a great evil, displeasing to God.

*M.*—I am not speaking against the Church of England, when I condemn the sacramentarian theories and priestly pretensions which are

undermining the Protestantism of that Church. The learning or sincerity of some men who have held these notions, should not induce us to accept them, unless they can be proved by the Word of God. No doubt, there are evils which arise from existing divisions; yet I firmly believe that all these evangelical churches have a place in God's plans, and are doing important work. But I cannot think it right,—while infidelity is assailing the foundation truths of religion, and vice and sin are enslaving myriads, and the call from heathen lands is so urgent—that men, who claim to be ministers of Christ, should spend their time disparaging other churches, and magnifying the claims of their own denomination and the importance of external rites. They forget St. Paul's weighty words:—"The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,"

*E.*—I don't want to have any more discussion with you. You seem to have studied these matters for yourself; and I have trusted too much to our minister's statements about Methodism. I see there is another side to the question.

*M.*—I am sorry that by compelling me to answer your points, against Methodism, you have kept me from telling you more fully, *why I am a*

*Methodist.* I may say: I am a Methodist—Because, as I have said, through the agency of Methodism I was brought to a saving knowledge of Christ—Because I find great spiritual help and fellowship for the Christian life furnished by Methodism—Because a free and full salvation is faithfully preached by Methodist ministers—Because they teach all the doctrines of the Bible faithfully and with power from on high—Because the experience of personal religion is more generally enjoyed by Methodist people than by any others that I know of—Because when I look upon the spiritual victories of Methodism, the vast numbers it has brought from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, I see the seal of God’s approval on its work, and am compelled to say:—“THIS IS THE LORD’S DOING, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES.”

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