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Editorial — News

MARCH 10, 1959

VOLUME 28, NUMBER 5

Cooperation in Evangelism

By JOHN MURRAY

The question with which we are concerned in this article is whether evangelicals may properly cooperate with modernists in the actual conduct of evangelism. When we say "properly," we mean whether it is in accord with the revealed will of God as set forth for us in Holy Scripture. It is a question that is seriously debated by both evangelicals and modernists, though the criteria by which modernists seek to determine the question are admittedly different from those of the evangelicals.

For the latter, by and large at least, the question is focused in the relevance of certain biblical injunctions such as "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph. 5:11), "be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (II Cor. 6:14), and "if there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed" (II John 10). Obviously, if this kind of cooperation falls within the scope of such prohibitions, then *for the evangelical* this should be an end of all debate. Within the evangelical camp it is precisely this question that has been ardently debated back and forth.

The Evangelical's Belief

An evangelical is committed to certain well-defined positions regarding the Christian faith. He is a trinitarian and believes that there are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He says without equivocation that there is one God, that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and that these three are distinct persons, as B. B. Warfield so simply stated the doctrine.

As to the Scriptures

The evangelical also believes that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the infallible Word of God written, inerrantly inspired of the Holy Spirit, the only infallible rule of faith and life. This latter belief is becoming increasingly the distinguishing mark of the evangelical as over against modernism, not because

this belief of itself makes one an evangelical but because, in terms of our present-day situation, a person begins to move away from his evangelical moorings whenever he is ready to abandon this position and because it is at this point that the attack on evangelical belief is most sharply drawn.

The evangelical believes that the eternal Son of God became man by being supernaturally begotten by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary and was born of her without human fatherhood. The Son of God came into this world by this means in order to save men from sin and for this reason he shed his blood upon the accursed tree as a substitutionary sacrifice. He rose from the dead on the third day in that body that had been crucified and laid in the tomb of Joseph. After forty days he ascended up to heaven and was highly exalted, reigns from heaven as head over all things until he will have subdued all enemies, and will return again personally, visibly, and gloriously to judge living and dead.

As to Evangelism

The evangelical believes that all men are lost and dead in sin, that there is salvation in none other name but that of Jesus, and that apart from regeneration by the Holy Spirit and faith in Christ Jesus men are irretrievably lost. He believes in heaven and hell as places of eternal bliss and eternal woe respectively and that these are the two final abodes of mankind. Evangelism, therefore, for the evangelical, is the proclamation of the gospel of Christ to lost men in order that they may be saved. He must proclaim this gospel with the urgency which the gravity of the issues of life and death demands. Evangelism is supported by the fact that Christ is offered freely to all without distinction and that God commands men that they should all everywhere repent.

This summary does not cover the whole field of evangelical belief. But it indicates what the identity of an

evangelical is. If a professed Christian does not entertain the type of belief which the foregoing summary represents, then he is not an evangelical.

The term "modernist" is flexible enough to include much diversity of belief. Indeed it is this flexibility that may be said to mark out and differentiate modernism. The modernist is exactly the person who, professing to be Christian, is not characterized by the well-defined and articulate viewpoint or system of belief which the foregoing portrayal of evangelicalism represents. He does not avow that viewpoint; it is not his faith. The more intelligently self-conscious he is the more he frankly disavows it. Even when he is simply non-committal he is still modernist. For the evangelical is never agnostic on what belongs to the Christian faith; he is positively assertive, and unequivocal confession is a distinguishing mark of his identity.

The Modernist's Unbelief

We may instance some examples of the modernist's disbelief. He is quite opposed to the doctrine of Holy Scripture which the evangelical holds. Indeed this is the point at which he most vehemently and perhaps scornfully disagrees. He is not willing to accede to the doctrine of eternal perdition. Faith respecting the virgin birth of our Lord is not essential to what he considers to be the doctrine of the incarnation. Substitutionary atonement in the sense so precious to the evangelical does not condition the faith in Christ which he professes.

The modernist cannot be hospitable to the exclusiveness of the Christian faith which excludes all hope for men who are outside the pale of the gospel revelation and for that reason his evangelistic interest cannot be impassioned by the fervour and urgency which belief in the lost condition of men must generate. It is apparent, therefore, that the belief or lack of belief of the modernist defines an entirely different pattern from that of the evangelical. Radically different conceptions of the Christian faith are

involved in these opposing views and the modernist is alert enough to recognize that divergence. He recoils at those very points which constitute the essence of the evangelical's faith.

As to God

First and foremost there is a different conception of God. The God of the evangelical is a God who, consistently with his perfections, will consign men to everlasting perdition. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is such a God. Our Lord Jesus himself said so. The modernist says he cannot believe in such a God, that this belief is incompatible with what he believes to be the God of love. It is surely apparent, therefore, that the God of the evangelical is not the God of the modernist. For, after all, the God in whom we believe and whom we worship is not the vocables by which he is designated but the God with respect to whom we entertain certain conceptions.

We can use all the titles by which God is named in Holy Scripture, but unless we entertain the proper conception of the God thus designated we are not believing in or worshipping him. We may honour Him with our lips and our hearts be far from him. There must be truth in the inward parts. And since the modernist openly disavows conceptions of God which are integral to the faith of the evangelical, they do not worship the same God. It is not man's prerogative to search the heart of another. But here we are not dealing with what is *hidden* in the heart but with concrete, open confession which we are in a position to evaluate and must evaluate. Otherwise all discrimination is at an end.

As to Christ

Again, let us think of Christ. The evangelical believes that Christ vicariously bore upon the cross the penalty due to our sins, that he satisfied the justice of God and propitiated his wrath, that God the Father delivered up his own Son to the damnation which our sins deserved. The faith which the evangelical reposes in Christ and which changes his whole outlook for time and for eternity is conditioned by this view of Calvary. Take away substitutionary atonement in the sense defined and the evangelical cannot rest in Christ for salvation. But the modernist cannot accept that view of Calvary. Indeed he

may recoil from it. In any case, he will insist that Christian faith or the Christian faith is not tied to that conception of the cross. Is it not obvious, therefore, that on the most cardinal question of faith in Christ there is radical difference and that the Christ of the one is basically different from that of the other?

As to The Bible

Let us think also of Holy Scripture. The difference here is concerned with our view of revelation from God as it comes into concrete and

This article, by Professor John Murray of Westminster Theological Seminary, appeared originally in the December issue of "The Bible Times" (Volume VIII, Number 5), which is published by the Japan Mission of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions under the editorship of John M. L. Young. We count it a privilege to reproduce it for our readers here.

Reprinted by The Japan Bible Christian Council in pamphlet form, it is being sent this month to a thousand missionary homes in Japan, with a covering letter from John M. L. Young, president of that Council, as one project in their observance of the centennial of Protestant missions in Japan. In the course of his letter Mr. Young writes: "We who believe that the Bible is the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice, are much less interested in what men have to say about this matter (of cooperation in evangelism) than we are in what principles God has revealed in His Word about it. It is from the point of view of determining those principles and their application that Professor Murray has made this study."

The pamphlet-reprint may be obtained by writing to the Council named above at 273 1-chome, Horinouchi, Suginami-ku, Tokyo, Japan.

practical relation to us. Nothing affects our religion all along the line of its activity more intimately than our view of revelation. Revelation is the source and norm of all thinking of God, of Christ, of salvation, of vocation, and of destiny. If the modernist's view of revelation as it comes

into relevant relation to us is so different that he cannot accept the Bible to be what the evangelical so jealously regards it, then divergence appears not only at specific points of belief but in connection with that which determines and conditions all belief within the realm of faith and worship. That which gives direction to all thinking and believing is conceived of in radically divergent ways.

We thus see how impossible it is to bridge the gulf that divides between the two brands of belief with which we are dealing. It is only by suppression or compromise of conviction that the cleavage can be discounted. And this is honest neither for the evangelical nor for the modernist. The differences are not peripheral—any candid appraisal shows that they are concerned with what is central in faith and worship. Even though modernists do not always carry to logical conclusions the basic assumptions of their position and sometimes espouse tenets which have no warrant on other than evangelical premises, premises which they disavow and even combat, yet the basic assumptions always persist and come to vocal expression at cardinal points of belief and confession. Their world of thought is alien to that of evangelical conviction.

The Issues Involved

When we address ourselves to the question of cooperation in evangelism, it is to evade the implications of the foregoing analysis to overlook the fundamental differences. The conception of God is radically divergent for it concerns nothing less basic than what belongs to God as justice and love. The conception of Christ is radically divergent for it concerns nothing less than the doctrine of his cross as well as the mode of his incarnation. The conception of revelation is radically divergent, and so the difference concerns that which gives character to all that falls within the compass of faith and devotion. Shall we say then that such apostolic injunctions as those of II Cor. 6:14-18; II John 10, 11 have no relevance? Are we to say that they have no bearing upon fellowship in evangelism?

It needs no argument that evangelism is one of the most sacred func-

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tions assigned to the church of Christ. It is not the whole work of preaching but it is a large part of it. Evangelism is the proclamation of the message of the gospel. And in no detail of the church's function and commission is it more important to maintain purity of witness and of fellowship. All evangelicals would surely agree that we could not possibly, without the most tragic betrayal of Christ, cooperate with Mohammedans or Hindus in promoting evangelism. The antithesis is so blatant that the suggestion is absurd. "What communion hath light with darkness?" (II Cor. 6:14). The relevance of Paul's challenge is immediately clear.

Vehement opposition will be offered to the relevance of such an illustration. Admittedly modernists, in terms of our discussion, are not Mohammedans or Hindus. It is also clear that Paul in the passage from which we have just quoted is dealing with pagan idolatry. "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" (vs. 16). We must not by any means overlook the specific context in which these injunctions occur or the situation that the apostle has in view. But that the teaching of Paul does not apply to the situation with which we are now dealing is not to be hastily concluded.

We must bear in mind that, if the principle which underlies the apostle's injunctions is relevant to our situation, then we cannot escape their application, however different may be the circumstances. That is the implication of the relevance of Scripture as the infallible rule of faith and practice. It is obvious that Paul could not have had Mohammedanism in mind when he wrote the second epistle to Corinth. But it is equally obvious, at least to every evangelical, that II Cor. 6:14-18 applies to this kind of fellowship with Mohammedans just as surely as to the unbelievers whom Paul had distinctly in view.

As respects the question we are discussing, we may not forget the radical cleavage that divides evangelicals and modernists. We found radically divergent conceptions of the

Christian faith. The God of the evangelical is not the God of the modernist. The Christ of the evangelical is not the Christ of the modernist. Revelation, as the source and norm of all faith and worship, is conceived of in radically different ways. There cannot be a residual common basis of faith and worship for the simple reason that the conceptions which are central to both faith and worship are so radically divergent.

It is this impasse that the evangelical must reckon with. For it is precisely that kind of impasse that dictated the inspired severities of II Cor. 6:14-18. If we plead that this passage is not applicable to the question at issue, it is only because we have failed to discern the grave issues at stake in the gulf that divides between evangelical faith and modernist unbelief.

Did Paul Cooperate?

We have good reason to believe that the heresy which disturbed the churches of Galatia was far from being characterized by many of the errors which distinguish present day modernism. The Judaizers were undoubtedly professed Christians. And the evidence would indicate that they did not controvert Paul's gospel on many of its most precious tenets. For Paul did not find occasion in his epistle to defend many of the articles of the Christian faith which he propounds elsewhere. But because the Judaizers had perverted the grand article of justification by grace through faith he pronounced his *anathema*.

He called this perversion "another gospel, which is not another" and added, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:7-9). No imprecation could be stronger than that of *anathema*. Are we to suppose that Paul would have cooperated with these perverters of the gospel of Christ in promoting evangelism? The suggestion is incon-

ceivable. He could allow for no obscuration of the issues at stake. To the core of his being he was convinced that the perversion took the crown from the Redeemer's head and was aimed at the damnation of perishing souls. "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4).

Are the issues at stake in the modernist controversy of less moment? Strange blindness has overtaken us if we think so. And we have little of Paul's passion left. The Judaising heresy struck at the heart of the gospel. Consequently Paul's intolerance. Modernism gives us a new version of Christianity and that is worse than perversion. May we then cooperate with modernists in one of the most sacred functions committed to Christ's church? The thought is intolerable.

Are John's Injunctions Relevant?

Or let us think for a moment with the disciple whom Jesus loved. John had written that "many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1). And "to the elect lady and her children" (II John 1) he writes, "Whosoever transgresseth (or goeth before), and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God" (II John 9). There is incisiveness and decisiveness. Perhaps we don't like it. But John had learned the mind of his Lord. And so he continues, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (II John 10, 11).

The modernism with which we are confronted today may not take precisely the same form as the denial which John had specifically in view. But that the modernist's denials go counter to the doctrine of Christ is just as evident. John's word must therefore be relevant and regulative in our context. There is a stringency about John's prohibition that goes further than anything with which we are now concerned—we are not to receive the exponent of false doctrine into our house. How much less may we enter into partnership and fellowship in promoting the gospel? To participate with him or to join hands with him in that which is most sacred

goes right in the teeth of John's interdict. If there is one thing that comes under John's ban it is *cooperation*. For then we would not only be extending to him the kind of hospitality which John condemns but we would be publicly entering into partnership in the promoting of the faith and, in terms of John's verdict, become partakers of his evil deeds.

This latter assessment is significant. It is not only the gross works of the flesh that can be characterized as evil deeds. The promulgation of false doctrine falls under that indictment. John calls the teaching of deceivers an iniquitous work. We dare not obscure the antithesis to the doctrine of Christ by extending to the proponent of this evil the hospitality and greeting which are the tokens of Christian fellowship. The word of Paul has the same import: "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11). After all, John and Paul are one when doctrine that strikes at the pivots of our faith is the issue. It is not only the doctrine that is to be condemned: cooperation with its emissaries is unthinkable.

Preach to All, Cooperate with Believers Only

The gospel is to be preached to all men irrespective of creed. The evangelical must seize every opportunity to bear witness to the faith in its purity and power. If, for example, a modernist minister invites the evangelical to preach and makes available certain facilities to this end, the evangelical may not decline the invitation simply on the ground that the request comes from one who is a modernist any more than may he decline a similar invitation from a Mohammedan.

Or if a group of modernists in concert with one another extend such an invitation, the evangelical may not decline to preach the gospel in compliance with such a request simply on the ground that the invitation comes from and the opportunity is offered by such an organization. The evangelical must indeed preach the gospel in its integrity and purity and *preach it in its direct bearing upon the unbelief of which the same modernists are the exponents*. Otherwise he is unfaithful to his evangelical witness—preaching must be negative as well as positive.

But the point now is that no principle of fidelity to Christ need be compromised by preaching the evangel under these circumstances. Paul did not compromise in the midst of the Areopagus when he preached the gospel in answer to the invitation, "May we know what this new teaching is, which is spoken by thee? (Acts 17:19). It may indeed be the case that in a certain situation, because of other conditions and circumstances, the evangelical would be required to decline. He might judge that more prejudice would be done to the witness of the gospel and to his own witness by acceptance. Into these conditions and circumstances it is not necessary to enter. Suffice it to say that the source from which the invitation comes does not of itself require the evangelical to decline the invitation. Fidelity to Christ and to his commission may demand acceptance.

This does not, however, annul the thesis of this article, namely, that evangelicals may not cooperate with modernists in promoting the gospel, nor even cooperate in sponsoring an evangelistic undertaking. The reason is that then partnership or fellowship with the exponents of unbelief comes into being and it is this cooperation that the Scripture forbids. The distinction is not one so finely spun that it may be alleged to be one without a difference. There is a wide gulf of difference between preaching the gospel at the invitation of modernists, on the one hand, and entering into partnership with modernists for the promotion of the gospel, on the other. It is in principle the distinction between preaching the gospel to Mohammedans at their invitation and cooperating with Mohammedans in sponsoring and promoting gospel proclamation. In the latter case there is the *partnership* which the Bible condemns; in the former there is but the proclamation of the gospel to all and this the commission of Christ requires.

God's Revealed Will vs. the Pragmatic Test

It is sometimes urged as an argument in favour of the cooperation and mixed sponsorship which this article controverts that the signal blessing of God has been witnessed in evangelistic enterprises where this kind of

cooperation has been practiced. There are a few observations which should be borne in mind. First of all, God is sovereign and fulfills his holy purposes of grace through the medium of actions which are in direct contravention of his revealed will. The crucifixion of our Lord is the supreme example. The arch-crime of human history is not relieved of its extreme wickedness by the fact that in this same event of the accursed tree God fulfilled his supreme purpose of love and grace for lost men (cf. Acts 2:23; 4:27, 28). What God does in the overruling movements of his providence is not the rule by which we may determine what is right for us.

Secondly, God blesses his own Word, and he often blesses it when it is proclaimed under auspices which do not have the approval of his revealed will. It is not ours to limit God in the exercise of his gracious sovereignty. But he has limited us by his revealed will. Beyond that revealed will we may never act or in contravention of it.

Thirdly, Paul the apostle could rejoice when Christ was preached even of envy and strife and faction and pretence. He rejoiced because Christ was proclaimed. And surely he had respect to the saving effects which would follow from such proclamation. The gospel is not negated as to its character or power by the wrong motives or intentions of those who proclaim it. But this does not condone or justify these motives. In the like manner we are not to condone the *method* by which Christ may be proclaimed simply because the gospel is proclaimed and saving fruits accrue therefrom. We may, like Paul, rejoice that Christ is preached and yet must severely condemn the auspices under which this proclamation takes place.

The upshot is, therefore, that our thought is to be regulated by the revealed will of God. Whenever we relinquish this criterion and attempt to judge what is well-pleasing to God by results, then we have made pragmatism our rule. This is the way of darkness and not of light. In no sphere of our activity must the principle that God's *revealed* will is the rule for us be guarded and applied with greater jealousy than in those sacred functions which are ours by the commission of the Saviour.