

Are There Any Protestants?

In Chicago, Ill., December 5, 1912, an assembly of three hundred and nineteen clerical delegates from thirty professedly Protestant denominations intentionally and expressly repudiated the word "Protestant."

That is an occurrence of such importance as to demand the serious attention of all: especially all the people of the United States. It is my purpose tonight to make as plain as possible both the fact and the meaning of it.

The meeting by which this thing was done was the "Second Quadrennial Meeting of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America" which was held in the Hotel LaSalle, Chicago, Ill., December 4-9, 1912.

This "Federal Council" is composed of thirty or more denominations, having a total membership of "more than seventeen millions." It was originally organized by five hundred delegates from twenty denominations, who met for the purpose in Carnegie Hall, New York City, November 15-21, 1905.

In its original organization this "Federal Council of Churches" was expressly and distinctly Protestant. In the call under which the convention met in New York City the object of the proposed meeting was distinctly stated to be "to secure an effective organization of the various **Protestant** communions of this country"; and "to form a bond of union that will enable **Protestant** to present a solid front," etc. And now without any pressure from without, and without any issue or crisis to demand it, but spontaneously and voluntarily that professedly Protestant organization openly and expressly repudiates the word "Protestant"!

And this occurred in the very first business meeting of the Council, and in dealing with the very first "Report" that was made to the Council: that is, at the first possible opportunity.

The occasion of it was this: The "Executive Committee" presented its report. In that report the committee expressed the "earnest hope that the Second Federal Council will make yet more clear certain fundamental facts as to the churches of the country, through their federation." And the first of these was "The fact of the substantial unity of the Christian and Protestant Churches of the nation."

No sooner was opened the discussion of the report, than that word "Protestant" was challenged as if it were a mortal enemy. "Why emphasize a word that is not a uniting but a dividing word? a word that recalls a most unhappy and trying experience," said one. "By using this word, you make it more difficult for many of your Christian brethren to work with you," said another. Discussion was soon cut off by a motion to resubmit the report to the committee for revision eliminating the word "Protestant." And this was so done as to express the "earnest hope" for the "fellowship of Catholic unity." Then the report was promptly and unanimously adopted, and with applause.

ORIGIN OF "PROTESTANT"

Now what is the meaning of such a transaction as that? What is the meaning of the word "Protestant"? How came it into the world? How came these people to bear it as a religious distinction? And since it should now be repudiated, was their bearing of it a mistake from the beginning? And if not a mistake from the beginning, and in the beginning, then when did it become such a mistake that it should be so incontinently repudiated?

The word "Protestant" as expressing a religious distinction, the word "Protestant" with a capital P, the word "Protestant" as dealt with by the Chicago Council of the Federated Churches, came into the world with the word "Protest" that was used in the Protest that was made at the Diet of Spires in Germany, April 19, 1529.

That Protest was made against the arbitrary, unjust, and persecuting, procedure of the papacy in that Diet. This procedure in the Diet of Spires of 1529, swept away the religious liberty

agreed upon and established in the Diet of Spires of 1526. This religious liberty guaranteed by the Diet of Spires of 1526, was the result of a deadlock in that Diet over the enforcement, by all the power of the then papacy, of the Edict of Worms that had been issued in 1521 commanding the destruction of Martin Luther, his adherents, his writings and all who printed or circulated his writings, or who on their own part should print or circulate the like.

Thus it will be seen that the Protest in which originated the word "Protestant" was against the effort of the papacy to destroy the Reformation, and was in behalf of the Reformation and its principles. And now for anybody to repudiate the word "Protestant," is to repudiate the Protest. To repudiate the Protest, is to repudiate as unworthy the cause in behalf of which the Protest was made. And that cause was the Reformation. Therefore, to repudiate the word "Protestant" is nothing less and nothing else than to repudiate the Reformation. And the Federal Council of Churches at Chicago, December 5, 1912, did unanimously repudiate the word "Protestant."

EDICT OF WORMS

And that all may see for themselves that just such is unquestionably the meaning of that action taken, let us consider directly the facts, documents, and dates, in which rests the unquestionable truth of the case.

In 1521 the Diet of Worms condemned Luther and the Reformation. There immediately followed, the "Edict of Worms" that is the key to the Protest in which originated

2

the word "Protestant." This Edict was issued by the Emperor Charles V. "the ablest and most powerful monarch of the sixteenth century." After denouncing Luther personally in sweeping terms, the imperial edict says:

"We have therefore sent this Luther from before our face, that all pious and sensible men may regard him as a fool, or a man possessed of the devil; and we expect that after the expiry

of his safe-conduct, effectual means will be taken to arrest his furious rage.

"Wherefore, under pain of incurring the punishment due to the crime of treason, we forbid you to lodge the said Luther as soon as the fatal term shall be expired, to conceal him, give him meat or drink, and lend him, by word or deed, publicly or secretly, any kind of assistance. We enjoin you, moreover, to seize him, or cause him to be seized, wherever you find him, and bring him to us without any delay, or to keep him in all safety until you hear from us how you are to act with regard to him, and till you receive the recompense due to your exertions in so holy a work.

"As to his adherents, you will seize them, suppress them, and confiscate their goods.

"As to his writings, if the best food becomes the terror of all mankind as soon as a drop of poison is mixed with it, how much more ought these books, which contain a deadly poison to the soul, to be not only rejected, but also annihilated! You will therefore burn them, or in some other way destroy them entirely.

"As to authors, poets, printers, painters, sellers or buyers of placards, writings or paintings, against the pope or the church, you will lay hold of their persons and their goods, and treat them according to your good pleasure.

"And if any one, whatever be his dignity, shall dare to act in contradiction to the decree of our imperial majesty, we ordain that he shall be placed under the ban of the empire.

"Let every one conform hereto."

And that the emperor meant every word of that edict, and that it should be enforced in full of all that it said, is made plain in the following sentences which he wrote with his own hand:

"Sprung from the Christian emperors of Germany, from the Catholic kings of Spain, the archduke of Austria, and the dukes of Burgundy, who are all illustrious as defenders of the Roman faith, it is my firm purpose to follow the example of my ancestors. A single monk, led astray by his own folly, sets himself up in opposition to the faith of Christendom! I will sacrifice my dominions, my power, my friends, my treasure, my blood, my mind, and my life, to stay this impiety."

There was practically a universal league of all the Catholic States under the direction of the emperor and the Pope to enforce everywhere the Edict of Worms. This of necessity caused that the Princes who had received the Gospel should form an alliance mutually to support each other against the enforcement of the Edict of Worms in their dominions; and to give free course to the Gospel there. The document which these evangelical Princes signed reads as follows:

"God Almighty having, in His ineffable mercy caused His holy and eternal Word, the food of our souls and our greatest treasure here below, to appear again amongst men; and powerful manoeuvres having been employed on the part of the clergy and their adherents to annihilate and extirpate it; we being firmly assured that He who has sent it to glorify His name upon the earth is able to maintain it, engage to preserve this holy Word to our people: and for this end to employ our goods, our lives, our States, our subjects, all that we possess—confiding not in our armies, but solely in the omnipotence of the Lord, whose instruments we desire to be."

THE DIET OF SPIRES

There were eleven powerful princes who signed this document. This step effectually suspended the enforcement of the Edict of Worms; and thus matters stood at the assembling of the Diet of Spires, June 25, 1526. The emperor's instruction to the Diet ordered that "the church-customs should be maintained entire"; and called upon the Diet to "punish those who refused to carry out the Edict of Worms." Against the emperor's instructions the evangelical Princes stood firmly for the Reformation; and their calm firmness encouraged the Princes who were willing to be neutral, to oppose the enforcement of the Edict of Worms in their States.

August 1, a general committee of the Diet reported the necessity of a reform of church abuses. No such thing as this was wanted by the papacy, and to counteract the report the church party brought

forth a decree of the emperor commanding the enforcement of the Edict of Worms. The evangelical Princes broke the force of this move by citing the facts that this decree had been issued away back in the month of March, four months before this present Diet had met; that since that time the emperor and the pope had fallen out and were now at war; and that in this time the emperor had written to his brother saying, "Let us suspend the Edict of Worms." This brought the Diet of Worms." This brought the Diet to a deadlock; and the way out was an agreement that there should be religious liberty: "Let every man do as he thins fit, until a national free council shall be convoked: within a year"—from August 17, the date of the agreement.

The expected council was not called within the year suggested, nor at all. This allowed the religious liberty established by the Diet to prevail with no check or limitation.

The Second Diet of Spires met February 21, 1529. By this time the emperor and the pope were at one again, and unitedly were determined to destroy the Reformation; by sanction of the vote of the Diet if possible; and failing this, then by all the power of the empire. Accordingly in the Diet, March 15, the imperial commissioners announced that the emperor "by virtue of his supreme power" had annulled the resolution of religious liberty adopted by the Diet of Spires, August 17, 1526. This action of the emperor was wholly arbitrary. But as it was a part of the settled program, the papal party proceeded as if it were fully and formally legal; and the resolution of religious liberty being thus out of the way, they now demanded that the Diet order the full enforcement of the Edict of Worms. The evangelical Princes insisted on the maintenance of the resolution of religious liberty, of the Diet of 1526. In this they were wholly in the right, as well as wholly within their rights. For this was a decision of the Diet, regularly made; while the emperor's annulment of it was wholly irregular and arbitrary.

THE PROTEST

April 7, 1529, the papal party secured a majority vote in the Diet for a resolution providing that: In all places where the Edict of Worms could not be enforced, there should be no new reform; the reformers should not touch any controverted point; they should not oppose any celebration of the mass; they should not permit any Catholic to embrace the doctrines of Luther; they **should acknowledge** the episcopal jurisdiction of the Catholic church; and should not tolerate any Anabaptists nor any Sacramentarians.

This on its face was a proposal for the positive smothering of the Reformation; for it stopped every activity of the reformers, and gave full scope to every activity of the Catholics. The evangelical Princes contended that "This Diet is incompetent to do more than to preserve the religious liberty agreed upon in the former Diet, until the council shall meet according to the original agreement. Therefore we reject this decree. We reject it also because, **in matters of faith the majority have no power.**"

The evangelicals were then ordered to submit to the majority. They

3

retired, according to custom, to deliberate. In their absence the imperial commissioners adjourned the meeting, declaring, "All is over. It is a settled affair. Submission is all that remains." When the evangelicals returned from their deliberation, to present their answer, and found the meeting adjourned, and the whole matter decided against them, and all **in their absence**, then, from this arbitrary and unjust course, those true Princes decided to "appeal to the Word of God, and from the Emperor Charles V to Jesus Christ the King of kings and Lord of lords." And the statement of this appeal formed the **Protest** that put the word "Protestant" in the world, and gave to the Reformation the name and title of **Protestant.**

They said that they could not consent to the action and course of the majority in the Diet, "because it concerns the glory of God and the salvation of our souls, and that in such matters we ought to have regard, above all, to the commandment of God, who is King of kings and Lord of lords; each of us rendering Him account for

himself, without caring the least in the world about majority or minority."

Also they said, "What! we ratify this edict! We assert that when Almighty God calls a man cannot, however, receive the knowledge of God! . . . For this reason we reject the yoke that is imposed upon us."

"Moreover, the new edict declaring the ministers shall preach the Gospel, explaining it according to the writings accepted by the holy Christian church; we think that, for this regulation to have any value, we should first agree on what is meant by the true and holy church. Now, seeing that there is great diversity of opinion in this respect; that there is no sure doctrine but such as is conformable to the word of God; we are resolved, with the grace of God, to maintain the pure and exclusive preaching of His holy word, such as it is contained in the biblical books of the old and new testament, without adding anything thereto that may be contrary to it.

"This Word is the only truth; it is the sure rule of all doctrine, and of all life, and can never fail or deceive us. He who builds on this foundation shall stand against all the human vanities that are set up against it shall fall before the face of God.

"For these reasons, most dear lords, uncles, cousins, and friends, we earnestly entreat you to weigh carefully our grievances and our motives. If you do not yield to our request we **PROTEST** by these presents, before God, our only Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and Savior, and who will one day be our Judge, as well as before all men and all creatures that we, for us and for our people, neither consent nor adhere in any manner whatsoever to the proposed decree, in anything that is contrary to God, to His holy word, to our right conscience, to the salvation of our souls, and to the last decree of Spires."

Thus, in the presence of the Diet, "spoke out those courageous men whom Christendom will henceforth denominate '**the Protestants.**' And that is the origin of the word "Protestant." That is the true story of the word "Protestant," as dealt with and repudiated by the federal councils of churches, thirty denominations, "a membership of more than seventeen millions!"

WHAT IT MEANS

And now in fact and in truth what does this word "Protestant" mean? By the open evidence of the plain story—

It means protest against the burning or otherwise destroying of either the men or the writings of the men who are found to disagree in religion or faith with other men either in a church or a state.

It means protest against arbitrary and unjust procedure of ecclesiastical [*sic.*] combines.

It means protest against any denunciation or condemnation of men in their absence, and without their being heard.

It means protest against any alliance or connection whatever between the ecclesiastical and the civil power.

It means protest against any assertion or claim of any power or right of any majority in matters of religion or faith.

It means protest against any intrusion whatever of the civil power, under whatever plea, in any matter that in any way partakes of religion or faith.

It means protest against all arbitrary authority of the church under whatever form, name or claim.

In this is means protest against any exercise of ecclesiastical authority or power in any other wise than only by the ministry of the word of God.

It means protest against any restriction whatever, or any kind, on the full preaching of the word of God, even on "controverted points," to every creature everywhere and always.

It means protest against any restriction whatever, of any kind, on the full and free exercise and enjoyment of the right of any individual at any time to embrace any doctrine that he may choose to believe.

It proclaims and defends the full and complete liberty of every individual, himself alone.

In this it proclaims and defends the perfect individuality of every soul.

And in this it proclaims and defends the sole and complete responsibility of the individual soul to God only, in all things pertaining to religion or faith.

It rests in an proclaims the word of God alone, as in the Bible of the Old and New Testaments as all-sufficient in all things pertaining to religion and faith.

That, all of that, and nothing less than that, in truth and in fact, is what the word "Protestant" means. And that is what the Federal Council of churches repudiated when it repudiated the word "Protestant."

IN THE UNITED STATES

And just here is where comes in most forcibly the special importance of this repudiation, to every person in the United States. In the light of the truth of what the word "Protestant" means, it is clearly seen that the principle of religious liberty in the separation of religion and the state in the United States by the National Constitution is the fullest and truest expression of the Protestant principle that there is in any organic connection in the world. This is explained in the fact that it was expressly declared in so many words by Washington, Jefferson, and Madison, and their noble compatriots in the making of this nation, that it was "upon the principles on which the Gospel was first propagated and the Reformation from popery carried on" that they established this religious liberty as a supreme right guaranteed by the National Constitution.

And the repudiation of the word "Protestant" by that Federal Council of churches in the United States means equally the repudiation of this religious liberty in the United States, which is the direct and plainly declared result of the Protest from which comes the word "Protestant." It is forever true, as stated by the great historian of the reformation that "It was this noble resolution [of the Protest] that gained for modern times liberty of thought and independence of faith." And people who are capable of

repudiating the Protest, are already qualified to abandon all the results of it.

PARALLELS

Indeed, this is already apparent. It is the truth that all that was really new about their repudiation of the word "Protestant", was only in the open and express doing of it. As far back as December 1908, in the first meeting of the council as such, the "right of private judgment," that was emphasized, and

4

the "individuality" that was developed, by "the Protestant Reformation," was specifically thrown over as that which should "no longer blind the minds of believers" to "the need of combination" and of "mutuality in service." And in the public announcement of the date and place of holding this council in Chicago, it was plainly stated that this "United Protestantism is not to be construed as a demonstration against the Roman Catholic church."

This latter statement was confirmed in another act of the Chicago council. The council unanimously adopted a report in which it is distinctly declared that the church is justified "in turning to the State for a co-operation [*sic.*] which will enable her to do her sacred task." This is exactly paralleled [*sic.*] to the instruction given by Leo XIII in his encyclical of January 6, 1895, to the hierarchy in America, saying that here the Catholic church "would bring forth more abundant fruits, if, in addition to liberty, she enjoyed the favor of the laws and the patronage of public authority."

CONCLUSION

Such parallels could be extended indefinitely, and all would go only the more to show that the repudiation of the word "Protestant" by the Federal Council of churches in the United States, was but the mouth speaking out of the already over-welling abundance of the heart.

It now remains to be seen whether the "more than seventeen millions" of the membership of these churches that are claimed to be represented in the vote of the 319 delegates, were really represented in that vote repudiating the word "Protestant."

Is all these were really represented in that action, then it will be a wonderful satisfaction and encouragement to Rome in her purpose concerning this nation to know that here are "more than seventeen millions" of people who are already pledged to silence, whatever she may do.

And if any of these were not truly represented in that action of the 319 delegates, then it is urgent upon them just now to wake up and speak out and let it be known that there is at least one Protestant yet alive.

And whether a person be a member of any of these churches of the federation, or a member of any other church, or of no church at all, by this action of the Federal Council there is now forced upon every one the personal, pertinent and very important, question,—

Are You a Protestant?

NOTE—It is but fair to all, that they should be informed as to what denominations they are whose "membership of more than 17,000,000" were professedly represented in that notable action of the 319 delegates at Chicago. They are the following:—

- Baptists—Northern Convention
- Baptists—National (African) Convention
- Christian Church
- Congregational Churches
- Disciples of Christ
- Evangelical (German) Synod of N. America
- Evangelical Association
- Free Baptists
- Lutheran: (except Swedish Lutheran)
- Mennonite Church
- Methodist Episcopal Church
- Methodist Episcopal Church South
- African M. E. Church

African M. E. Zion Church
Methodist Protestant Church
Colored M. E. Church in America
Primitive Methodist Church
Moravian Church
Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.
Presbyterian Church in the U. S.
The Protestant Episcopal Church, U. S. A.
Reformed Church in America
Reformed Church in the U. S.
Reformed Presbyterian Church
Cumberland Presbyterian Church
Seventh Day Baptist Church'
Society of Friends
United Brethren in Christ
United Evangelical Church
United Presbyterian Church of N. America
Welsh Presbyterian Church

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