

**REASONS FOR
METHODISM: IN A LETTER
ADDRESSED TO THE
BISHOP OF EXETER**

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Reasons for Methodism: in a letter addressed to the bishop of exeter by

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"It doth behove them (the Wesleyan Methodists) to ponder well the reasons which keep them separate."—*Bishop of Exeter's Charge to his Clergy.*

"Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."—*St. Peter.*

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REASONS FOR METHODISM,

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MY LORD,

THE elevated and prominent station which your Lordship occupies in the Church and in the Senate;—the sensation produced through the nation by the Charge which you have recently delivered to your Clergy;—the implied acknowledgement which that Charge contains of the national importance of Methodism;—the “earnest and affectionate manner in which you admonish the Methodists to ponder well the reasons which keep them separate” from the Established Church;—the appeal which you make to the conscience by urging them “to be sure that those reasons are such as will justify the separation, not to their own judgment only, but also at the judgment-seat of Him, who is not the author of confusion, but of peace;”—the crisis at which we have arrived in the Ecclesiastical history of our country;—the certainty that something *must* and *will* be done to allay that spirit of agitation on ecclesiastical affairs which prevails in every part of the United Kingdom;—the sanguine hopes of various classes of

Dissenters ; — and the gloomy anticipations of Churchmen ;—combine to induce me to solicit your candid attention to the following pages, in which I purpose to state those reasons which constrain me as a Wesleyan Methodist, and which I venture to presume have a similar influence upon others, to continue in a state of separation from, but not in a state of hostility to, the Established Church : and though it is my purpose to use great plainness of speech, yet I shall from principle avoid every thing that can, even constructively, be deemed personally disrespectful to your Lordship.

Before I proceed to submit, for the consideration of your Lordship, those reasons which I have to adduce in the support of Methodism, as a separate section of the Church of Christ, I must in the most unequivocal manner protest against your authority for attempting to affix the stigma of Schismatics upon the Wesleyan Methodists. I admit that you apply this term of reproach with an avowal of grief ; and that your language indicates its reluctant and compulsory application :—“ The great mass of Dissenters amongst us—are Methodists ; and of these the far greater portion are Wesleyans, a class of Christians, whom I grieve to call Separatists,—for Separatists, I am bound to say, is but another word for Schismatics.” That the Wesleyan Methodists are, as a body, Separatists from the Establishment, I admit ; but that they are Schismatics I *deny*. On this point I join

issue with your Lordship; and though you have not condescended to state the reasons which "bound" you to apply this offensive and reproachful term to that body of people, yet I feel "bound" to state my reasons for refusing to admit that the Methodists are Schismatics.

It is scarcely necessary to remind your Lordship that the charge of Schism has been frequently preferred by Roman Catholics against the members of the Protestant Church; and if "Separation" be synonymous with "Schism" the justness of that charge cannot be denied. For the sake of brevity I will state the argument in a syllogistical form:

"Separatists, I am bound to say, is but another word for Schismatics:"

The members of the Protestant Church of England have separated from the Church of Rome:

Therefore the members of the Church of England are Schismatics.

The Church of England either *has* or *has not* separated from the Church of Rome: if it has not separated from the Romish Church, then on what grounds does it assume the name of Protestant? If it has separated, then, as your Lordship is "bound to say Separatists is but another word for Schismatics," the members of the Church of England are convicted of Schism! What an argument for a Protestant Bishop to put into the mouths of the Roman Catholics, who are the avowed and most malignant enemies of the Establishment!

But, notwithstanding the *dictum* of your Lord-

ship, I affirm that Separation is not Schism, in the sense in which the latter word is used in the Holy Scriptures, which “contain all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or to be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.”

The proposition which I maintain is simply this—*that Separation is not Schism*. The negative of this proposition “is not read” in the Scriptures—nor can it “be proved thereby.” To the law and the testimony I appeal.

Your Lordship is well aware that if there be a word in the English language, which is ambiguous and indeterminate in its meaning, it is the word Schism. Among the numerous writers who have exercised their understandings and displayed their learning upon the import of this word, none have defined its meaning more accurately, and reasoned respecting its import more calmly and conclusively, than the justly celebrated John Wesley, in his Sermon on Schism: from which I select the following extracts, and to which I solicit your special attention:—

“The whole body of Roman Catholics define Schism, a separation from the Church of Rome; and almost all our own writers define it, a separation from the Church of England. Thus both one and the other set out wrong, and stumble at the very threshold. This will easily appear to any

that calmly consider the several texts wherein the word Schism occurs; from the whole tenor of which it is manifest, that it is not a separation *from* any Church, (whether general or particular, whether the Catholic, or any national Church,) but a separation *in* a Church.

“ Let us begin with the first verse wherein St. Paul makes any use of the word. It is the tenth verse of the first chapter of his First Epistle to the Corinthians; the words are, ‘ I beseech you, brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no schisms’ (the original word is *σχισματα*) ‘ among you.’ Can any thing be more plain than that the schisms here ‘spoken of were not separations *from*, but divisions *in* the Church of Corinth? Accordingly, it follows, ‘ But that ye be perfectly united together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.’ You see here, that a union in mind and judgment was the direct opposite to the Corinthian schism. This, consequently, was not a separation from the Church or Christian society at Corinth, but a separation in the Church,—a disunion in mind and judgment, (perhaps also in affection), among those who, notwithstanding this, continued outwardly united as before.

“ The second place where the Apostle uses this word, is in the eighteenth verse of the eleventh chapter of this Epistle: ‘ When ye come together in the church,’ the Christian congregation, ‘ I hear that there are divisions’ (the original word here

also is *σχίσματα*, *schisms*,) ‘among you.’ But what were these schisms? The Apostle immediately tells you: (verse 20.) ‘When you come together,’ professing your design is ‘to eat of the Lord’s Supper, every one of you taketh before another his own supper,’ as if it were a common meal. What then was the schism? It seems, in doing this, they divided into little parties, which cherished anger and resentment one against another, even at that solemn season.

“It deserves to be seriously remarked, that in this chapter the Apostle uses the word heresies as exactly equivalent with the word schisms. ‘I hear,’ says he, (verse 18.) ‘that there are schisms among you, and I partly believe it:’ he then adds, (verse 19.) ‘For there must be heresies’ (another word for the same thing) ‘among you, that they which are approved among you may be made manifest.’ As if he had said, ‘The wisdom of God permits it so to be, for this end,—for the clear manifestation of those whose heart is right with Him.’ This word, therefore, (*heresy*), which has been so strangely distorted for many centuries, as if it meant erroneous opinions, opinions contrary to the faith once delivered to the saints,—which has been made a pretence for destroying cities, depopulating countries, and shedding seas of innocent blood,—has not the least reference to opinions, whether right or wrong. It simply means, wherever it occurs in Scripture, divisions or parties *in* a religious community.