

IS THE CHURCH A BATTLEFIELD OR A SHEEPFOLD?

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According to the Associated Press, the Bishops during the General Conference of the M. E. Church at Kansas City made the following statement in their episcopal or keynote address: "If the preacher assumes to answer every adversary of Christianity he will make the place a battlefield instead of a sheepfold." But how can we maintain the sheepfold if we fail to drive away the ravenous wolves? A good shepherd must not only feed the sheep but defend the flock. A physician not only gives tonics and sedatives but antidotes and counteractants. A logician not only presents truth but exposes fallacy. A scientific teacher not only teaches correct views but opposes false theories. A statesman not only advocates good political measures, but fights greed and graft and corruption. A farmer not only cultivates the crop, but destroys the weeds. There is just as much sense in saying to a gardener: "Cultivate the vegetables, but do not destroy the weeds," as to say in a keynote speech to a General Conference: "Make the Church a sheepfold instead of a battlefield."

The Church is set forth in the scriptures under a variety of terms such as a house, an olive tree, a vineyard, a flock, a family, an army, a commonwealth and a kingdom. One of the finest pictures of the church in all literature is that given in the Cantations: "Who is this that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun and as terrible as an army with banners."

"One army of the Living God—

"To His command we bow."

It would be a very fine thing if we were in the midst of the millennium where the lamb and lion shall lie down together and nothing shall hurt nor destroy in all the holy mountain of the Lord.

But as long as the church is militant it will be necessary to fortify itself in order to meet its multiplied foes and to put to route the myrmidon of darkness. In the present dispensation, at least, the church cannot maintain a sheepfold without a battlefield. The ravenous wolves which would enter the fold and devour the flock must be fought off and driven away. Therefore it is contrary both to reason and experience to set the church as a sheepfold in contradiction to the church as a battlefield. The church is both a battlefield and a sheepfold. In fact, the church must battle in order to protect itself as a sheepfold. The prophet Isaiah upbraided the shepherds of Israel who were mild instead of militant and characterized them as greedy dogs lying down, loving to slumber, dogs that cannot bark (56-10). The faithful shepherd dogs (to continue the figure of the prophet) whose duty it is to mind the flock must not only be able to bark, but to bite, if need be in order to protect the sheep from the hungry coyotes of destructive higher criticism. Would the good bishops in the face of the fact that the ministers of the Methodist branch of the militant church promised in their ordination vows to banish and drive away all strange and erroneous doctrines that may exist, advise all the faithful soldiers of the cross to lay down their weapons of warfare and cease to sound the bugle notes of warning even when they see the enemy approaching? Do they consider the poet who sang: "The saints in all this glorious war shall

conquer though they die." As being too narrow and militaristic for modern Methodism? Do they mean to say that the church, henceforth, is a sheepfold and no longer a battlefield? Do they mean to pass up the inspired apostle Paul as going out of date and so far back in the dim distance of the pre-scientific past that his famous injunction to Timothy to "Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ," and his courageous command to the Ephesians to "Put on the whole armour of God" are no longer appropriate for the present day and age of the world?

At the close of his eventful career Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles, could shade his weak eyes and with a retrospective view look over his life and triumphantly exclaim: "I have fought the good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith." During the heat and burden of life's day he disputed with Tyrannus, he argued with the stoics, debated with the Pharisees, reasoned with kings and contended for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. He could say: "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." With Paul all true Christians must constantly engage in heroic battle against the world, the flesh and the devil.

"Sure I must fight if I would reign
Increase my courage, Lord."

The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church that is built upon the solid Rock of Ages. Suppose the valiant Martin Luther had considered the church as only a sheepfold and not as a battlefield, who can venture to say what the fate of Protestantism might have been? Were there no foes for John Wesley, the father and founder of Methodism, to face? What would John Knox, the heroic saint of Scotland, and the courageous covenanters think of the church being a sheepfold instead of a battlefield?

The sheepfold and the battlefield as applied to the militant church are not contradictory but complimentary terms. They are not, and never were, mutually exclusive. If the church is a family, a commonwealth, an army, a kingdom at one and the same time, most certainly it can be a sheepfold and a battlefield at the same time. The church in its composite character, is at once a human, a divine, a social, moral and spiritual institution. The church must be maintained in all these different phases in order to fulfill its divine commission. There is no necessity to divide the church against itself. It is a unity in variety. We speak of the polity and discipline of the church; the spiritual life and the social features of the church. All these various elements and activities of the church are essential.

The militant church has always been a battlefield of right against wrong, of truth against error, of holiness against sin. It has also been a sheepfold where the faithful flock is fed and nourished by the riches of divine grace. Let not those who hold the high office of the bishopric think that the Fundamentalists spend all their time fighting the adversaries of the Christian faith. They feed and nourish the Church on the pure Word of God unmodified and unadulterated. They are very careful, however, not to allow the poison of infidelity to get mixed up with the bread of life which they, as gospel ministers, must break to the hungry multitudes of humanity. David, the shepherd boy, who later became a king and played a conspicuous role on the stage of Hebrew history, fed his father's

flock and slew a lion and a bear in order to protect the sheep. It seemed to be necessary in David's day to have a battlefield near the sheepfold. Anyway what is the need to feed the sheep if we do not defend them? Such a mode of procedure would merely furnish fatter mutton for the ravenous wolves that invade the fold and devour the flock. But despite the pacifistic, episcopal tone the fight is on.

In the same issue of the paper that reported the part of the Episcopal Address which we have been discussing there was a statement by a prominent president of a well-known Seminary that was in perfect accord with the pacifist program of the Bishops. The statement was this: "The role of the preacher is not that of a fighter nor a recluse, but a mediator between God and man."

This Seminary President was at one time supposed to be an evangelical, yea, a fundamentalist, but he began to compromise and to cater to both crowds and has at last come to the conclusion that the preacher should not be a fighter but a mediator. But what is there to hinder a preacher from being both a fighter and a mediator? Who desires a cowardly compromising minister to mediate between him and the Almighty? There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. . . . Hence, so far as mediation in the meritorious, sacrificial sense is concerned there is only one person in the universe qualified to meet the requirement. Jesus alone stands as our all-sufficient Daysman and Redeemer. It is time that a consecrated man may assume the role and occupy the position of an intercessor. The minister is supposed to stand in the gap and fill up the hedge, to weep between the porch and the altar. In a modified sense, therefore, the preacher may act as a mediator between God and men. But such ministry of mediation or intercession does not make it impossible for the preacher to play the role of a fighter for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. Those who put up a good fight for the fundamental principles of Christianity invariably make the best "mediators" between God and men. So it is utterly out of harmony with history and the genius of the Christian religion to set the "fighter" and the "mediator" over against each other as incompatibles. So instead of saying that the role of the preacher is not that of a fighter but that of a mediator, it is far better and more correct to say that the role of the preacher is both that of a fighter and a mediator. The fighting spirit will predominate in some, while the mediating spirit will predominate in others. But both should be present in the well-balanced and properly proportional preacher of the pure gospel.

Therefore we conclude that the church militant is both a battlefield and a sheepfold, and that the ideal preacher is a fighter as well as a mediator.—The Pentecostal Herald.

"I know a little land-locked bay,
For souls upon a stormy sea;
What light on all the hills around,
What song of birds in every tree.
No billows roll, no rocks do rend,
No wildly wrecking winds are there,
But tiny ripples whisper "Peace!"
That little land-locked bay is prayer."
—Heart and Life.

God's way is to save us from a thing before we get to it.—Christian Witness.