

DISESTABLISHMENT

Address at the New Year's Assembly of the London City Missionaries, January 1, 1861

By Charles H. Spurgeon

Let me say at the outset that I dissent somewhat from the hope which some of you entertain as to the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church at a very early period. I hope it may come; I should be glad to see it come this evening; but I am afraid lest you should be very sanguine, and then be disappointed. I thought some time ago that some of us were coming up, like Blucher, just at the end of Waterloo, only to see the running away of the foe; but it has not been so these last twenty years, and I am inclined, to think that it will want a great many years yet. I will tell you why. Did you ever try to whistle all the mites out of a fat Stilton cheese? Did you ever sit still and wait until that consummation had arrived?

I think there is great hopefulness in the Church itself of disestablishment coming, only the friends whom we trust get just up to the point, and then they draw back. When it comes to the parting with temporalities, they *Linger shivering on the brink, And fear to launch away.*

I quite agree with Mr. Antliff's remark that there are many of the best men among the clergy of the Church of England. I know it to my satisfaction and joy. I met one of them not long ago, and I said to him, "You know I have been walking through your garden." He replied, "I am sure you are very welcome look in at any time." I then said, "As I walked along your garden, do you know what I thought of? I wondered how you would like to be disestablished and disendowed." "My dear brother," said he, "that has often crossed my mind." I said, "It may, perhaps, be as well that it should, because you will probably come to it." "That may be," he said; "and I sometimes put it to my conscience whether I should, like those men of God in Scotland at the Disruption, come out and leave everything for the truth's sake." "Well" I said, "what decision did you come to?" He replied, "Well, I thought that by the grace of God I could do that, much as I love the old rectory and grounds." So I said, "Why don't you, then?" "Now," he said, "that was unkind of you. No one is more glad to see you than I am; but you do say some things that ought really not to be said, preventing brotherly feeling." "Well, my dear sir," I said, "but why don't you?" He replied, "If ever there should arise in the Church of England an error which might constrain a follower of Christ to leave it, I hope I shall be one."

"Well," I said, "if there is no error already there which should constrain you to leave it, be of good comfort, there never will be." So I saw him no more, but I went on my way. I am afraid that neither party will come up to the mark.

Although my whole heart and sympathy are with the evangelical clergy of the Church of England, yet certainly as to courage I have more hope of the High Church. But I have not any hope of them either, for they may write tracts and books about "the Crown Rights of Jesus," and the necessity of liberty for the Church, but still I am afraid that when it comes to the leaving altogether of the Land of Goshen and coming clean out of Egypt, the leeks and the garlic and the onions and the cucumbers had been: so long enjoyed that they will be loth to part with them. I hope the matter will come to an end, because this fighting is no joy to us who have taken the question up. I am supposed to be naturally of a bitter or acid disposition, to be narrow and bigoted, and so on. I have read it, brethren, and it is a great benefit to a man to see himself as others see him. Yet, so far as I know, I never struck a blow against the Church of England in any shape or form, whatever its errors might be, without feeling my arm somewhat the weaker, because of the many good, excellent men there are in that Church. Years ago I said I could almost wish that there were none such, and that the Church might get worse and worse. I

thought it was rather complimentary language, but it has been bandied all round the three kingdoms, and people have said, "See what a bigoted man this is! he wishes that the Church may grow worse and worse;" to which I have replied in a great many cases that I have never wished any such thing, because I never wish for impossibilities. If I were diabolical enough to wish to see the Church in a sorrowful, unhappy, and ungracious plight, I could never wish to see it reduced to what the Established Church is now. I sorrow over it and feel no joy in my heart. We have taken up this matter, many of us, though we are not "sensible dissenters," though I am afraid we are "political dissenters" — we have taken this up as a matter of religion. At least, I have for one. It is a thing I pray about. It is to me, as much a fundamental doctrine of my faith as almost any you could mention, that the Church of Christ is Christ's Church, and not the State's Church, and that she has rights and privileges which are not to be sold and bartered for any amount of gold or patronage.

We wish to see the Church separated from the State for these reasons.

First, we hold that the establishment of one peculiar form of Christianity, and the leaving out of other Christians, is a clear wrong and injustice. We feel that, if we were the patronized sect, we should find it difficult with the light we possess to defend our position. We should be half ashamed to meet our episcopal brethren who were unendowed if we Baptists and Congregationalists were endowed; we should always feel as if we owed them an apology, and we should say to them, "We cannot help it; somehow or other we have got to be endowed; pray forgive us and bear with us, for ours is an anomalous position; we feel that we are doing an injustice to you, and we are sorry for it." That is how we should feel; and because our denominations are inferior in number, taken one by one, to the Church of England, I think it all the more unjust. There is an island of the Turks out yonder in the sea which contains a certain number of white persons who all go to church, a number of brown persons who are all Wesleyans, and a larger number of black persons who are all Baptists. As far as my observation goes, it is very much the same thing here. The white people, the very respectable ones, go to church; the next grade, to the Wesleyans; and the very black people belong to the Baptists. Now, it would seem to me to be an injustice that there should be an endowment in Turk's Island for the support of the religion of the whites, who are those who have the most money, and, therefore, could support their own religion, while the black man and the brown man receive nothing from the national treasury. If you endow any people, let the weaker brethren have it. Surely, if there were any justice in it there would be a kind of chivalry about the matter; but for a sect that numbers nearly all the lords and the great people of the land to come to the treasury to take gold out of it — ah! where can be the justice of this?

And because we do not want our nation to go on perpetrating what is certainly a grievous bodily wrong — the denial of religious equality to us all — therefore we must lift up our voices. If we were quietly to endure it, we should be accomplices in the wrong; we must speak and continue to speak until that wrong is redressed. The union of the Church with the State causes, before all the world, a misrepresentation of what the Church is. It always must be so. I dare say the Church of England is as fair a representation of the Church of Christ as could very well be produced under the circumstances. But look at its membership. Who are members of the Church? I am one. We are all members of it. I have been informed that I am a non-attending member, an outside member. All Englishmen are said to be members of the National Church, and they are treated as such. Did Christ ever mean to set forth to the world that his Church really was everybody born within a certain district? I had thought there were some hedges for his fields; that there was a sort of division between his spiritual kingdoms and the kingdoms of this world. But where is discipline? Is discipline possible? Let it be attempted. It has been attempted bravely here and there, if not wisely; but it cannot be carried out. How can it be? You are brought and made members of Christ, children of God, while you are yet unconscious of it. You take those solemn vows upon yourselves at certain periods, and you are all of you, whatever your character

may be, members of this great National Church. I say that is a misrepresentation altogether of the church of Christ. To me one of the most sorrowful things is, that in this Church Jesus Christ is practically dethroned. First, by name; for who — it is no fault of hers, God bless her! — who is the head of the English Church? Who is declared to be so?

Then to whom do we refer if we want to know whether this practice is right or not? What is the statute book of the Church? Is it the Bible? No, sirs; it is a book that was made by human, uninspired hands. Ay, and above that, is the Parliament of Great Britain and Ireland, made up of a great many sorts of people, “all honorable men.” It seems to me that to ask Parliament what I am to do, if I am Christ’s servant, is to be disloyal at once to my Lord. He has given me his statute book, and if I do not understand it I must seek his enlightening spirit by prayer. But to go down to the House of Commons to ask those gentlemen about it! I would ask them about a great many things, but certainly not about religion. I am afraid if I were to begin to test them about it I should find them signally failing. A gentleman once called upon me here to know how it was that I could give my vote to a certain member of Parliament, who was unorthodox in his doctrinal sentiments? I did not answer him, but I simply called down my tube, and said, “Bring me up the Westminster Assembly’s Catechism!” It was brought up, and I gravely began to question the man upon the doctrine of election. He knew nothing about it; he seemed all at sea. Then I asked him what he was. I think he said he was a lawyer. I said, “Well, I should never employ you as a lawyer, because you are not sound on the doctrine of election.” He did not see the relation between the two things, and I said, “Neither do I see any relation between the orthodoxy of a man and his becoming a member of Parliament.” Why, if all members of Parliament were Charnocks, and Owens, and the greatest divines that ever lived, it would be treason against Christ for the Church to go and submit her laws to them. “One is your Master, even Christ,” says the Church. I am a very High Churchman, indeed, in that respect. I am sorry for a man that he should ever bring his conscience down to submit to the dictate of the State about a thing which concerns Christ. I should not like to be in such a position that I could not pray to God without a petticoat of some particular kind, and some men cannot unless it is of a certain color one day and a different color the next. Well, dear souls, are they to go to Parliament to know all about it? Of course they must, as long as they take the parliamentary money. I pray God that the little finger of the State, which has been heavy upon them, may become thicker than a man’s loins to them. I should like to see them feel the bitter oppression, for they will never come out of Egypt until the tale of their bricks shall be doubled, and until the straw is withheld. Happy shall be the day for them when they dare to come out with this upon their banner: — Christ alone is our Master, and the Word of God is our great law book. Or, if they do not take this as their motto, at any rate let them feel that Christ’s church cannot be cut, and carved, and molded by a Parliament that has not the understanding to do it, and was never meant to do it. It can manage some things very well, especially when it is a Liberal government; but as to our souls, I would not trust the Liberal government with them any more than I would a Conservative government. The Church must be free, and Christ must be her sole Master, cost what it may, in England, Scotland, and everywhere else. I, for one, hope that this question will soon be settled, because the present state of things unites men who ought to be separated. It is very sad, to my mind, to see how some of our evangelical brethren are toned down. They will speak out admirably sometimes, and some of them do now; but the tone is gradually declining towards a compromise, I fear, and things will gradually get worse and worse. Now, what communion has Christ, after all, with Belial; or an Evangelical with a Ritualist? Can there be any? I cannot see it; there ought to be none, and I pray to God that the two may be sundered from each other, but I do not think they ever will be so long as there are common slices of bread and butter to be eaten. That one common table brings them all together, otherwise they would divide at once, and the sooner the division takes place the better for the interests of truth and righteousness. We have now amongst us an immorality of language which, for one, I deprecate, and to the last degree mourn over. Men talk the language of a certain book, and one reads it one way, and another another; yet they say they all believe, *ex animo*, a book which no man ever did believe, or ever can believe, or ever will

believe, because it is selfcontradictory. It has in it noble points and grievous faults, yet persons with views differing as the poles, all say that they believe that one book. I say it is teaching the nation to trifle with words, and to trifle with truth. I hope we have got some of the blood of the martyrs about us now, and that we would not subscribe to a lie, though life depended upon it; or chaffer with words, or make language mean other than it should, though the rack and the prison should await us. I hope there are some such left: but if there be, they have not been produced or educated by the process which enables men to say that they do not believe in baptismal regeneration; and yet the words, "In my baptism, wherein I was made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven," are still part of the statute book which they subscribe. I said something about that once, and I won't say any more. I am not penitent yet, but I am sorry for the present state of things, and hope it will come to an end, because it seems to me the present union of Church and State separates those who ought to be united. We should preach the gospel in this church, and in that church. Wesleyans, Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists — are we not all one? And notwithstanding that hard battle, which will grow warmer still, there is enough love left among some of our dear Episcopalian brethren to love, some of us, though we handle them very roughly; and we love them none the less, but all the more, because we speak out in this matter. Once let this thing be decided, and you will see the brethren congregate as brethren; you will see those who are not of us go each to his own place, as things ought to be.

Some time ago I was surprised when the rector of a certain parish, where I happened to be, came and asked me if I would preach in the evening for him. He said, "I am sorry you cannot preach in the church, but, happily, our large school-room is just across the yard; I will read prayers in the church, and you can preach in the school-room." I was perfectly satisfied, because it was the best thing he could do under the circumstances. But why should it be so? We are all brethren if we love the Lord; and if they will not come and meet us here on such a platform as this, and address such an assembly as this about the vital interests of the soul, yet I hope the day will come when there will be such an intercommunication and exchange of Christian courtesy, such real working together, that the separation will not continue any longer. But that cannot be until the Church is divided from the State; and in the interests of brotherly love, which are very dear to Christ — for he said, "By this Shall all men know that ye are my disciples, that ye have love one to another" — I trust that this matter will soon come to an end.

I have for a good many years been a little amused at ecclesiastical law; it is such a curious sort of thing. I know the bishops and clergy of the Church of England have been acting in a very dreadful manner for years, without knowing it. They have made speeches at Exeter Hall, some of them have preached there, and it is a remarkable thing that none of them have died in consequence. Yet, though I never published it before, let me tell you I registered Exeter Hall in the Bishops Court as a dissenting place of worship, and it is so now for aught I know. It is an awful thing, and I have been obliged to keep it to myself. I sat lately on the platform of the Bible Society, and I saw the Archbishop of Canterbury and one or two other bishops, and I thought they little knew within what unhallowed precincts they then were. I hope now that they know it, and find that they have survived it, they may be encouraged to feel that, after all, places are not so dreadfully injured by the presence of Nonconformists; and I trust: they may come to see that Nonconformists will not pollute burial-grounds either. I wish that Burials Bill could be got rid of, and come to an end. If I had been able to advise the Church of England, I think I should have effectually "dished" Mr. Carvell Williams and the Liberation Society. I should have proposed that — "Albeit we do not feel that we can yield your claim to the parish graveyard, yet, inasmuch as this question touches some of the tenderest feelings of our fellow Christians, we desire, of our own free will, to give our consent to their being buried in the churchyard." Then you would not have had much to fight about; you would have got what you asked for; and yet the principle would not have been touched. But they are not wise enough to think of anything that is a

rational compromise. We cannot have better allies than our enemies. I am certain they do our work better than we should do it.

All things considered, I do not know that a greater blessing could have happened to the Liberation Society than for the Liberal Government to be turned out and the Tories to get in. And may the Liberals keep out till they know their own friends. A member of Parliament said to me when he was canvassing, "I found no canvassers take my case up heartily except the Nonconformists." I said, "Of course; we have got a principle that is dear to us as life itself, for which we shall never cease to plead, and if a man will come forward upon it we will back him up." There are numbers of Liberals that never will be returned unless they speak out straight and say, "Though I may lose some supporters, I will go in heartily with you." May they keep in the cold until they learn that the helots that have followed at their heels, who really have won their victories, mean to be free themselves. I conclude by saying that we shall be glad to see this matter fully carried out, because it is making us all accomplices in the present journey of England towards Rome. I am sorry that any church should go Romewards; but if it do go, it is no business of mine. I am not responsible if I faithfully preach the gospel. But this is my church, and your church; this is the National Church; it represents us; it does our religion; it makes us godly; as you all are aware, we should be a godless nation without it — it is performing the religious functions of the nation, regarding it as if it were an individual, and this is what it is doing — it is bringing back a yoke which our fathers would not bear, and which they dread to shake off. Roman Catholicism has made comparatively few converts by teaching of its own; cardinals, priests, monks, sisters of mercy, have been a dead failure; but the English Church has been the great missionary for the Church of Rome. It has smoothed the way, and paved it, and helped those along it who never else would have trodden it. Now, if the Church of England chooses to do this, let it do it, but not in your name, nor in mine. If it chooses to turn its churches into conservatories, or into music-halls, if it erects its joss-houses, and defiles this land with its idolatries, so let it do, but not in your name, nor in mine, for our souls loathe priestcraft; and to put me in fetters and imprison me is but an external wrong to my physical frame; but to say of these crucifixes and things, "These be thy gods, O Israel," and to fix upon all of us this infamy, that this shall be our religion — why, sirs, it is a piece of oppression such as old Rome, in the worst days of her tyranny, never put upon her conquered subjects.

Be watchful and vigilant, and pray about this matter. If it does not come for years, recollect God may have great purposes in the delay. I sometimes think that some of you rich Dissenters would not always be for Liberal measures if you had got this carried — that you would some of you become Conservatives. Though I do not want the Conservative party to get you, I do know that when you begin to grow a little rich your natural tendency is that way. You are kept to do justice for others by suffering injustice yourselves. There is nothing that makes you so quick to see the wrongs of any other class as having to endure some wrong yourself. It may be that you have to be kept out of your natural right for a time, until you have done a little more for others who have their wrongs also to complain of. But the time shall come, and some of us will live to see it; and then I should not wonder if there is a meeting held in this place, in which a number of clergymen will be upon the platform, and will say, "We are exceedingly grateful to you, brethren, we thought you our enemies, but you were our best friends; we thought that you were going to kill us, but you were only breaking our chains. We fancied when you wanted to get us out of Goshen that you would take us into the wilderness and destroy us, but now we see that you helped us on towards the promised land, flowing with milk and honey." As sure as I live, I hope to shake hands with a great number of my Episcopal brethren over this question, and to say, "Well, wasn't it a good fight after all? You defended your position as well as you could; it was rather naughty of you to give Mr. Williams the eggs and the cayenne-pepper; we never did that to you, except that, in a metaphorical sense, we did cayenne-pepper you; but did we not do you essential service?" and one after another will say, "Yes, and we are very grateful to our dear brothers, Dale and Rogers, whom we thought to be dreadful fellows, awful Radicals, agitators, and stirrers up of sedition; but now

we see it is all right. We have been so happy in our liberty, so glad to have got rid of our chains; and now we salute you who helped to set us free." 'Twere a consummation devoutly to be wished! It is coming on!