

What is Personal Religious Liberty?

Arranged by MRS. M. M. TURNER, Washington, D. C.

THE constitution of the United States accords to its citizens religious liberty when this liberty does not lead to encroaching upon the rights of others. Individual liberty is invaded when societies of men and women bring the child-mind of this or any other nation into subjection to any of the many theological theories which infest life in all of its departments. The constitution does not give the right to put theological fetters upon the minds of the children. This is not individual liberty; it is only the liberty to make partisans.

Theology, to merit the approval of mankind, should establish by incontestable proof, some one theory that will be good for all people for all time, and that does not depend upon the promises of heaven or the threats of hell for its vitality. Without this, theological work is disuniting, disorganizing and in fact demoralizing. It stands in the way of the purifying and organizing work of Science, with her methods of proving and demonstrating, based upon the uniform and changeless laws of the universe, without promise or threat—only appealing to reason.

Such baseless theories as the following, formulated more than a hundred years ago, and gathered from the Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Roman Catholic and Episcopalian catechisms and the "Thirty-nine Articles of Religion", should be brought to the bar of public judgment and be made to "stand in the pure light of free and fearless questioning".

Theory About God (Not Proved).

"There is but one god, . . . the only true god." In this "god-head", "without body, parts or passions," "unchangeable in being, the same in essence, equal in power and glory," there are three persons, father, son and holy ghost. "The son, which is the word of the father, begotten from everlasting of the father," whose "sacrifice as an atonement was the thought of God before creation began," was "by the power of the holy ghost born of the virgin Mary." Having been crucified and buried, "he arose again from death and took again his body with flesh, bones and all things pertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended to heaven" and "continueth to be god and man, two distinct natures in one person, forever sitteth at the right hand of God," the father, son and holy ghost, "until the last day." "My father is greater than I" (John 14:28). "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, and that is God" (Matt. 19:17). The holy-ghost part of this godhead came down as a dove, and again as "cloven tongues of fire".

Unproved Theories About God's Relation to Man.

"When God created man he entered into a covenant of life with him. . . . This covenant being made with Adam, not for himself, but for his posterity, all mankind sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression."

"All mankind by their fall, lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all the miseries of life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever," consequently "we have no power to do good works, pleasing and acceptable to God". "Works done before the grace of Christ and the inspiration of the spirit are not pleasant to God. . . . We doubt not but they have the nature of sin."

Faith—the grave of Reason—is the one absolute requisite to gain heaven, yet this cannot be had "without the grace of God by Christ preventing us that we may have a good will, "the spirit applying to us the redemption purchased by Christ working faith in us."

Roman Catholicism, not believing that the intercession of Christ and the holy ghost will melt the heart of this tyrant in the skies, appeals to the virgin Mary, Michael the archangel, John, Peter, Paul and all the saints to pray for mercy on the Roman Catholic sinners.

Different Theories About Baptism.

Baptist Catechism: "Infants of such as are professing believers are not to be baptised. . . . Baptism is rightly administered by immersion, . . . and not by sprinkling."

Martin Luther said: "It can not be proved by the scriptures that infant baptism was instituted by Christ."

Methodist: "Little children ought to be baptized. They belong to Christ."

Episcopalian: This church requires faith and repentance before baptism. Infants are made to promise these things by "their sponsors".

Roman Catholic: "Baptism is necessary for salvation, because without it we can not enter the kingdom of heaven."

Different Theories About the Soul.

Presbyterian and Baptist: "The souls of believers at death are made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass to glory, and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves until the resurrection."

Methodist: "The soul is the breath of God. . . . At the last day the Lord Jesus will come down out of heaven, the trumpet will sound and the dead shall be raised, the heavens shall pass away, . . . the righteous shall be taken up into heaven, but the wicked shall be turned into hell."

Roman Catholic: "Christ will judge us immediately after death and on the last day." The first is called "particular judgment", which sends souls either to heaven, hell or purgatory. "The judgment which all men have to undergo on the last day is the general judgment."

The Episcopal creed says: "I believe in the resurrection of the body." Rev. Lyman Abbott says: "There is no resurrection of the body save in grass and flowers."

Spiritualists teach: "The continued conscious existence of the individual spirit after the change called death; the intercommunion of the two states by the voluntary action of the individual disembodied spirits to and through those existing in the human form."

Swedenborg claims that at the age of 57 he was visited by the Lord. He says: "It has been given to me to be together with angels and to speak with them as man with man." From this intercourse he claims to have learned that man is an immortal spirit "who awakes in the spirit world" after the death of the body, for which there is no resurrection.

Theosophy teaches the reincarnation of the soul.

Church and Priests.

"The church has four marks by which it may be known: it is one, it is catholic, it is holy and it is apostolic. These marks are found in the holy Roman Catholic church alone." This church teaches that Christ gave his priests power to change bread and water into his body and blood. The priests exercise this power through the words of consecration in the mass, making deo-pophagi of the congregation.

Leo XIII informed the archbishop of England that the orders of the English church are "invalid".

The archbishops argue that "if the Anglican rite of ordination is held invalid, for the same reasons given by his holiness, then, on the same ground, doubt is cast on all other orders also, even those of the church of Rome itself."

The bishops of the Episcopal church of the United States say to young men being ordained, "Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; whose sins you retain, they are retained."

"The decrees of God are his eternal purpose . . . whereby for his own glory he hath foreordained whatever comes to pass. . . . His works of providence are his governing all his creatures and all their actions." This includes plagues, pestilence and famine, battles, murder and death.

Though we have no power to do good without the grace of God, the most depraved of sinners is promised forgiveness if at the last he says he has faith. Faith opens the gates of heaven for the murderer.

These various and conflicting theological theories have strewed the path of life with millions of agonized human hearts, with tears, blood and death by various forms of torture. They now divide the people into factions. In the ranks of the working classes where man's daily bread depends upon his daily work, these theories torture reason, "hush and school the natural human conscience, make it speak the words of a formula, making obedience the whole duty of man."

It is thought that a covenant was made for man by Adam without man's knowledge or consent. All but arrant cowards would prefer to bear just punishment themselves on account of breaking this covenant rather than to have an innocent person suffer and die to save them. It takes moral cowards to be willing to shift punishment justly due to one onto the shoulders of an innocent party, even if the party was one-third of the god-head or the god himself.

The government accords to each man the right to think as pleaseth himself. It should not allow theology to interfere, as it does, with individual religious liberty. It should not allow associations of men to take these different theories, with their weapons of heaven and hell, to the Eastern nations; it might lead to the re-establishment of the inquisition to thrust one or another of those theories down the throats of other nations. Study of the Bible might lead to hunting and burning witches. It has been done before among enlightened people—it may be done again. The garments of theology are crimson with the "blood of the souls of the poor innocents".

Secularism, in the name of science, asks that these differing theological theories shall be brought to the bar of Reason and Public Opinion and be made to "stand in the fierce light of free and fearless questioning," if, peradventure, any of them may prove themselves the truth acceptable to the enlightened reason of this day and time and to all people.

When this is done men will learn that, as W. K. Clifford says, "the principle of natural ethics is the sole and supreme allegiance of conscience to the community". Wherever nations have a god to fear, a heaven to hope for and an eternal fire to dread, there the allegiance of conscience to the community is betrayed. The sublime and solemn force throbbing through the universe, without beginning and without end, wants no worship, no prayer and no churches; it needs and asks nothing from man. The human family in the mass is credulous and superstitious, struggling with ignorance, bitter poverty, the unhealthy conditions it engenders and the stress and strain of sex. It needs all the love, help and self-sacrifice that man can give. It asks justice and natural rights, not church charities given to please God and save the giver from the pains of hell, but from allegiance to the community.

Sanctioned by

J. E. REMSBURG,

President American Secular Union and Freethought Federation.

E. STEWART,

President Oregon State Secular Union.

NOTE.—The above has been printed in tract form for free distribution. Send a stamp to pay postage and a quantity of them will be forwarded for you to distribute. Address Torch of Reason, Silverton, Ore., or Mrs. M. M. Turner, 1410 Q. St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

I consider the government of the United States as interdicted by the constitution from intermeddling with religious institutions, their doctrines, discipline, or exercise. But it is only proposed that I should recommend, not prescribe, a day of fasting and prayer. I do not believe it is for the interest of religion to invite the civil magistrate to direct its exercises, its discipline or its doctrine. Fasting and prayer are religious exercises; the enjoining them, an act of discipline.—[Thomas Jefferson.]