

"I do not believe in Foreign Missions."

What is implied in this "Confession of Unbelief," and why no True Christian should make it.

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Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? LUKE 6:46.

All the Word of God is Light. But there are parts of it which are more than ordinary in their illuminating power. They are like the cathode rays which penetrate to the secret places, and show what is hidden there; they are discerners of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Such are these words of our Master. Conscience is aroused by them. Pictures pass before our minds as we hear them. We think of the time when we came to Christ and vowed eternal obedience to him. We remember the many occasions when, under the power of his presence, at the communion table, or when we have met to renew our consecration to his service, we have said that we would give ourselves to his service willingly and entirely, with his help. We have called him Lord and Master; and as these words come to us, they bring up pictures not only of the times when we have in our hearts or with our lips given him that name, but pictures as well of the times when we have failed to do the things he has told us. It is a verse we do not like to linger over; conscience has too much to say to us about it, too many unpleasant things of which to remind us. The words are an accusation.

But now I would make but a single application of them; it is in regard to the work of Foreign Missions. I shall not bring to you long tables of statistics, of the kind that make foreign missionary sermons and meetings so dreary a thing to many people; I want to show you how this text fits in with the work of Foreign Missions. I desire to speak to one class of people especially, though not exclusively; they are those who do little or nothing for this work, give but a trifling amount or nothing at all for it, and answer all appeals by saying, "I do not believe in Foreign Missions."

I mean to define this class widely so that it may take in all who are not doing what they should for this grand work, whether they are holding back altogether from it, or merely slighting it, "condemning it with faint assistance."

There are some who take that attitude and mean it with all their hearts. When they say, I do not believe in Foreign Missions, it is with all their heart and soul and strength and mind that they say it. It means a definite turning away from that work, perhaps not an antagonism to it, but a real earnest opinion that it is not of enough importance, or that it is not practical enough, or successful enough for them to do anything in its inter-

est. Then there are other people who, using the same words, mean nothing more than that they have little or no concern for the work of the church in other lands, and generally it is accompanied with a statement of interest in some good work nearer home. Whichever class you may find yourself in, I want to appeal to you in the most direct way I can think of, by taking up this oft-heard statement, "I don't believe in Foreign Missions," and analyzing it somewhat, seeing what it involves. It is easy to say; it comes naturally to the tongue of one who has not given much thought to what is involved in it. But there is so much that inevitably goes with it to one who applies a little logic to it, that I believe anyone who honestly considers it, will see that it is not a remark which reflects much credit upon the heart or brain of the one who says it, nor is it an excuse for small gifts or little interest.

Let me say at the outset that I am not asking anyone to take my view of the case, unless it commends itself to his own reason and conscience. If after I have stated what I think is involved in this expression you feel that I have been unfair, and that you still can use the excuse with good grace, well and good. I only ask you to consider the case fairly, and see whether it does not logically involve what I shall try to make clear to you.

The statement is a confession. Not a confession of faith, but a confession of unbelief. That in itself is not bad. It may be that the next best thing to a confession of faith is a confession of unbelief, for every denial involves an affirmation somewhere. Carlyle has shown us in such a way that no reader of *Sartor Resartus* can ever forget it, that man makes progress to the everlasting *yea* through the everlasting *nay*. Let us see, however, what is logically and fairly involved in this confession, "I do not believe in Foreign Missions."

It is first of all, a confession of ignorance of the history of civilization.

I do not suppose there is a man or woman who would presume to say in intelligent company, "I do not believe in civilization, in human progress." I do not imagine there is one who would want to be convicted in any statement of his ignorance of the progress of human society, or apathy about it. And yet it is a simple matter of history that the one mighty force in the development of what is good in modern civilization has been the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And it is a simple matter of daily reading and observation that civilization has much progress still to make, that there are dark quarters of the globe where the light must be carried. What is to do it if not that which has brought the light to us? What do we think of the man who has been healed and restored to complete vigor through some medicine who coolly says, when his attention is called to others who need it, "I don't believe in sending that medicine to somebody else."

Ever since Paul exclaimed, with sincerity to which his life bore witness, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth," the history of the world has been but a revelation of the power of that Gospel. Wherever the knowledge of Jesus has come, light has come, and men have advanced in all that makes life noble and pure and glad. If we sweep out of the way for a moment all that the Christian religion has to say of another life and concen-

trate our thought on what it has done to make this life more bearable, more worthy of being lived, we shall have to acknowledge that modern civilization has its root in Bethlehem.

It is not mere religious prejudice, or the glamour flung over facts by beliefs, that leads us to say this. Scientific students of man are as ready to acknowledge it as are the most devoted followers of Jesus. No book has in recent years been written on sociology which attracted the attention given to Benjamin Kidd's *Social Evolution*; few books have so influenced the thought of their time and the few years following. And the kernel of its thought is the statement that our modern civilization finds its explanation, its mightiest force, in the fund of altruistic feeling that came into the world with Jesus of Nazareth; in other words, the Gospel.

Wherever we look, in the past or the present, we find it true that the pioneers of civilization are the missionaries, and that the first principles of right living have come to the savages and the degraded nations through the teaching of the religion of Christ. The man who says that he does not believe in foreign missions is saying practically that he does not believe in the testimony of history, or that he does not think the mightiest force the world has seen for civilization is worth our attention.

You cannot point out to me a time since Jesus came into the world, or even before that, a time when the human race has made real and substantial progress in the good things of civilization, where there has not been a strong religious movement accompanying or preceding it. You cannot find a nation that is alive and vigorous and devoted to a high ideal the foundations of which were not laid by missionaries of the cross. You cannot find a nation that holds a leading place in the world, not by force of arms merely, but by force of ideas and ideals, which has not been started in the path of progress by missionaries, and kept true to the path by the constant influence of the religion of Jesus Christ. The man who says, "I do not believe in foreign missions," is saying in effect, I do not believe in the force which has made England, and Germany, and America. Do you want to acknowledge such an unbelief as that? Is it anything to be proud of, or to parade?

A saying currently attributed to James Russell Lowell, the authorship of which is in fact unknown, puts the case thus strikingly:—

"When the microscopic search of scepticism, which has hunted the heavens and sounded the seas to disprove the existence of a Creator, has turned its attention to human society, and has found a place on this planet ten miles square, where a decent man can live in decency, comfort and security, supporting and educating his children unspoiled and unpolluted; a place where age is revered, infancy respected, manhood respected and womanhood honored, and human life held in due regard; when sceptics can find such a place ten miles square on this globe, where the Gospel of Christ has not gone and cleared the way and laid the foundations and made decency and security possible, it will then be in order for these sceptics to move thither and ventilate their views." So we might say, When you can find a place where civilization is at its height, and the religion of Christ has not led the way to the height, then you may say, "I do not believe in foreign missions."

Putting this statement, "I do not believe in Foreign Missions" under the microscope, we find in it also a confession of *unbelief in*

humanity. I mean in the essential worth, dignity, and possibility of human nature.

If we press the one who makes such a statement for a reason, often he acknowledges that he does not believe in doing much for those degraded people at the ends of the earth; to send out bright, intelligent, consecrated men and women, and let them live among these savages, doing the little they can do for them; to send thousands and millions of dollars over there for such low specimens of humanity as the Chinese, the Hindus, the Siamese, the Africans, is sheer waste of men and means. These men and women over there are not worth the effort or the expenditure; that is why he says, "I do not believe in the work."

Now, do you not see, when you put your eye close to it, that wrapped up in that statement and the explanation of it is a confession that you do not believe in the essential worth of human nature? There is a great deal of the feeling in our nation, more strongly felt since the war than ever, that nobody but an Anglo-Saxon is worth much. The Anglo-Saxon race is getting about all that is worth having in this world, and we well nigh claim for them as a birthright the heritage of Israel and the exclusive title to heaven. We are very sure that God made our race; but we think that the rest of the world is like Topsy, and "just grew." We have come to the point where the sublime declaration of our Fathers, that "all men are created free and equal," a declaration which, if taken as they meant it, is grandly true, which has such power of truth in it that it could inspire more than one people to rise and put it to the test, I say we have come to the point where we are ready to deny it, and to hold in contempt the other nations of the world because they have not the blood of the Anglo-Saxon.

We have not found the first principle of any right view of man or of society until we have accepted the statement of our declaration of independence, in its meaning, that Man is more than nationality or accident of birth; that classes are doomed, and the cause of Man is triumphant. Every American ought to believe in that principle. And yet when one says he does not believe in Foreign Missions, because he thinks effort for these lower races is useless, he is setting himself against the whole tide of progress, and denying his birthright as an American.

Is he not doing more than that? For this belief in Man as *Man*, this belief in human nature as the only thing worth living for, this faith in its possibilities, this sense of its oneness, is at the root of Christianity. Springing though it did from a nation the most exclusive of its time, of any time, perhaps, until the Anglo-Saxon race arose and took the position of chief Pharisee in the world's synagogue, Christianity nevertheless, because it is from God, and because its founder was Son of God and Son of Man, took the position at the start, staked its life upon it, that all men are brothers, and that whether a man be far or near, whether a member of the chosen race or not, whether barbarian, Scythian, heathen or Christian, American or Chinese, his Humanity was the chief thing about him, and made effort worthy in his behalf. The man who does not believe in Foreign Missions because he doubts the wisdom of sending the Gospel to such peoples, or doubts the possibility of doing anything for such low, degraded specimens of humanity is ignoring one of the root principles of his religion, that every man is a child of God, and that the Gospel was sent for him.

He is saying practically that he does not believe that Christianity is the supreme redemptive force of the world, of man. He is taking the position, is he not, that God can save the Anglo-Saxons through Christianity, but cannot reach other races with the same force? Charles Darwin once stated that a certain race of men were so degraded that nothing could reach them. Yet so impressed was he some years later with the results of missionary effort among them, that he acknowledged his error, and gave the best proof there is of faith in any work, sent some money to aid the missionaries there. If you have a real enthusiastic faith in *humanity*, you will find it hard to keep on saying that you do not believe in Foreign Missions.

More important still is the fact that this statement involves a confession of unbelief in the *essential principle of christian character and conduct*.

Some of those who do not hesitate to avow their unbelief in Foreign Work, explain it by saying that there are heathen enough at home, that the church ought first of all to look out for itself; that before doing anything for these distant places she ought to use her resources on what immediately concerns her own life and work. Now this position is set over against that basal principle of Christianity, the truth that in losing life we find it, what Matthew Arnold with his usual felicity of expression, calls the *secret of Jesus, the law of sacrifice*.

Is it not true that Christianity, in its words, in its ideal, in its history, has taught clearly and uncompromisingly, that when any individual or any church exists for itself alone, it loses its life in saving it? And is it not true that when individual or church disregards the distant work for immediate needs, when it pleads nearer work as an excuse for further off, when it might attend to both by a little sacrifice, it is disregarding or going directly against this divine law? As an actual matter of fact, I believe it would be found on investigation that no church ever lost through giving too much to Foreign Missions, and that no church ever gained through saving its funds from that work. Do we believe that that law of the Master is true?

Some years ago there was a great church that attracted much attention. It had an eloquent man as pastor; it had a membership well up towards five thousand; seemingly it was strong and great. In its annual reports for years there never appeared any offering for any Board of the church; a row of blanks was all that was to be seen. Some of the influential men in the church are reported to have said that they needed all the money they could raise for their own work. Trials came to that church, no greater than have come to others. And it vanished; it did not decline or grow weaker by degrees: it simply disappeared in a breath like a child's card-house; and I have always felt that it was an illustration of the law, "He that saveth his life shall lose it." It is true that the church has sore needs at home, that there is not a church in this city which could not expend wisely on its own work all the money its people could possibly contribute; it is true that there are demands in our country calling for much money. But for all that, I believe that the church which, while doing its best for its own work and the work near to it, does not forget the furthest reach of the kingdom of Christ, will be blessed, and will find a stronger life, though it may have to struggle for it, than if it took that money for its own help. It is always true that "re-

ligion is a commodity of such a nature that the more you export the more you have at home." If it should ever be the destiny of our church, as thank God, we do not believe it ever will, to decrease in strength and retrench and save everywhere, until it came to the point of severest economy, where struggle for self-support became a serious matter, still I would say, the last thing to be cut off is the offering to the Boards of the church: the money given to Foreign Missions by any church is a gain to that church, not a loss; to deny that is to deny the words of Christ.

We need money in our church work now. But if it were possible for me by a single word to divert one dollar from Foreign Mission work to our church work, I would not do it. And if I knew of any way in which I could make our offering to this work double what it was last year, I would do that, knowing well that we would be the gainers thereby, not the losers.

But this statement, I do not believe in Foreign Missions, implies also, a *setting of one's own opinion against the command of the Master, the spirit and teaching of the Bible, and the history of the church.*

That is a serious charge, yet is it not true? Do not take it on my word, but search for yourself. What did Christ ever command of His followers if not that they should carry the Gospel to every creature? His last sacred words to His people of all time, were, "Uttermost part of the earth." How can the man or woman who does not believe in the foreign work read the Acts of the Apostles, or the Epistles of Paul, or the history of the early Christian church with any comfort, or without shame? The Bible is full of the duty and privilege of spreading the light of truth to all shores and all people. The church has advanced by the very work of which you are so severe a critic. Are you willing to consider what has been the chief work and glory of the church, what is expressly commanded in the Bible, what Christ told us to do as a solemn charge, and then say, I do not believe in it, notwithstanding all this? Is that a position for a Christian?

One more point I would make about this remark, is, that it clearly shows a failure on the part of the one who makes it, to appreciate some of the noblest and most heroic work of the world. When you say you do not believe in missions, very likely you mean that you do not believe they are accomplishing anything worthy of the effort given to them. If that is what you mean it shows that you are not acquainted with the facts of the case. There is no nobler work being done, no more heroic workers engaged anywhere, no better results being reached in any field, than in the foreign mission work of our own church. Do you know that in Korea, only lately opened, a field over which many wise men shook their heads in doubt as to the advisability of opening work in it, there were 347 adult baptisms the last year; and that in the mission fields at large of one denomination there were 3,854 additions to the church? You may say that many of these are mere hangers-on, coming because they hope to get some gain out of it; that accusation is often heard. But what will you make of the fact that in many fields, where the reduced income of the Board made a cut in the appropriations necessary, the native workers kept on with reduced pay, or with none at all, and the native churches raised the amount necessary to carry on the work for themselves, sacrificing for it as none of us ever have? And the men and women who are fighting the

battles of the church in the distant places, are they not a band worthy of our support? Think what it means to enter the work. Those men and women stake their *all* on the truth of their religion. They deliberately give up in a long act of sacrifice, their home, friends, everything, for Christ and His kingdom. We all admired, and rightfully, the young men who went to the war; should we not have admiration of the same kind for the young men and women who give their lives for their fellows as missionaries? How all of us admire Theodore Roosevelt. What a magnificent thing it was for that man of wealth, of social position, of national importance, to throw all his manhood into the service of his country. But I have been thinking the past few days of another brilliant young man, a man of ability and power, whom I knew some years ago, of whose work in Korea I was reading in the report of our Board. He gave his life, his powers, his energy and enthusiasm, and gets nothing for it in this life, nothing outward that is. Is he not a hero worthy of our support? And he is but one of a band of about 700.

Do you know that when there was a debt a year ago on the Foreign Mission work, that the missionaries out of their slender salaries contributed a tenth of that debt. These self-sacrificing men and women, whose salaries equal not a thousandth of the aggregate income of the church members of this land, gave one-tenth of the money contributed for the debt on the Foreign work. If that is not heroism, what is? And after that they met many of the expenses of their work out of what was left of their income.

There is no work being done anywhere in the world, so grand, so far-reaching in its results, so strong in its heroism, so big with import for the world's progress, as the quiet work of missions. We love dramatic happenings. If it came to our knowledge that one country was suddenly converted altogether for Christ, we would believe in that work, but the ordinary work is so slow, so patient, that we do not believe it is doing much. The hurricane tears along, leveling trees, spreading destruction and death, and we think, what power there is in it. Yet there is a greater force shown in the patient way in which life pushes out the green shoots again, and rebuilds what the hurricane has destroyed. So we might well turn from the things the world regards as great, and see in the slow, patient, evolutionary work of missionaries the greatest work of the world. If you do not believe in that work, you are shutting your eyes to the noblest deeds, the most far-reaching work, that the world knows to-day.

I wish everyone who does not believe in Foreign Missions would read the annual report of our Church Boards. I wish all those who think that the Christians in heathen lands are not worth the effort of saving them, would simply read what Julian Hawthorne has said of them, from the standpoint of an unprejudiced spectator. You cannot believe that Foreign Missions are not successful, and worthy, unless you shut your eyes and refuse to look squarely at the facts.

I have just two questions to leave with you. Are not these things true which we have said, as to the statement of unbelief in missions? Is it not true that in that statement is involved a failure to appreciate the progress of civilization, a confession of unbelief in humanity, a denial of the root principle of Christian living, a setting your opinion against the command of Christ and the spirit of the Bible and the church, and an ignor-

ing of the facts of the work? That is the first question. Search and see whether this is the true state of the case. Have I overstated it? Have I put it too strongly? If so, where? Study it and see.

And then, this question also: If this is true, does it not make of that statement, I do not believe in Foreign Missions, a saying the Christian ought to be ashamed to utter? What does it mean to be a Christian? Anything at all? Can a man be right in calling himself a Christian, and then avowing unbelief in that which rests upon the history of the church, the direction of the inspired Word, the command of the Master?

The reformation has brought such independence ^{of} thought that we are apt to think individual opinion is sacred, and needs nothing to support it. We have come to think that when a man says, I believe, or I don't believe, that settles it. We ought to push that question back a step further and ask, Why do I not believe? Is it because of facts which convince my reason, or is it because of prejudice? And if any man can find any good reason, borne out by facts, for not believing in, giving to, working for, the cause of foreign missions, if he can find any reason for such unbelief which will not be at the same time a confession of doubt of the Bible, and unwillingness to accept the Master's judgment, then he may rest in it. But can any Christian rest in a mere statement of unbelief? The Christian is to decide and to act as Christ did. That is the rule for every question.

Our churches gave a large offering last year to this work. It was sorely needed. Yet it is needed as much this year. Work is suffering for lack of funds. Mission work is being largely supported out of the mean salaries of the workers themselves. These things ought not so to be. May God lead us to do our duty in the offerings for this work. To give here means, *I believe in Foreign Missions*. But it means more than that; it implies as well, "I believe in Jesus Christ and His truth; I believe in the gospel of Christ." I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to every one, American, or Chinaman, or Korean, or African, or Hindu, to *every one* that believeth. And I know it is such a power, for I take the Word of the Master and the Word of God as my authority. Such faith is what we need. Such was the faith of Paul; such the faith of the victorious church of all the ages. Such is the faith that will overcome the world. Think of the history of the church; think of the needs of men; think of the heroes now at work, and their difficulties; think of Christ and His last commands; and in the light of those thoughts decide what you *owe* to that work which Christ assigned to every Christian.

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