

## HOW TO VIEW DENOMINATIONALISM

BELOVED WATCH TOWER BRETHREN: –

By nature I was always weak, timid and fearful, but as the Truth of the Lord's Word has entered my mind and heart it has given me a courage which is entirely foreign to my nature. That is but one of the ways in which the Truth has made me free.

This was recently impressed upon my mind very forcefully by a conversation I had on the train with a stranger. He was apparently a minister, although he did not say so, nor did I ask him. But in the usual ministerial way he made an attack upon Brother Russell and the cause for which he stands.

This led to an extended conversation with him, in the course of which he asked me: "What opinion do you people have of our great denominations?" I said, "Are you really desirous of having that question answered?" "Yes," he said.

I replied, "Then you shall certainly have your wish. But possibly if it were answered very directly you might charge that it was influenced by prejudice, so I am going to approach the matter from a different standpoint.

"My home is in Philadelphia, and as you know, the prominent evangelist, 'Billy' Sunday, is conducting a long series of meetings there. My father is sending me the daily papers in which are published reports of his sermons, etc., and I have been following the same very carefully.

"Practically all the Protestant churches in the city are behind Mr. Sunday; the papers stating that as many as four hundred ministers were sometimes on the platform with him. So of all men

Mr. Sunday is surely qualified to speak for these denominations. Besides which his large experience with them should enable him to say with accuracy just what are the conditions prevailing in these churches.

"In some of his sermons I note that he has a very poor opinion of the spirituality of these organizations. He scores the ministers because they have no faith. He condemns their neglect of Bible study. He says the theological seminaries are turning out infidels.

"He refers to the large amount of saloon property that belongs to church members. He enumerates all kinds of worldly doings which go on in these denominations. He would have us believe that the moral standard of thousands [R5724 : page 207] high in the churches is so low as to almost stagger reason.

"Now if what Mr. Sunday says about the denominations is true they are not fit places for good, respectable people, to say nothing of true Christians. In fact, if they are only half as bad as he says, then every faithful child of God ought to get out of them as quickly as he can.

"If they are but one-quarter as bad as Mr. Sunday tells, then the only safety on the part of one who wishes to retain his faith is to get out of such spiritual pest-holes. And we must confess that Mr. Sunday's delineation of the conditions in religious organizations is true to fact.

"This is why we are glad to take a stand independent of all denominations, and advise all who are not satisfied with the conditions prevailing in these systems to follow our example. Of course, there are many who want to know why we do not remain in the churches and try to reform them. We answer them that if all the able evangelists from Moody to Sunday have been able to accomplish so little in that direction then the case is hopeless. It is like the Bible puts it, 'We would have healed her, but she could not

be healed.' The disease is incurable. That is why the denominations are DYING."

The gentleman never attempted to refute my statements, but he said, "However, you must admit there has been a great revival in the way of Bible study in the past few years. Does that not look hopeful for the churches?"

I replied, "It is true that the past few years have seen the inauguration of several movements having for their object the encouragement of more Bible study. But do you know the real reason for their existence?"

"When Pastor Russell first began to call attention to the extent to which the Word of God was being ignored in these denominations, his views were treated with the same scant courtesy as the Bible; and it was only a question of time until the Scriptures would have been altogether neglected.

"But as the religious leaders began to see the people listening to Pastor Russell they trembled for the effect it would have on their own prestige, just as I imagine the Pharisees must have done when they found the common people listening to the words of Jesus. And in their fears the clergy realized that they must get up some kind of substitute for Bible-study to keep the mass of mankind from listening to the one who is unquestionably the religious Reformer of this century."

The poor man had nothing more to say. He probably knew it was all too true. How glad any of us would have been to have given him the same comforting light we have, but he was not yet ready for it.

Yours in the Fellowship of the Gospel of Peace,

B. H. BARTON.

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