



**Reasons for not Co-operating
In the Sunderland Revivals**

Arthur A. Rees

Reasons

For

Not Co-operating in the Alleged
Sunderland Revivals

In an address to his congregation, published by request, 1859

By

Arthur Augustus Rees

"Speaking the truth in love" Paul

"There is no learned man but will confess he hath much profited by reading Controversies—his senses awakened, his judgment sharpened, and the truth which he holds more firmly established. If then it be profitable for him to read, why should it not at least be tolerable and free for his adversary to write? In logic they teach, that contraries laid together, more evidently appear: it follows, then, that all controversy being permitted, falsehood will appear more false, and truth the more true." Milton

"Not phenomena, but principles". Anonymous

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Introduction

My Dear Friends,

You have all heard much about Revivals of late, and many of you have been on the tiptoe of expectation for a Revival here. Not a few, indeed, believe that it is come; only they marvel that it should be confined within the four walls of a single building, and limited to a single sect. As one of the first promoters of revival prayer-meetings in this town, it must seem strange to some that if there is a Revival in Sunderland, I should have no hand in it, and apparently no heart in it. And I admit that either I must be wrong, or the Revivals are untrue. The Rev. C. Rawlings, in a letter to the *Watchman*, says, that "*Satan is very busy, and sometimes through agencies never thought of*".

The allusion is obvious; and enquirers have a right to ask for an explanation of my withdrawal; they have good reason for the question, "*Why, when there have been daily meetings of thousands, and, as is alleged, weekly conversions of hundreds, should you keep aloof, and even look coldly on the movement?*" I will answer them directly.

Others may, on the contrary, enquire, "*What have you to do with the movement at all? If you don't like it, why not let it alone?*" I reply;

Firstly, because it concerns the glory of Christ, and I hope I have an interest in that.

Secondly, it concerns the welfare of my own congregation, many of whom have thought it their duty to frequent these meetings - and I hope I have an interest in that.

Thirdly, it concerns the welfare of the inhabitants of this town generally, who must be, in one way or another, seriously affected by the movement; and, I hope, as a public man, and a minister of Christ, I have an interest in that.

Now for the explanation of my moral and physical absence.

The Role of Women

It has been a source of unfeigned regret to me, that, in my conscience, I durst not identify myself with this alleged revival. I regret it, firstly, because it seems to be blowing cold on a warm and good work. Secondly, because the ministers of the denomination to which I refer, are, in my opinion, as a body, very effective preachers of the Gospel, and, when they keep to this legitimate work, are productive of immense good all over the world; and I do not like to censure any movement which they sanction; for let it be understood, I am not assailing Wesleyanism, but a religious agency which some Wesleyans employ. This agency I cannot approve, (and I have reason to believe that nearly all the ministers in this town are of the same opinion) because, in my deliberate judgment, it is both unnatural and unscriptural.

First, it is unnatural. The sphere of woman, even nature teaches us, is not the platform or the pulpit - which are so opposed to the "shamefacedness and sobriety" that Paul recommends. Lord Lyttleton's advice to females is quite in keeping with the apostle's;

*Seek to be good, but aim not to be great,
A woman's noblest station is - Retreat;
Her fairest virtues fly from public sight,
Domestic worth, - that shuns too strong a light.*

Milton, speaking of the difference between Adam and Eve, says;

*For contemplation he, and valour formed,
For softness she, and sweet attractive grace.
He for God only, she for God in him."*

And thus he has Eve address Adam;

*"Oh, thou for whom
And from whom I was formed, flesh of thy flesh,
And without whom, am to no end, my guide
And head!
My Author and Disposer, what thou bidd'st,
Unargued I obey. So God ordains;*

*God is thy law, thou mine: To know no more
Is woman's happiest knowledge, and her praise.*

Shakespeare in the same strain says;

*Tis Beauty, that doth oft make women proud;
'Tis Virtue that doth make them most admired:
'Tis Modesty that makes them seem divine.
A woman impudent and mannish grown,
Is not more loathed than an effeminate man.
Women are as roses, whose fair flower
Being once displayed, doth fall that very hour.*

We may, therefore, say with the poet Cowper;

*Ye ladies! (for, indifferent in your cause,
I should deserve to forfeit all applause)
Whatever shocks, or gives the least offence
To virtue, delicacy, truth, or sense.
(Try the criterion, 't is a faithful guide,)
Nor has, nor can have, Scripture on its side.*

Secondly, it is unscriptural; but on this point I would rather express myself in another's words than my own. First hear John Wesley on the celebrated text 1Timothy 2:10-14;

"To usurp authority over the man, i.e., by public teaching. Adam was first formed; so that woman was originally the inferior. Adam was not deceived. The serpent deceived Eve. She did not deceive Adam, but persuaded him. "Thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife". The preceding verse, viz., Adam was first formed, showed why a woman should not 'usurp authority over the man'. This verse, viz., the woman was deceived, shows why she ought not to 'teach'. She is more easily deceived, and more easily deceives. The woman being deceived, transgressed - 'The serpent deceived' her, Gen 3:13, and she transgressed."

I know that Wesley seems to make an exception to this rule in his notes on 1Cor 14:34; "Let your women keep silence in the churches;" i.e., says he,

"unless they are under an extraordinary impulse of the Spirit:" but with all deference to so great an authority, I submit this is, addition, not exposition, - for the very women to whom Paul refers, were "under an extraordinary impulse of the Spirit;" none else pretended to speak in the churches; and lest the Apostle's authority should be disputed he adds - *"If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord."*

Wesley's "unless" seems to me most perilous. In the Decalogue God says *"Thou shalt not steal;"* but what if a commentator were to add - "unless thou art under an extraordinary impulse of hunger!"

Next hear Dr Albert Barnes, the celebrated American commentator, on this text:

This rule is positive, explicit, and universal. There is no ambiguity in the expressions; and there can be no difference of opinion, one would suppose, in regard to their meaning. The sense evidently is, that in all those things which he had specified, the women were to keep silence; they were to take no part. He had discoursed of speaking foreign languages, and of prophecy; and the evident sense is, that in regard to all these, they were to keep silence, or were not to engage in them. These pertained solely to the male portion of the congregation. These constituted the business of the public teaching; and in this the female part of the congregation were to be silent. 'They were not to teach the people, nor were they to interrupt those who were speaking' - Rosenmuller. It is probable that, on pretence of being inspired, the women had assumed the office of public teachers. In chapter 11 Paul had argued against their doing this in a certain manner - without their veils, (1Cor 11:5) and he had shown that, on that account, and in that manner, it was improper for them to assume the office of public teachers, and to conduct the devotions of the church. The force of the argument in chapter 11 is that what he there states would be a sufficient reason against the practice, even if there were no other. It was contrary to all decency and propriety that they should appear in that manner in public. He here argues against the practice on every ground; forbids it altogether; and shows that on every consideration

it was to be regarded as improper for them even so much as to ask a question in time of public service. There is, therefore, no inconsistency between the argument in chapter 11 and the statement here; and the force of the whole is, that on every consideration it was improper, and to be expressly prohibited, for women to conduct the devotions of the church. No rule in the New Testament is more positive than this; and however plausible may be the reasons which may be urged for disregarding it, and for suffering women to take part in conducting public worship, yet the authority of the apostle Paul is positive, and his meaning cannot be mistaken.

'For it is a shame for women to speak in the churches'. It is disreputable and shameful; it is a breach of propriety. Their station in life demands modesty, humility, and they should be free from the ostentation of appearing so much in public as to take part in the public services of teaching...It does not become their rank in life; it is not fulfilling the object which God evidently intended them to fulfil. He has appointed men to rule; to hold offices; to instruct and govern the church; and it is improper that women should assume that office upon themselves. This evidently and obviously refers to the church assembled for public worship, in the ordinary and regular acts of devotion. There the assembly is made up of males and females, of old and young, and there it is improper for them to take part in conducting the exercises. But this cannot be interpreted as meaning that it is improper for females to speak...in meetings of their own sex, assembled for prayer or benevolence; nor that it is improper for a female to speak...in a sabbath school.

Neither of these can come under the apostle's idea of a church. And in such meetings, no rule of propriety or of the scriptures is violated in their speaking for the edification of each other. It may be added here, that on this subject the Jews were very strenuous, and their laws were very strict. The rabbis taught that a woman should know nothing but the use of the distaff; and they were especially prohibited from asking questions in the synagogue, or even from reading (see

Lightfoot). The same rule is still observed by the Jews in the synagogues."

Dr Palmer, in a letter to myself, justified female teaching - and as I am sure he will not be ashamed of his own arguments; as, too, they are no secret, I have no hesitation in giving them verbatim.

"If St. Paul's meaning is that females are to keep silence in the churches, why do our Episcopalian friends break the command at every service in responding, as they do, in their excellent service: I call it excellent, for I am no bigot: and if Paul meant that they should keep silence, why permit the ladies to sing? Is that not breaking the command, according to your rules of interpretation? I know the passages probably that you quoted, but do not intend to go into a defence of Paul, according to your showing, giving contrary instructions, - first, how they shall appear, and, as you think, afterwards forbidding it. As Jesus commissioned a lady first to proclaim a risen Saviour, even to them that were to be the great apostles to the world, may He not do the same now? He promises in the last day to pour out his Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy - they certainly did so on the day of Pentecost, or there could be no sense in Peter's sermon on that occasion, when he said - 'This is that which is spoken of by the prophet Joel.'"

Here it must be observed that Dr Palmer fully admits what some of his followers deny, viz., that "a lady" may "proclaim the risen Saviour." Of course, he means publicly, for this alone is the question - he does not attempt to split hairs, as many do, by distinguishing between "in the Churches" and in the Congregation - between speaking from the pulpit and speaking from the platform - between preaching and talking - between expounding and exhorting - he admits that the chief female agent in this movement, does and ought to "proclaim" publicly "the risen Saviour," to men, women, and children (Where will this end, if once the fence is broken through; if there may be "lady" evangelists [preaching from a church platform], why not "lady" pastors - nay why not "lady" bishops as well as "lord bishops?").

As to Mary Magdalene's "proclamation" - I don't call a private message a public proclamation. As to the prophesy of Joel - I don't set prophecy against precept. Dr Palmer maintains that because Peter said, "this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" - therefore, "the daughters" certainly did prophecy on the day of Pentecost - but Peter says also, "I will show blood and fire and vapour of smoke," and, therefore, according to the argument of Dr Palmer these phenomena must have appeared at the same time. Paul is speaking of inspired women when he says - "*it is a shame for women to speak in the Church.*" What if they have the gift of prophecy, they must not use that gift in public [meeting] - "*the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets.*" I know the gloss that would explain all this away.

I know it is pretended that female teaching is not the question here - but female discussion in the Church - this, however, will not do, for it is as great "a shame" for men to dispute in the Church as for women—why, then, should women be forbidden? Besides, the very reason for imposing female silence demonstrates that female usurpation is in debate, "it is not permitted them to speak, but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law." If, too, this reason forbids female questioning, all the more, it forbids female teaching. But, explain this away, if you like, you cannot so easily get rid of - "*I suffer not a woman to teach*" nor of the reasons that enforce it - which are of universal and permanent obligation. "Adam was first formed," "Adam was not deceived," "the woman was deceived."

The truth is that the weaker vessel - as the door through which "sin came into the world, and all our woe - for "the woman was deceived" - this sex is, in the present life, and as far as the body is concerned, under a denser cloud of suffering and humiliation than the other. Daily facts prove that the primeval sentence is not cancelled - "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception"- and it is very remarkable, as a confirmation of this sentence, that under the law, the mother of a male child was ceremonially unclean only half the time that was required to purify the mother of a female child (Lev 12).

Of course it is not disputed that many individuals of the female sex, are, in every respect, far superior to many individuals of the male sex - nay, I hold that "a good woman is the best thing in the world" - but then she must be in her right place. Even angels must not preach (Acts 10) - nor must women. Privacy is their proper sphere, and, when engaged in works of charity, nothing becomes them more than the visitation of the sick;

*"When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou."*

Publicity in woman is not to her credit, and the whole sex is dishonoured by it - "for it is a shame."

For these reasons, I cannot approve of the agency in question - it is unnatural, and unscriptural. Why, then, should any of my fellow Christians look coldly on me for obeying the dictates of my conscience? It is because I fear God, and "tremble at his word," not, as a writer in the Herald says, "because I cannot bear that any good should be done by others than myself, or in another way than my own," that I dare not sanction female teaching, but am bound to oppose it.

The Method of Operation

My second reason for keeping aloof is, that the method of operation, is, in my judgment, most illegitimate.

By all accounts that I have heard, and those from the most reliable sources, the “penitent form” or, as it is unscripturally called, “the altar of prayer,” is almost a *sine qua non* of “getting the blessing.” To this “mercy-seat” all are invited who desire salvation, and not only invited, but, if possible, persuaded, by frequent visitations in the pews; and, to my knowledge, several, in compliance, not with their judgment, but their feelings, have yielded to these entreaties. In truth I should not like to publish all I know about some who have gone to the communion rail, and about the means used to bring them there. But the necessary inference is, that salvation is not so likely to be found in the pew as on the form - that the truth spoken and heard in one place, is not so likely to impart peace, as when spoken and heard in another, and that there is a sort of spiritual charm attached to the favoured spot.

This I hold to be a pernicious delusion, directly calculated to deceive precious souls. That I have not misrepresented the operations will appear by the following extract from Mrs. P’s own letter to the Wynd Journal;

"A Christian brother, whom I had observed perhaps the first time about thirty days ago, kneeling at the altar of prayer, at one of the afternoon meetings, seeking the baptism of power, gave evidence that he had obtained the grace by the manner in which the Spirit spoke through him, in inducing others to yield to the claims of Christ. With no extraordinary influence of any sort, other than the gift of power with which Jesus would have all His disciples endued,- he went out among the people, and with the holy discernment and singleness of purpose which this endowment of power ever gives, he continued from day to day bringing forward to the penitent form one after another. One evening as I was observing his unobtrusive yet mighty influence, seemingly unmarked by other than the unseen angel with the ink-horn - and he had now come forward perhaps the sixth or seventh time that evening, leading those that he had ferretted out to

the altar of prayer- I could not but speak to him of the divine record which was being kept of those who sigh and cry for the peace of Jerusalem. Modestly, yet joyously, he exclaimed, "This is the fiftieth one the Lord has enabled me to bring! Think of a quiet unassuming man, with no extraordinary capabilities, either physical, intellectual, or social, being instrumental, in the hand of God, in leading fifty in a few days, to the foot of the cross!"

Again, the test of the love of Jesus is not a reasonable answer to a reasonable question, but a show of hands, which is no test at all. What shadow of a proof is there that any one loves Jesus, simply because he holds up his hands? Nor is this test only untrue - it tempts to hypocrisy, for who would like to keep down his hands, and thereby publicly proclaim that he did not love Jesus? None would do so but those (and they are not many) who have sense enough to decline this unscriptural criterion. The same may be said of the test of anxiety - it is a show of hands, or an advancement to the rail - which is no test at all. It would be just as unwarrantable - but not more so - if I were to say to you, "All ye that love Jesus stand up"? Who would not stand up? And who would be the better for the posture? Nay, rather, I believe that the worst of you would stand up, and the best sit still as you ought to do.

That this too is no misrepresentation, will appear by the following extract from a letter of the same lady to the same journal;

"The work here bids fair to exceed anything we remember to have witnessed, either in America or Europe. Last night the large chapel in Sans-street was densely crowded, and many, I presume, went away for want of room; but the best of all is, God was with us in His wonder-working power. The number of the convicted I would scarcely dare to estimate. The Rev Mr Rawlings, one of the able staff of Wesleyan ministers here, gives it as his opinion, that the number could not have been less than five hundred. The penitent-form and every place available for the accommodation of seekers, was filled till we could invite no more forward. Dr Palmer then, standing on a seat in the midst of the dense crowd, announced, 'We are informed that the people are weeping all over the house, and that there are

hundreds of awakened sinners here. In view of the fact we cannot invite you forward for want of room; we desire to know where you are, in order that we may unite our supplications on your behalf. (!) The Saviour of sinners is willing to save you wherever you may be, [why, then, invite them forward?] and let all those who desire to seek the Lord, raise the right hand.' Quickly multitudes, in every part of the house, threw up their right hand. Probably not less than two or three hundred of these raising their right hand, were among those standing in the gallery. I will not attempt to describe the effect of this acknowledgment of convicting power, as Dr Palmer requested that everyone desiring prayers, would continue to keep their hand upraised, until heaven's recording angel might write the name in the book of God's remembrance. (!!) Under such circumstances, we cannot say how many were blessed with pardoning mercy. Over a hundred names have been recorded, of those who have presented themselves as subjects of prayer. But oh! what a mighty impulse did my faith receive at our afternoon meeting yesterday. Hundreds were out. Ministers and people of various denominations mingled with us, [but not all in sympathy] as at Newcastle; but the point at which my faith began to rise, and claim "great and mighty things" was when I saw the office-bearers of the church - leading men and women of the church and community - come forward to the altar of prayer, humbly acknowledging their resolve, that they would never rest without the gift of power delegated to the early disciples."

The true test of piety is - knowledge of the truth - consistency of conduct - and confession of Christ by openly and regularly joining his people, and submitting to his ordinances.

Again - those who come to the rail are led to suppose that they must make quick work of it, or else go away unsaved, as there are many more waiting for the "movement of the waters," who cannot get healed where they are, but must take their turn at the "mercy seat." The result is, that these professed penitents are on an unhealthy *qui vive* for any sudden emotion which feels like "the blessing;" they are therefore peculiarly accessible to the operations of Satan in the guise of an angel of light - they are also

tempted to hypocrisy, for if No. 1 avows that he has “got the blessing,” (an unmeaning phrase by the way, for it leaves in doubt what blessing is meant) No. 2 will not like to go empty away, so he is naturally prompted to make the same avowal - the same may be said of No. 3 and the rest. Then comes another batch, and another, and another, who all go through the same process, the names are taken down, and the grand results are published to the world. Now all this I believe to be both unscriptural and dangerous, and therefore I cannot join in it.

I say nothing of the confusion and strife of tongues in these meetings - the unmeaning loud responses, and doxologies, not suppressed but encouraged by the teachers, who, on one occasion, told the people that there was “more noise in heaven than amongst them.” I speak not of the whole scenes so opposed to Paul's inspired direction, “*Let all things be done decently and in order,*” and so alien from the mind of God, “*who is the author of peace, and not of confusion, as in all the churches of the saints*” - but I do feel that my position as a minister of nineteen years standing in this town, demands some deliverance from me on the general movement; and now you have it God is my witness - not in ridicule, but in regret - not in sarcasm, but in sorrow - not in anger, but in gravity and in grief: nor can I believe that the best ministers and members of this sect, throughout the country, approve of what is being done.

Principles

But it may be objected, that there is much good done by this agency. I answer;

Firstly, show me, not phenomena, but principles - and if I find the latter to be wrong, I need proceed no further.

Some indeed are of Alexander Pope's mind, who said -

*For modes of faith, let senseless bigots fight,
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right.*

As long as there are good appearances, there is no further examination, and John's caution, "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God," has no meaning for them; but excuse me, if before I eat the pretty berries, I enquire on what tree they grew.

Secondly, if good has been done, I reply, in Paul's words, "that we must not do evil that good may come," and to employ a forbidden agency is "to do evil."

Thirdly, the Providence of God is not our rule, but his word, and this prohibits the agency. God may, and does, bestow blessings through many forbidden instrumentalities, as, for example, the preaching of unconverted men, or the celebration of unscriptural rites. I can easily fancy the solemn spectacle of a young lady taking the veil, being the occasion of serious and saving impressions to some of the spectators - but who would argue from this, that to take the veil, must be God's institution.

*He that would win the race, must guide his horse,
Obedient to the customs of the course.*

Fourthly, if there is much good done, is there not also much evil? - the good is blazed abroad ; the evil is not known, or not made known. Let me tell you some of it. To my certain knowledge, many sober and consistent Christians, including ministers, elders, and missionaries, have been greatly grieved by what they have seen and heard. One minister, who was present at the meetings, told me, that if that was religion, he would prefer popery. But perhaps the greatest evil is, that through this forbidden agency, the

Christians of different denominations, nay, of the same denomination, ministers and people, have been “set by the ears,” for those who have been bold enough to protest against female teaching have irritated its defenders, and given occasion to the utterance of “hard things”. In other words, there has been “schism,” but the guilt of it lies not at the door of the protesters, but of the defenders. I fear too, for reasons you shall hear anon, that multitudes have been falsely converted; not, of course, intentionally, but as the natural result of the unwarrantable means employed.

Fifthly, I do not deny the personal goodness of the agents - or their good intentions - or that they have done some real good - but this is not the question. I demand principles before I investigate phenomena.

So much for the objection that great good has been accomplished - I rejoice in the good done, I lament the evil by which it has been done.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I too have been working for a Revival, and some short-sighted people imagine that because as yet there has been no great noise amongst us, nothing has been accomplished - but has the farmer done nothing when he has tilled the ground, and sowed the seed ? Are all prayers lost that are not at once answered? Wait till the autumn, and you will see that tilling and sowing are not to be despised. Says the apostle James *"Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruits, and hath long patience for it."* I have no wish to run before God, and so catch the shell. I prefer to walk behind him, and so get the kernel.

I dare not say with Mrs Palmer in one of her letters - "Where is the locality in which a Revival may not take place at once? Thousands may be converted in Manchester in a week." My answer to this question is - *"The wind bloweth where it listeth...so is every one that is born of the Spirit."*

*Oh, how unlike the complex works of man
God's easy, artless, unencumber'd plan!
No meretricious graces to beguile,
No clustering ornaments to clog the pile;
From ostentation, as from weakness, free
It stands like the Cerulean arch we see
Majestic in its own simplicity.*

*Inscribed above the portals, from afar,
Conspicuous as the brightness of a star,
Legible only by the light they give
Stand the soul-quickenning words - Believe and Live.
Too many shocked at what should charm them most,
Despise the plain direction, and are lost!*

PS - if any one, in a Christian spirit, and by sound argument (not by the ascription of bad motives, and of Satanic instigation) can convince me that I am wrong, I will sincerely and publicly thank him; for I should be too happy to be able, with a good conscience, to co-operate in a Religious Revival.

In 1859 Dr Walter Palmer and Mrs Phoebe Palmer, from the United States, set foot in Sunderland and began preaching. Their meetings in Sans Street Chapel caused so much of a stir that many began to whisper about 'Revival'.

Rees gave the address of this booklet to his congregation at Bethesda Free Church as an answer to what was taking place in Sans Street. His address attracted so much publicity that he repeated it in a second meeting and, upon request, had it published.

Rees was the founder and pastor of Bethesda Free Church, Sunderland, from 1845-1884.



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