

## WHY I AM A PROTESTANT

First, let me disabuse the minds of any of you who may have come here expecting to hear a debate. This is in no sense a debate. Were such the case, there is at least one speaker who would surely be absent. I do not believe that there is ever much to be gained through debating religious questions, in the first place. In the second place, even though I believed in debating, I should certainly not have the temerity to strike lances with such seasoned knights as these who appear with me on this platform. This is rather a conference. We are not here to argue with each other, but to explain to each other. We represent, each one of us, a different way of life. We are therefore to tell what we have found as we have traveled our own road. We are to try to indicate some of the winsome and worthwhile goals to which our particular quest has brought us. Our purpose is not to point out the demerits of the other man's way of life, but rather to show some of the merits of our own. Where demerits are pointed out or insinuated, it will only be incidental and by way of contrast.

This discussion is therefore an adventure in mutual understanding. We are convinced that the better we know each other, the more we see into each other's minds and hearts, the more tolerant we shall be, and the more we shall come to an attitude of brotherly regard, each for the other. For to know each other more fully, I am sure, will be to love each other more freely. It is ignorance and misunderstanding of our fellows that make contempt for them so easy. "I hate that man," said Charles Lamb vehemently. "Why?" replied his friend in astonishment, "I did not think that you even knew him." "I don't," was the reply. "That is the reason I hate him."

I

I am to tell you why I am a Protestant. My first step in holding this faith is my belief in God. This bracing faith I rejoice to share with both my Jewish and Catholic brothers, Rabbi Barnston and Mr. O'Brien. We three set out together. We begin shoulder to shoulder and arm in arm, even if we do find it necessary to draw apart somewhat as we continue our journey. Only Mr. Darrow walks alone all the way. He has no companion for a single inch of the journey. And this I say, if the lot of loneliness ought to fall to any man, it certainly ought to be to him, because he is so magnificently capable of seeing it through. We three come, saying with conviction, "I believe in God." He comes, saying, "I do not know."

1. I believe in God because this faith satisfies my reason. As I look about me I discover an ordered world, a universe that is law-abiding. Everywhere are indications of intelligence. I cannot believe that all this is the product of blind forces that had no prevision of what they were making. If you tell me that you bought a new car, my first question is, "What make is it?" I cannot conceive of so efficient a piece of machinery being the product of a fortuitous concurrence of electrons. No more can I conceive of this infinite universe except as the work of an Infinite Maker. Therefore I heartily agree with that majestic sentence that is the first word of the Hebrew Bible, "In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth."

2. I believe in God because this faith seems to me to be sanctioned by the facts of life. Carlyle tells us that if we build a lie into a stone wall it will topple into ruins. But if this faith is false and agnosticism true, then a lie is more constructive

than the truth. For faith in God has ever been constructive. It has been the builder of our most hopeful and helpful men and women. It has been the builder of some of our greatest civilizations. Those holding this faith have builded our churches and our schools. They have builded our hospitals for the sick and our asylums for the handicapped and the sick in mind. Agnosticism does not build. It is a negative force. If all the beds were removed from our hospitals except those put there by agnostics, our sick would not have a place to lay their heads.

3. I believe in God because I believe in man. I believe with Tennyson in "this main miracle that I am I with power on mine own act and on the world." I believe that I am a personality. Personality implies the power to know, the power to will and the power to love. These powers I am conscious of possessing. I believe that the one back of these powers possesses them in a yet fuller degree. "He that made the eye, shall He not see, and He that made the ear, shall He not hear?" I believe in God because I believe that man is a personality and not a machine.

4. I believe in God because of the testimony of human experience. One of the chief glories of the Bible is that it is a human book. It is a book rich in the findings of those spiritual adventurers who have gone in search of God. "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep." So sang one of these explorers of the long ago. Not everybody is willing to do business in great waters. I am told that in Sumatra grown men will sit all day upon rice ridges and fish in the shallow waters between the furrows. That is their privilege. But having done so they have no right to laugh at or to dispute the findings of those who have done business in great waters.

It is easy, I know, to criticize some of the stories of the Bible, especially those of the Old Testament. It is easy to poke fun at that argumentative serpent and Balaam's over-talkative ass. It is quite easy to change Jonah from a prophet into a clown by giving ourselves to the wooden task of measuring a fish's throat. But the crudeness of many of these stories is of the letter rather than of the spirit. They represent the early trails along which these spiritual pioneers went in search of God. The trails that our fathers made through the American wilderness would seem very crude by the side of our modern highways, but these modern highways were made possible through their crude trails. And these spiritual pioneers, in spite of the seemingly crude roads by which they traveled, came to amazing discoveries. They came to realize a shepherding God as we read in the Twenty-third Psalm. They came to an amazing understanding of man's whole privilege and duty as is stated in that magnificent sentence from the prophet Micah: "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

The truth of the discoveries made by these spiritual pioneers is confirmed by an innumerable company outside the Bible that no man can number, both Jews and Catholics, and Protestants. Those who have dared to adventure have come into a definite awareness of God. This is the testimony of countless millions, and I, for one, believe that discoveries in the realm of the spiritual are just as valid as the discoveries in the realm of the physical.

## II

My next step in being a Protestant is that I am a Christian. I believe in Jesus, the Christ. Here I will have to part company,

in some measure, with my Jewish brother. I do so with profound respect. I do so, also, with deep appreciation of the contribution that the Jewish people have made. They have been the greatest light-bearers of any one single race that the world has ever known. But this is my consolation as we come to the parting of the ways: I do not have to surrender one single value that belongs to my Jewish brother. I only lay hold, as I see it, of other and larger values that he does not possess.

1. In becoming a Christian I do not have to surrender the Jewish Bible, the Old Testament. As a Christian I sit at the feet of its great prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Amos, even as my Jewish brother. I do not have to throw away one single page of it. My Master said emphatically, "I come not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill." Therefore, as a Christian, I hold every precious truth of the Old Testament.

But while holding to this truth, I feel I come to a better understanding of it, and to even newer and fuller truth, in the New Testament. I am persuaded that Jesus added real values when he said, "Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time . . . . . but I say unto you." I believe the spiritual life of the world has been immeasurably enriched by these added sayings of Jesus, by His sermon on the mount, and by his matchless parables. I believe that we should be vastly poorer for the loss of Paul's immortal ode to love in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians.

2. In the second place, in passing from Judaism to Christianity, I do not have to give up the God of Israel. Everything of worth, of winsomeness, of majesty and loveliness and power that the Jews claim in God, we claim. In addition to this we are profoundly sure that we have come to a clearer understanding of God

through Jesus Christ our Lord. We believe that God has come closer to us through Him. We believe that He spoke sober truth when He said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." We believe further that John, who came closest to the heart of Jesus, learned through Him to write the most precious and hopeful single sentence in all the literature of the world, "God is love."

We believe as profoundly as any Jew that God spoke through the prophets, but we believe in addition that "He who in time past spake unto us through the prophets, has in these last times spoken unto us through His Son." Speaking as a Christian, I say reverently that Jesus Christ is all I can desire in manhood. He is all I can long for in God. To my mind the greatest compliment that we can possibly pay to God Himself is to say that He is like Jesus.

"If Jesus Christ is a man -  
And only a man, - I say  
That of all mankind I cleave to Him,  
And to Him will I cleave alway.

"If Jesus Christ is a god, -  
And the only God, - I swear  
I will follow Him through Heaven and hell,  
The earth, the sea, and the air!"

### III

My final step toward Protestantism is that I am not only a Christian, but a Protestant Christian. It is only fair to say that I was born into this faith. Every other speaker on this platform still continues to hold the faith into which he was born. This does not mean that men never change. The Jews have welcomed many proselytes, Catholics have become Protestants, and Protestants have become Catholics. But the chances are overwhelmingly great that we remain in the faith in which we were born and reared. This

in itself ought to make us very tolerant and very gentle in our judgments. I have chosen to remain in the Protestant faith for the following reasons:

1. Protestantism has been rich in popular progress. Our Catholic brother will doubtless tell you that Protestantism has been chiefly fruitful in producing discord and numerous religious denominations. We are not denying these many denominations. They are a part of the price we have had to pay for the right to think for ourselves. But we do maintain that, even in the midst of our outward differences, there has been much unity of spirit, and a widespread agreement on things essential. We believe further that this spiritual oneness is growing with the passing of the years, and that this is the oneness for which Jesus prayed and prays still. He is not seeking uniformity. He is a God of variety. He will soon hang billions of leaves upon the trees, but no two of them will be alike. Nor does He make any two men alike. He is moving toward unity of spirit in the midst of variety. But even confessing that Protestantism has been and is now weakened by its lack of agreement, it still has nothing of which to feel ashamed in the presence of a united Catholicism when the practical results of **their** ministries are compared.

2. As I survey Christendom today, and put in one column those countries that are predominantly Protestant, and in another those that are predominantly Catholic, I find that the Protestant countries have, as a rule, made larger material progress than the countries that are Catholic. Take for example the United States, which is only one-sixth Catholic, as compared with Mexico and the South American republics that are overwhelmingly Catholic.

2. Then I find, as I compare Protestant countries with Catholic countries, that popular education is, as a rule, far more prevalent in Protestant countries than in Catholic countries. By this I do not mean to deny that the Catholics educate their leadership, and educate them well. Nor do I mean to say that the larger illiteracy found in Catholic countries is deliberate. What I do say is that, as a rule, popular education is more prevalent in Protestant than in Catholic countries. To test this compare again our own country with our sister republics of the south. Compare Holland with Belgium. Compare Switzerland with Italy. Compare the Germany that was with the Austria that was.

3. But if Protestantism has no more to say for itself than that it makes for material and intellectual progress, it still leaves much to be desired. It might be possible for a nation to be well clothed and well fed and well housed, and well rotted all at the same time. But Protestantism has been rich in spiritual progress. It has been, and is, a character building religion. It has been the mother of some of the world's choicest saints. Mark you, I am not disparaging the saints of the Catholic Church. I honor Saint Francis of Assisi. I honor yet more Francis Xavier, who in ten short years learned to preach in twenty languages. But along with them I can name John Wesley, John Bunyan, George Fox and John Knox, - men who put their hands upon their nations and pushed them into new zones of light.

We believe that Protestantism is especially adapted to the making of the highest type of saint because of its insistence upon the right of private judgment; because, also, of its greater concern for the inwardness of religion rather than its externalities. Every religion is in danger, at times, of making the doing of holy things



a substitute for a holy life. Every religion is in danger of committing that sin against which Isaiah thundered so fiercely - mingling wickedness and worship. I believe Protestantism is less subject to that danger because it is less concerned with outward forms. Therefore, we affirm with confidence that Protestantism gets results in terms of lives remade, that it produces its proportionate part of saints who have been and are the salt of the earth.

4. I remain a Protestant because I am so profoundly catholic. Every Sunday I lead my people in this confession of our faith, "I believe in the holy catholic church." I sincerely believe in the oneness of all true believers. Therefore, when you sing "Lead, Kindly Light," by Cardinal Newman, and "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy, Like the Wideness of the Sea" by Faber; when you sing "Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee With Sweetness Fills the Breast" by Bernard of Clairvaux, or when you sing that choicest of Christmas hymns, "Silent Night," that also came out of your great church, I join with you heartily. But when we sing "O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go," or "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," - when we sing "Nearer, My God To Thee," or "Blest Be the Tie That Binds Our Hearts in Christian Love," I regret that one wing of the great choir lapses into silence. And when we come to the end of the journey we must sleep in different grave yards. But the edict that separates us was not issued by Protestantism. I am a Protestant, then, because I am so enthusiastically catholic.

5. Finally, I am a Protestant because I believe that Protestantism is the nearest approach that we have to primitive Christianity, which is our real mother church.

For instance, when we turn the pages of the New Testament

one of the first facts that impresses us about this early church is its democracy. It was not a monarchy, nor even an oligarchy, but a brotherhood. It was not Peter's church, nor was it the church of the apostles. It was the church of the people. Preachers and laymen worked and planned together. There is no slightest hint of a hard and rigid ecclesiasticism. Whatever modern Christians do, there is surely no indication that the early Christians called any man "Father" upon the earth. That same democracy is more nearly approached by Protestantism today than by Catholicism.

Then, as you look at this history of the early church you see further that the only appeal made by its membership in proclaiming the gospel, whether lay or clerical, was the appeal of the truth. They knew no authority except the authority of the truth. They did not appeal to the authority of an infallible book. They did not appeal to the authority of an infallible church. No more did they appeal to the authority of an infallible man who had been made head of the church. It is true that Christ promised that He would give the Spirit of Truth to guide, but this Spirit is for every member of the body of Christ. This is Peter's own declaration. "This promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Protestantism to this day rests its faith on no man's infallibility nor on the infallibility of any work from man's hand.

Last of all, as we turn the pages of our New Testament, we learn of every man's right to approach God for himself without any human "go-between." One day Jesus told a story of a laddie that broke away from home, went into a far country and wasted his substance with riotous living. At last, broken in heart and bowed with shame, he set out to return to his home. When he was yet a

great way off his father saw him. But when he saw him he did not send any servant to meet him and bid him welcome. He himself went and fell on his neck and kissed him. And Jesus said God is like that. And when the son poured out his confession of sin it was not into the ear of his elder brother, it was into the ear of his father. Protestantism proclaims the right of every man, even the last and the lowest and the least, to come boldly to a throne of grace and meet God face to face. This faith I have found good in my own experience, and when the journey is over, not trusting in the church nor leaning upon an arm of flesh, I hope to go out with confidence, with the words within my heart that I have learned from our common Lord, "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit."