

(on account of misunderstandings and erroneous statement which have been circulated throughout the world, concerning one of the large divisions of the Bible Students, we herewith reprint [March, 1928], in full, the following article with reference to the objects and purposes of the PASTORAL BIBLE INSTITUTE.)

OUR ASSOCIATION TOGETHER IN THE MINISTRY

Methods and Forms of Edifying the Body of Christ

FROM the beginning of this association known as The Pastoral Bible Institute, and the publishing of "The Herald of Christ's Kingdom," about ten years ago, the Bible teaching on the subject of Christian liberty, the basis of Christian fellowship, the present mission and work of the Church, Church organization, etc., have been given special prominence. This was done for the reason that these issues have been much beclouded and the truth largely hidden, not only generally throughout the Age, but particularly in these recent years; and this, too, notwithstanding the fact that Brother Russell ceased not to hold up the truth on these subjects and to admonish the brethren to avoid all organizational bondage and to zealously maintain their liberty in Christ and the right of individual judgment in the matter of deciding points of faith and teaching.

The open and free discussion of these subjects mentioned above have become the occasion for various inquiries as to the existence of the Pastoral Bible Institute, why it exists, what is its mission, and if there is not some conflict between the Scriptural thought of remaining free in Christ, and of being identified with an association of this kind.

The Consequences of a Crisis

It is not to be wondered at that some of the friends who have had such sad experiences in getting free from a state of bondage to an organization should be inclined to swing to the other extreme of the pendulum and be disposed to absent themselves entirely from every kind of an association, even from being identified with an ordinary Ecclesia of friends, feeling that they might become entangled again. However it is the sober and dispassionate view that will be found to be in harmony with the spirit of a sound mind.

At various times these inquiries have been dealt within the pages of the "Herald;" but for the benefit of a considerable number of new readers, and in response to various inquiries that continue to come, we are reviewing the subject again.

Briefly, the fiery experiences, the painful and distressing circumstances that have developed amongst the brethren in these recent years, became the occasion for the forming of this association. The passing of Brother Russell in 1916, as is well known, resulted in a general crisis in the work in which we were all engaged. The change in the management and controllership of the institution conducting the work meant a complete change in the spirit, policy, and methods of administration; and in that same connection brethren who had served long years in association with Brother Russell and who had occupied important positions of trust and responsibility, were summarily dismissed from their offices and posts, of duty for no reason whatever other than that of their stand in defense of the principles of the Truth, love, justice,

and righteousness and the life-work and ministry of Brother Russell. As a result of this general sad situation—departures, changes, and innovations—many problems, questions, and issues of the most vital importance, involving the Truth and the liberty of the people of God, came before the brethren the world over. Out of this crisis and upheaval that immediately followed, in which many brethren everywhere were deeply affected, there came into existence this association designated the “Pastoral Bible Institute;” friends everywhere meeting with practically, the same tests of faith and being called upon to face substantially the same issues and problems, involving their loyalty to Christ the Head, saw the special advantages of uniting together and forming this association for mutual encouragement, and in authorizing the publication of a semi-monthly journal and such other forms and statements of the Truth as would be within their power; recognizing that by uniting their efforts much more could be accomplished than for each Ecclesia to attempt to work separately in an individual way.

Safe-Guarding the Liberties of the Brethren

Now it was in order that the friends of various Classes in the country might carry out this plan of a united ministry and service that it was deemed advisable to provide a business corporation, or organization. Funds were needed—indeed voluntary contributions toward a treasury commenced at once. And in order that the contributors themselves might exercise the right and power to control the distribution of the funds so that they would be dispensed in what to them would be proper channels, matters were placed upon a legal basis in the form of a business membership corporation which provided that any one contributing to the amount of five dollars should be given a certificate of membership, entitling him to a voice in the management of the Institute’s affairs, its business meetings, elections, etc. This method of procedure was followed after very careful and prayerful deliberation, and the earnest desire of the brethren was that everything in the nature of headship would be avoided and no opportunity left open for an ambitious individual or a company of individuals to usurp a position of authority, and lord it over God’s heritage.

In keeping with this original purpose the brethren who have been exercising the stewardship of this ministry, have not taken on themselves these offices, privileges, responsibilities, or to any extent sought to, act on their own initiative. It was only after they were appealed to by hundreds of brethren in all parts of the world that this plan for mutual encouragement and for carrying on a ministry was formed; one of the provisions being that those whom the friends desired should thus serve and discharge this responsibility should be elected annually by the brethren at large.

“Decently and in Order”

Let the facts be clearly known that this association of the Institute is not in any sense a religious organization nor does it represent the formation of a Church or Ecclesia, but acts merely as a means or agency by which a religious work can be carried on by brethren of various Ecstasies or Churches and by which they might co-operate and act together “decently and in order.” Accordingly, this association has drawn up no creed nor formula of belief; none of those who become members are questioned as to what they believe; nor are they questioned as to their religious faith and practice. There are no articles of faith to be subscribed to and no, tests of fellowship made, nor any attempt made to judge or determine just who are members

of the true Church and who are not. Moreover this Institute makes no claims whatever to being a Divine "Channel" over the House of God, a thing never, authorized by the Lord with regard to, any except Christ and the Apostles.

From the foregoing it should be evident to all that there is no bondage to any one in any measure whatever in connection with this ministry; nor are the liberties of any of the brethren interfered with in regard to studying and interpreting the Scriptures, or in regard to methods of service and dispensing the Truth. Each brother and each Class of brethren is left entirely free to conduct their own affairs and to decide what shall be their method of Bible study, service, etc.

Let it be clearly understood too, that this Institute undertakes to elect none as Elders of Churches nor to ordain any as teachers. Such matters as these are altogether for each Ecclesia to attend to within its own precincts, and apart from any outside interference of any kind. In the case of brethren who are sent forth by the Institute to visit and to minister to Classes as Pilgrims, these are selected from among those who are already Elders, having been duly elected by some Ecclesia of friends. Such brethren thus sent forth as pilgrims to minister are directed to visit only such Classes as request their service and ministry; and there is no insistence that any Ecclesia shall receive the visits of the traveling brother unless they fully believe that his ministry would be uplifting to them spiritually.

Asked as to the Scripturalness of a business arrangement for conducting a general service amongst the churches, the reply is that we know of nothing in the Scriptures forbidding the use of a business concern such as described above. The Lord's people are exhorted to use the spirit of a sound mind in all things, and to do whatsoever they do unto the glory of God. The Apostle assures us that "the end of the commandment is love," and that "love worketh no ill to his neighbor." (1 Tim. 1:5; Rom. 13:10.) The preaching of the Gospel is a ministry of love, and any device that will encourage or facilitate such holy service in harmony with the principle of justice and love is to be lauded and not condemned. True enough, we do not read of any business corporation being authorized in the early Church, nor for the Church subsequently; but neither do we read of the brethren of that time riding on railway trains, and making use of such devices as we have in modern times. The increase of the human family, and the advance of civilization and commercialism has become the occasion for the introduction of various legal instruments and arrangements by which the world's business might be transacted orderly. The matter of a corporation is one of those provisions which the Lord's people may make use of just the same as they may make use of a railway train, although St. Paul journeyed hundreds of miles on foot:

Other Methods Unwise to Follow

It is true that other methods of procedure might be adopted: One of these is for the friends to select some one individual and place the entire responsibility of the ministry in his hands, look to him for guidance and follow his leadership. But our experience is that it would not be wise or safe to place so much authority and responsibility in any one person, or rely so much upon his wisdom or the exercise of his executive powers. Our experience furthermore, since the beginning of this form or method of ministry, is that there is no one person to be found anywhere who would be generally and uniformly as wise or as uniformly effective in any particular as a committee of brethren or board of trustees and an editorial staff. We have on

more than one occasion had opportunity to give thanks that matters have not been left to the exclusive control of one person, either as to his acts in important matters or as to the wisdom displayed; even though assuming that such an one would always walk in safe paths made for his feet.

Moreover, if it be suggested that some one church be authorized to act and have charge of the ministry over all the other churches, there is serious objection to this also; for there is no one ecclesia or congregation in a position, as far as we know, able to undertake and carry on the work now done by the Institute; and it has become very manifest that it was needful, therefore, that those interested in this ministry must be of several congregations and from the isolated ones—indeed, from over the whole habitable globe. Furthermore, we thought and still think that it is better that these interested ones should have an opportunity to exercise a supervision and control over the directors and, through them, over the editors, such as would measure up to their individual and collective responsibilities, rather than that this particular service should be in the control of a single ecclesia or congregation, even should one ultimately come to such a position of influence as to be able to undertake such a work. It would require a framework and organization in some one church, not originally contemplated and not found in the apostolic body, and would very likely tend to make some metropolitan church self-controlled, without possible interference by, others interested, and thus put it in a position not conducive to the welfare of the Body of Christ.

It must be borne in mind that the apostolic Church as the visible church did not maintain its original purity and humility, but degenerated into a condition of subservience to a metropolitan church or churches; and so the first danger to be guarded against now, is the control of interchurch activities by any one congregation, rather than that the Institute composed of many congregations, would dominate any one ecclesia.

No Organizational Control

In the plan of procedure that has been followed, in the order of this Institute, there is no one-man controllership permitted; neither controllership by a group or, a committee of brethren, nor by any one central congregation or ecclesia of the friends. The affairs of the ministry are entirely in the hands of the friends at large, of various ecclesias; and through the election each year they may determine who shall be entrusted with the responsibilities of the service, the management, etc., as well as decide what methods shall be followed and what shall be the character of the ministry. The brethren at large therefore have it in their power to make any changes that may seem best at any time. From the standpoint of the foregoing explanation, none have anything whatever to fear with regard to bondage or to being deprived of their liberty in Christ in any sense. None are urged to become members of the Institute, nor is membership in this association in any sense or to any degree made the test of fellowship or of service; brethren who are not members of the Institute and who have abilities and talents as teachers and who display the spirit of the Lord are given equal share in the ministry to that of other brethren who are members of the Institute. So then, membership in this Institute is nothing so far as gaining a standing in Christ is concerned; neither is membership in this association any means whatever by which to measure one's spirituality or nearness to the Lord. For as the Scriptures clearly point out, it is a new creature alone that counts; to be a new creature is

everything, and membership in Christ is everything. But getting into Christ is an individual matter and is not effected by any device, institute, or organization that we as the Lord's people may form, but by a personal knowledge of God and by hearing the call from Him to believe on His dear Son and to surrender all to Him. Such Alone is the way of becoming enrolled as a member of Christ's Church and such are said to have their names written in heaven.

As before stated, the object of the membership feature in this institution is merely to preserve in the hands of those who are contributors the right that is properly theirs of deciding how the funds shall be used and in what direction they shall be appropriated. Membership in the Institute carries with it no responsibilities so far as subscribing to any form of belief is concerned, and no one in becoming a member is in any sense of the word joining a church or in any way becoming entangled in a church organization.

Not for Great and Wonderful Works

Let the facts be clearly seen further, then, that there is no purpose or effort on the part, of any one associated in the Institute to build up a great movement or "organization," nor to attract a great following; we are evidently very near the end of the Age and the true saints are surely very few in number. Any one therefore who is ambitious to create a great organization or movement composed of true footstep followers of Christ would surely be disappointed.

Nor has this association, this uniting of the energies and activities of the friends in general, been with the object in view of doing a "great and wonderful work" amongst men. As has been repeatedly pointed out in the "Herald" the Church in the flesh have never been authorized to attempt to do any great work of either witnessing or of reformation that would have to do with affecting either the masses of the world or the multitudes of professing Christians in Christendom. The work of the Church as is well known to Bible students was never intended to be of any large proportions in this Age, for it has merely to do with announcing the Message so as to reach those who have ears to hear and thus gather out of the world "a people for His name." The true Gospel Message has never been popular because the darkness still hateth the light. The "great work" of the Church as the Scriptures clearly point out will be after all the faithful called-out saints of this Gospel Age have been glorified together with Christ and compose the Kingdom of God. That will be after Satan is bound and the times of restitution are ushered in. Meantime "the present. work and mission of the Church, is that of the perfecting of the saints for the future work of service, to develop in herself every grace, to be God's witness to the world and to prepare to be kings and priests in the next Age."

Neglecting the Work of the Spirit

Time and again it has become obvious that those who are seized with the idea that their mission, as God's people, is that of "doing a work," or engaging in a great outward movement, have lost sight of the real work of the Church; that of the growth and development of spirituality, that of giving attention to the development of the fruits of the Spirit, the fruits of love, patience, long-suffering, meekness, gentleness, brotherly kindness and love; such qualities as represent the completely rounded-out Christian character which will be qualified to undertake the great work or the great mission of the coming Age, that of instructing and of uplifting all humanity. Those

who have attempted to organize God's Zion and do a great work for Him have ever displayed great outward activity; "increased in goods," and "great and wonderful works" for the Lord, are the boasts of all those who have been set up by men as Divine agencies over the Church. Great ecclesiastical activity and works is offered as the seal or proof that they are "God's organization;" but such evidence is turned by the true Word of God into the occasion of their condemnation. Thus Jesus foretells how some will ultimately come to Him "in that day," claiming the right of entering into the inheritance of the saints on the basis of their activities, "Have we not done wonderful works?" And Jesus declares that their wonderful works will receive no recognition, inasmuch as they will have neglected the real work of grace, the work of the Spirit in the heart, the work of producing the character-likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ which alone will constitute any person fit for membership with Christ in the glorified Kingdom and fit to share with Him the responsibilities and honors thereof.

It has been in keeping with what the Scriptures teach to be the true and spiritual work of the Church, that this arrangement known as the Institute was formed. Looking back now over the past ten years of the ministry conducted in this form; it should be apparent to any one that the purposes of the brethren have merely been to be all the spiritual help they possibly can to the scattered friends in various parts of the world; to assist them to be of good courage and in a general way to assist in edifying and building up the Lord's people in spiritual things. To this end therefore special effort has been made by the brethren to preserve the purity and simplicity of the teachings of Christ and the Apostles and to uphold the Truth in general; further, to encourage and to enable the friends as far as possible, to maintain a proper poise and balance spiritually amidst all the perplexities and confusion of the present hour, and in that same connection, by a generally united effort to more effectively bear testimony to the Truth and carry on a work of the ministry to whatever extent it might please the Lord in the remaining days while we sojourn in the flesh.

"A New Commandment I Give unto You"

As is known by many, the chief and principal features of the ministry relate to the issuing of the semi-monthly journal, "The Herald of Christ's Kingdom," and otherwise sending forth the Divine Message in printed form by means of books, leaflets, etc.; additionally, that of assisting brethren of ability to travel from place to place and minister the word of grace to larger or smaller groups of friends who desire and request such service. The Lord has very graciously blessed what has been done up to the present time. Since the starting of this journal nearly ten years ago, we have been brought into communication with brethren in all parts of the world; many tell of their pain and heartaches during the recent years and of the grace of the Lord that has so marvelously sustained and kept them through all of these experiences. These also write of how they appreciate more than ever the Truth, the knowledge of the Lord, the knowledge of the principles of truth and righteousness, and that this knowledge is truly their shield and buckler at the present time.

As for other brethren who have not been disposed to associate themselves in this general ministry of the Institute, and who have felt called upon to start various individual movements of their own, apart from any particular authorization from the friends at large, we have no quarrel with any of these and have refrained from engaging in controversy with those who desire to pursue other lines of Bible

interpretation and service.

Those who properly attend to the great commission that Christ gave the Church have no time to spend in strife over matters to no profit, but realize that they have their hearts and hands full in faithfully carrying out their God-given commission. Surely it is the spiritual interests of the Lord's people that deserve first consideration. Spirituality—a larger possession and display of the Lord's spirit of love, forbearance and tolerance—is what is sorely needed today everywhere. We need to hear afresh the Master's gentle tones, "A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another as I have loved you;" and then to Christ, this love of God, that must enter into and occupy carefully and reverently join St. Paul in his study of this so large and prominent a place in the character-image or sublime subject, in his wonderful analysis of love—the likeness of the Son of God—this love which all must have, love that is kind, that seeketh not her own, is not easily according to God's predestination, who would become provoked, that beareth all things; that endureth all things; joint-heirs with Jesus Christ in the riches and glory of the love that never faileth. Indeed it is this love of Christ this love of God, that must enter into and occupy so large and prominent place in the character-image or likeness of the Son of God—that love which all must have, according to God's predestination, who would become joint-heirs with Jesus Christ in the riches and glory of the Kingdom of Heaven.