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On one occasion when His disciple John told Jesus of one who was casting out demons in His name, the Saviour said, "Forbid him not...for he that is not against us is for us." This tolerance of Jesus makes us unwilling to adversely criticise any custom or teaching contrary to that generally accepted by the Christian Church. But on the other hand, we remember that Jesus sternly opposed the Scribes and Pharisees, saying, "Ye have made void the word of God by your traditions."

So though we must be charitable in our judgments, we must not compromise in questions of truth. Similarly in writing to the Church at Philippi, Paul said that some in Rome preached Christ even of envy and strife, and added that he would rejoice that Christ was preached whether in pretence or in truth. But on the other hand, he wrote sternly condemning the Judaising teachers who troubled the Churches at Galatia by perverting the Gospel of Christ, so again we recognise the principle that we must acknowledge what is good in others and at the same time, earnestly oppose all error.

In this spirit we examine a movement that recently has disturbed the faith of some Christian people. About 50 years ago, evangelistic work was carried on in Scotland by what was termed a "Faith Mission." An agent of that mission, Mr. William Weir Irvine, went to Ireland, and began an independent work at Nenagh in the County of Tipperary. The Methodists freely granted him the use of their churches, and a number of persons professed conversion. Presently the missionary began to attack Methodism, and naturally the use of Methodist churches was forbidden.

The mission was then carried on in small moveable buildings, and the missionary proceeded to attack all churches and preachers. Then he was joined by Mr. Edward Cooney, who because of his stronger personality became the leader of the movement, and his followers were popularly called Cooneyites. Some of these have come to Australia, and here diligently disseminated Mr. Cooney's teachings. In addition to condemning all churches and preachers, all habits of ostentation and extravagance in dress or conduct were forbidden.

The argument used was that since Christ lived as a poor man, His followers should literally follow Him. This is called "The Jesus Way." Again, it was taught that the directions Jesus gave to His twelve Apostles, recorded in Matthew chapter ten, and to the seventy disciples recorded in Luke, chapter ten, are to be literally observed to-day. Regardless of the changed conditions of time and country, an attempt is made to do what Jesus commanded.

Because Jesus said, "Go your ways," the missionaries are called "Go-Preachers." Because Jesus sent His disciples Two by Two, the preachers, either two young women or two young men, go from place to place. Because Jesus said, "Go not from house to house," the preachers persist in staying on in any home where they have found entrance. Christian people have given them hospitality because they have come in the Master's name, and have found it difficult to induce them to leave. Obviously the attempt to do in Australia what was possible in Palestine in the days of Christ, is wrong.

But all this is not especially serious. It is their teaching regarding salvation that is very harmful. All their system is based upon what Jesus said and did before He died upon the Cross. Salvation is said to consist in an imitation of Christ.

To a certain degree, this is right. Jesus still says, "Follow Me," but all His steps led Him to Calvary and after His death and resurrection, He commanded that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all the nations. An attempt to ensure salvation by imitating the Saviour in His earthly life is the old mistake of seeking justification by our own works.

The true Christian life with all its peace and joy is not reached "by works done in righteousness which we did ourselves," but by an identification of ourselves with Christ as crucified and risen. The attempt to copy Christ is a painful and impossible task, whereas a full surrender to the Spirit of Christ, that Christ may dwell in our hearts and reproduce His life in ours, is the way of full satisfaction and power. The one way is mechanical and formal, the other is spiritual and vital.

While we recognise the earnestness and self-denial of the Go-Preachers, we regard their teaching not only as inadequate, but subversive of the glorious gospel of the grace of Christ. We can afford to pass by all their claim that they only are the true interpreters of the Scriptures, and that all ministers and churches are wrong. Misrepresentation only succeeds for a time.

We sympathise with those who with earliest desires and right motives have yielded to the persuasions of the "Go-Preachers," since they only see Jesus when His glory was veiled during His life on earth, and miss the vision such as John had in Patmos, of the Risen Christ in all His majesty and grace. It is not the Christ of Galilee, but the Conqueror of sin and death who says to us, "Go into all the world and preach."

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TTT NOTES: The Baptist College of Victoria was founded in 1891 in Melbourne with four students. The author, Frederick J. Wilkin was appointed Professor in 1911 and was the first Australian-trained minister appointed to the staff of the College. In 1962 the college was given a new name: University of Melbourne.