

The Go-Preachers or Cooneyites

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By John McDonald

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THE GO-PREACHERS

OR

"COONEYITES."

Their Practices and Doctrines Tested by the Scriptures . . .

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Numerous and strange are the new cults that are engaging public attention in these dark and ever-dark ening days of apostasy. We could gladly let the "Go- Preachers" pass as unworthy of serious consideration, were it not for the number of simple saints who have been waylaid by these pretentious preachers, and the exhortation we receive in Jude is imperative: "That ye should contend earnestly for the faith which was once-for-all delivered unto the saints."

The "Go-Preachers" are found in Great Britain, America and Australia, etc. They seem to have more success in country districts than in the cities of these countries. Much vigilance is demanded on their account, if for no other reason than their secrecy and mysterious reticence concerning their origin and purpose. If inordinate self-announcement betokens weakness or possible conceit, concealment as to origin and purpose suggest defect and deceit.

The facts stated hereafter are either gathered from personal observation, or have been received from persons of unquestionable veracity, and are confirmed by many reliable witnesses.

THEIR ORIGIN.

We cull the following from "Go-Preachers," by W.M.R.:-

"The originator of the movement was a Mr. William Weir Irvine (or Erwin), a Scotchman, who went to Ireland some thirty years ago as an agent for the 'Faith Mission' superintended by Mr. Govan. He left the 'Faith Mission,' and started on independent lines at Nenagh (Co. Tipp.), where he gathered around him a few hearty souls recently converted. He held several missions in school houses, and Methodist Churches placed at his disposal, and as a consequence a number of young men and women professed conversion, and followed him to different places. Then he began to attack Methodists and Methodism, and this led to the withdrawal of permission to use any of their properties for his meetings, but he and his followers began building several movable wooden halls for use in different places. The condition of Church life in the South of Ireland at that time, where young Christians were languishing for lack of spiritual food, led many to unite with Irvine, who then began to anathematise all the churches and preachers.

"About this time Edward Cooney gave up his secular employment, and threw in his lot with Irvine and became a 'Tramp' Preacher (hence the name 'Cooneyites' or 'Tramp Preachers' which they some times bear). A strong personality, combined with fiery zeal, very soon led to fresh attacks being launched against all sects and systems, with whom the converts were strictly forbidden to have any fellowship.

"Further developments shortly took place. Converts were exhorted against the modern tendency in dress and all outward forms of respectability were branded as worldly and contrary to the mind of Christ, who, when on earth, lived and worked as a poor man. If any had money or property, they were exhorted to give it up and literally carry out the teaching of the Lord Jesus in Luke ix., 1-5, x., 1-9, Matthew x., 5-42, which they called 'The Jesus way.' Only those in 'The Jesus way' were to be regarded as Christians, and every profession of conversion through other instruments, or servants of Christ was Satanic, and the fruit of False Prophets, Hirelings, etc. Thus conversion to 'The Jesus way' was indispensable for salvation, and was to be evidenced by 'following us,' any divergence from this teaching being classed as 'earthly, sensual, devilish.'"

THEIR PRACTICES.

Their most frequent custom in country districts of Australia is to go to the trustees of a "Union Church," or the Minister of a Denominational Church, and secure permission to use their building for services. When interrogated as to themselves, they simply term themselves "Children of God," carefully concealing what they distinctly stand for. Having secured the use of the building, they go on for a time, preaching what most Christians could assent to, till they have gained the ears of the people. Whereupon they denounce all other preachers as servants of the devil, going to Church, or meeting, or Sunday School are denounced as wrong.

Comment.— To honorable persons such practices are beneath discussion. Nor can we conceive of any intelligent and honest mind attempting to find justification for them.

They condemn all tracts and books written by others for the encouragement and help of believers; or for the awakening of unbelievers as to their danger and need. They refuse to read them, and forbid their followers to do so.

Comment.— It is a poor light that requires all other lights to be extinguished in order that it alone may be seen.

They seek to found Churches in all places, these being presided over by "Bishops," who are men that have strictly conformed to "their ideas."

Comment.—"Their ideas" are substituted for Scripture, which says (I. Tim. iii, 1-7) among other things, that "the Bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach," etc. But how can their "Bishop" teach if he is forbidden even to study the Scriptures by himself? He is only able (like the Pharisees of old) to "teach for commandments the traditions of men."

Their ordinary converts are left to pursue their secular calling, while adhering to their cause, meeting together amongst themselves, generally in the house of the "Bishop," every Sunday morning to break bread; also at prayer meetings twice a week, from which nothing but severe sickness will occasion absence. In all such meetings, both men and women take part.

Comment.—Their zeal, as displayed in attendance at meetings and faithfulness to their ideas is certainly worthy of a better cause. Christians with the clearer light of God's Word may well learn something from their zeal. But it would be interesting to know what they break bread for, seeing Christ's death was not (as they aver) for them; but as an example of self-denial to them. Our Lord said: "Take, eat; this is My body, which is broken for you. This do in remembrance of Me," etc. (I. Cor. xi., 24.)

They denounce all preachers as impostors, except their own leaders, whom they regard as true followers in "The Jesus way," and whom, according to their means and inclination, they support financially. Such servants of God as Luther, John Wesley, Whitfield, C. H. Spurgeon and D. L. Moody, etc., they fearlessly and fiercely declare to be in hell.

Comment.— Seeing the "Go-Preachers have only existed, as such, for some 30 years, and God can only save through their instrumentality (as they state), what is to become of the countless millions who have lived and died in the 1,800 years or more to whom no "Go-Preacher" ever appeared?

Superfluous money from their collections goes into a central fund, and is utilised in sending their agents to other parts, assuming to carry out the command, "Go ye." Hence their name, "Go-Preachers."

Their missionary zeal is confined to Christendom, believing that they are thus answering to the words of the Lord Jesus, "Beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke xxiv., 47)

They often get hold of people whose consciences have been stirred up by other preachers, who have passed on, leaving them unsatisfied, thus becoming a prey to their plausible way of handling the Scriptures.

Comment.— There is need of more thoroughness in dealing with awakened souls, leading them to Christ Himself, and leaving them cleaving unto His Word.

Their method of working is for two young women or two young men to go into a country township and seek out the one "worthy," stating that they have come to preach the Gospel, the real "Jesus way," and that they belong to no sect. If refused, they will, to the horror of the timid, literally shake off the dust of their shoes against them and go elsewhere. Where they are received they soon bewilder their host with their perverted applications of Scripture, and often gain their adherence, unless they are well-grounded in the truth or possessed of a well-balanced mind. For the sake of one proselyte they have been known to preach every night for two or three months.

Comment.— Their success is largely due to strategy and persistency. Alas; for the sleepy Church.

If they find anyone who is likely to be of use to their cause, they exhort him or her to forsake all and "Go-Preach." A case is known of a local preacher in England who went to argue with two of these girl preachers; but he suddenly became melancholy; and, selling off his farm, stock, etc., laid down the proceeds at the imposters' feet, and went off with them, he in one direction, and his young wife with one of their women in another.

They discourage marriage of preachers. Some of those who were married before they were chosen among the number have separated, the children being given up, and the wife sent out with another woman. They quote in support of this the words of the Lord Jesus: "Who is my mother and who are my brethren? For whosoever shall do the will of My Father who is in heaven the same is My brother, and sister and mother" (Matt. Xii., 48-50).

Their converts must renounce their former religious connections, and be baptised by them; and when, as sometimes is the case, parents of converts are in opposition to their methods and teaching, young men and women have been known to forsake parents, home, and all filial obligations under their influence. Many broken-hearted godly parents are regretting the break-up of their family circle and all its sacredness by these insidious proselytisers.

They also claim that as they only are the true servants of the Lord, in that they have complied with the Master's command: "Sell that thou hast and give to the poor," and preach without money and without price; there can be no true servants of God in any of the Churches, and, therefore, no Christians save those who make profession at their meetings. At such meetings they invite thus: "If anyone here realises that he is out of Christ, let him turn to the Lord in true repentance and signify the same by raising his hands." This, according to them, is the "new birth," or a turning from the "wrong way" into the "Jesus way," or into the "Testimony of Jesus" (another of their favourite expressions).

One of them told an inquirer that they never had to turn out any who professed at their meetings; that when a person got hold of the "truth," as they set it forth, he would stick to it. Yet one of their former preachers is now preaching with another company, after having been cast off by them, while a number of others have left them. For such "apostates" the "Go-Preachers" declare there is no hope; they cannot possibly be saved or renewed unto repentance, and can only expect "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries."

Comment.—The presumption, ignorance, and arrogance of these "Go-Preachers," as seen in the above statements can only find a possible parallel in the Church of Rome. The acceptance of them by any intelligent thinking person only proves the statement of Scripture which declares as to such persons: "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. iv., 18).

THEIR DOCTRINES.

As to the Person of Christ.

They profess to believe in the deity of Christ; but utterances such as, "Jesus overcame His own flesh," clearly show that they do not believe in the spotlessness of His humanity.

Comment.—If one is not sound as to the person of Christ, he cannot be sound as to the work of Christ. It is the person of Christ that gives quality and value to the work of Christ. If we are unsound as to this we are fundamentally unsound. It matters little as to the elegance of a superstructure if its foundations are dangerously insecure. In the Lord Jesus Christ we see humanity as it never was seen in any other, viz., in perfect holiness, with nothing in it needing to be overcome. In proof of this we quote Luke i., 35: "And the angel said unto her (Mary), 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.'" To assert or infer that there was any evil element in His body, which needed to be overcome, is to deny the statement of the Angel of God, and the recorded testimony of the Holy Ghost, as to the perfection of His being, and is, therefore, blasphemy. Any blemish in His person would render Him unfit and therefore ineligible to take our place on the cross.

As to the Redemptive Work of Christ.

They teach that sinners are not saved by faith in Jesus Christ, but by imitating the life of Jesus as a man upon earth. They quote in support of this theory from Rom. v.: 10, "We shall be saved by His life."

Comment.—Having discovered that they are unsound as to the person of Christ, we are not surprised to find that they are unsound as to the work of Christ. If their theory be correct, there is no hope for poor sinful humanity. We are at once and peremptorily robbed of our Saviour and offered a mere model instead. If we are to be saved by "walking in all the footsteps of Jesus," as they affirm, then we are practically called upon to make saviours of our feet; while the legalist, who preaches salvation by works, practically asks us to make saviours of our hands. Alas! for our crooked and unclean feet and our unskilled hands, but the Saviour of which we have been robbed had both his hands and feet nailed to that Roman gibbet on Calvary's hill-top. How deceitfully they handle the Word of God, quoting only one phrase, from Rom. v., 10, i.e., "We shall be saved by His life," detaching it from its immediate context. Let us now quote Rom. v., 10, in full, and we shall see the "Go-Preachers'" foundation evaporate like a noxious fog before the rising sun. "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Who could possibly mis understand this simple and convincing statement as to the way of life? We were bitter and hateful enemies, but we were reconciled to God (not by the life of Christ) by the death of God's Son. Calvary's dark tragedy was a necessity to our salvation, embracing reconciliation. Thus were we saved from the penalty of sin, and we shall be saved from the power of sin by His life—not His life of humiliation down here, but by His resurrection life of power at God's right hand. In proof of this we quote Heb. vii., 25, "Wherefore He is able to save them evermore that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." "Go-Preachers" do not need to be converted to God in order to become members or teachers of this strange order. Unlike the Apostle Paul, who declared "we preach Christ crucified" (I. Cor. i., 23), they preach human excellence as the only possible way of salvation, thereby contradicting the Lord Jesus Christ, whom they profess to follow, who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me" (John xiv., 6). But the "Go-Preachers" are practically saying: "We are the way, the truth and the life," seeing they assert that no one can be saved apart from their preaching, and such "Go-Preacher" is blasphemously claimed by them to be "Christ come into the flesh," while His Word spoken by their lips is made to live. They thus seek (whether intentionally or unintentionally) to rob Christ of His redemptive glory and of the joy which is righteously His. "Who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross and despised the shame, etc. The glory they rob Him of they blasphemously annex to themselves asserting in effect: "The Word that He spoke was dead, but we make it to live. "Let us not be misunderstood here. We strongly advise all believers to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, but not in order to get life, but in happy acknowledgment of the facts that they possess Eternal life through His atoning death. "Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Rom. iii., 24-25). We have thus seen that the "Go-Preachers" teach in direct opposition to the word of God in regard to the person and work of Christ and the Scripture saith: "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is noliht in them." (Isa. vii., 20).

They teach that no benefit can be derived from reading books, tracts, or even the Scriptures, teaching that the Bible is a dead book unless made to live through the mouth of one of their preachers.

Comment.—Here again we find them directly contradicting the Scriptures, as well as much experimental knowledge. In Acts vii., 38, we read: "This is he, that was in the Church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to, him in the Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; who received the living word to give unto us" (C.V.). Hence their claim to make the Word of God live is a reflection upon the perfection of God and His Word, and an arrogant and blasphemous pretension as to themselves. Moreover, many thousands of well-known cases of conversion to God by reading His Word alone and by reading tracts and books based upon His Word, could be cited by many of the Lord's servants, the writer included. Let me quote one more Scripture in confirmation of this: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (I. Peter i., 23). Seeing they close down on all literature and even on the Scriptures, there seems little hope of delivering them from their own ideas. Hence the necessity of warning all from entanglement in this cunningly warped snare of Satan.

They discourage marriage and in a subtle way forbid the marriage of preachers, those who were married before they were chosen in the number, generally separate (as a result of the teaching they receive), the children are given up, and the wife sent out with another woman.

Comment.—Such a prohibitive order, however imparted can only prove a plague spot in a community. It has not failed, nor ever can, in the production of its natural crop of immorality and illegitimacy, etc. Their participation in this prohibitive order, like papal Rome, has been anticipated and clearly defined in the Scriptures of truth:—"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils (demons); speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry," etc. How deplorable their ignorance of, or willful departure from, the teaching of Scripture. God, through His servant Paul, has clearly defined the marriage relationship, and the duties incumbent on each of the contracting parties in the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter vii. In verse 10 of that chapter we read: "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, let not the wife depart from her husband." Surely this unholy tampering with the holy institution of marriage should open the eyes of the otherwise indifferent and unwary.

Their assumed commission they base upon such passages as Mat. x., 1-15; Luke ix., 1-5; Luke x., 1-17, etc.

Comment.—Did they possess even the least knowledge of the dispensational teaching of Scripture, we should have been saved the wearisome task of exposing the absurd interpretations they so frequently employ in defence of an untenable position and creed. In looking briefly at the first passage named, we discover that here the Lord Jesus Christ is sending forth His disciples to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom, which announced that the King or Messiah was at hand, which Gospel had for its object the preparation of the hearts of the people for His reception as King or Messiah. John the Baptist preached the same Gospel, and baptised with the baptism of repentance. In sending His disciples forth thus, He said to them, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go preach, saying, the Kingdom of heaven is at hand," etc. Now, while the "Go-Preachers" claim authority from this passage, they do not carry out the commission, they go to the Gentiles and not to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The other passages to which they refer are of a similar character. Going "without purse and scrip" is confined to the commission, and is not given in the commission to His disciples in Mat. xxviii., 19, and Mark xvi., 15-16, where the Gospel of the grace of God (Acts xx., 24) is the burden of their commission.

Conclusion.

Having reviewed the practices and doctrines of the "Go-Preachers" without prejudices or personal feeling, but as a duty we owe to unwary fellow-believers, we have to conclude that in our judgment their practices do not commend themselves to such as desire to act honorably with their fellow-men; and their teachings are anti-scriptural, while their quotations of Scripture are detached from their context and are consequently much misapplied. We would therefore exhort believers everywhere to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the Saints" (Jude, verse 3.)

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