

I.B.S.A. RELIGIOUS NEWS BUREAU

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PASTOR RUSSELL AND BILLY SUNDAY DISAGREE ON HELL-FIRE

The "Anti-Hell-Fire and Brimstone" Resolution Adopted in Washington, D.C., Draws the Fire of Clergymen Everywhere.

Almost Unanimous Ministerial Repudiation of the "Hell-Fire and Brimstone" Theory.

(By the Religious Perambulator, Official Reporter for the I.B.S.A.)

The hot Mid-Summer Convention of the International Bible Students at Glen Echo Park, Washington, D. C., in passing their now famous Resolution, made so big a noise about "Hell-Fire and Brimstone" that the old ecclesiastical line-up was thoroughly routed and put to flight, and an entirely new formation of forces is now in the making. It surely was a big gun that was fired from Glen Echo into the camp of the stand-patters, and the noise will echo and re-echo throughout the ecclesiastical heavens for some time to come.

Gen. Wm. P. Hall, U. S. A., a brave Indian fighter of the past, in calling for the public repudiation of the hell-fire theory, claimed that to do so would create a situation in America that would enable thousands of Ministers to publicly declare what they freely admit privately. The desired repudiation was made and the general spontaneous response from Ministers of all denominations vindicates the General as an excellent tactician.

The present general repudiation of the hell-fire theory by the clergy of the Evangelical Alliance will no doubt be considered by the public as a startling admission, and is in striking contrast with the opinion still held by ninety per cent of the people who were reared under and taught by these same clergy. The impressions gained in childhood from the Ministers that the Bible was the authority for the fire-and-brimstone hell will be hard to erase. It is acknowledged that seventy-five per cent. of the people reared under sectarian instruction, when arriving at the age of discretion, discard as unchristian and unreasonable the hell-fire mythology of the Middle Ages, and as they believe the Bible responsible for the doctrine, they lose respect for the Bible and for the Church, and discard both and join the big congregation composed of detached Christians and skeptics.

The mid-summer Resolution repudiating and relegating to the ash heap the red-hot hell fire deception, so wonderfully described by Milton and Dante, and pictured by Gustave Dore, will probably be likened unto Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream" by Billy Sunday, Gypsy Smith and their kind.

It's tough on these gentlemen, too, at this stage of their illustrious career, to be deprived of their hell-fire-works and brimstone, their only argument. Their undoing, however, will be a sweet morsel for the Men and Religion Congress people, who have declared against "itinerant Evangelists."

From among the hundreds of recently published expressions from leading clergymen of all denominations on the Washington "anti-hell-fire" Resolution we quote: Canon Henson of Westminster Abbey, in confirming repudiation of the eternal torment doctrine of the "dark ages," said: "I think the American religious public is generations behind us, although I don't say that individual American divines aren't the equals of ours."

The famous R. J. Campbell, of London, representing the Non-Conformist view, said: "This seems to me to be a very belated pronouncement. I don't know any clergymen here who believes in eternal punishment; nor do I think and educated clergyman has done so for many years."

Rev. Arthur L. Odell, a St. Louis pastor, said: "I do not know of any Presbyterian Minister who believes or preaches this idea. Of course, this literal hell was an idea widely held in earlier years, but the church is breaking away from many of the conceptions of past ages."

Archbishop Glennon, although evading the direct question, leaves the impression that the Catholic clergy no longer believe in literal hell. He said: "It's too hot to talk about such a subject today. As to whether Catholic clergymen preach hell fire, I will say that we preach the faith, and our faith is the faith of the church."

Rev. David S. Phelan, Editor "Western Watchman," stated: "Catholic priests do not preach a hell of fire. The church has not taken a definite position on the subject."

Rev. Dr. James W. Lee, of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, stated: "I do not believe in a fire-and-brimstone hell, and I think I have never heard but one sermon in which that belief was expressed, and that was down in Georgia years ago."

Rabbi Adolph Rosentreter is quoted as saying with emphasis: "The resolution passed by the Bible Students at Washington ought to have been passed 1500 years ago. I do not believe in a literal hell of fire, of course. Orthodox Jews do not hold that idea."

The "Christian Leader and Way" prints the following: The American Association for Bible Study has solemnly stated that there is no hell. A conference of English ministers has adopted the same view. A few days ago the Ministerial Association of Marietta solemnly promulgated or indorsed a like doctrine. In other words, the authorities of the Christian churches seem to agree that the old Biblical conception of a hell of unending torment, of fire and brimstone, is illogical and untruthful."

Pastor Russell of London and Brooklyn Tabernacles says: "If the Bible does teach that Eternal Torture is the fate of all except the saints, it should be preached, yea, thundered, weekly, daily, hourly. If it does not so teach, the fact should be made known and the foul stain dishonoring God's holy name removed."

Until the passing of the Washington Resolution few ministers could safely publicly repudiate the hell-fire error, lest they be charged by other ministers with seeking personal notoriety, as a sort of unwritten code of ethics in Ministerial Associations forbids individual action on this and kindred matters. Now that the theological atmosphere has been cleared of a discrediting and deterring fallacy the clergy feel relieved, and it is hoped by many that stranded Christians, and possibly some skeptics, may be regained to denominational activities.

Many I.B.S.A. delegates were most positive in their statements that the vast majority of clergymen were in hearty agreement with the President of the I.B.S.A. on the hell-fire myth, and that they would gladly go on record, if opportunity afforded, and the world-wide spontaneous response more than justifies their claims. However, there is no hope expressed that Billy Sunday and Pastor Russell will agree.

Pastor Russell, President of the International Bible Students Associations, in the past has practically stood alone in the lime-light on the anti-hell-fire platform and withstood severe and unjust criticism. Now that leading clergymen of many denominations have mounted the same platform he will henceforth be only one of a galaxy of great preachers to share the brunt of battle against literal fire-and-brimstone adherents.

Progressive ministers do not expect to find the battlefield vacated by the stand-patters. It would be expecting too much to hope that all clergymen would get into the band wagon immediately, and a few ministers of wealthy and prominent congregations will not willingly admit past errors, fearing that such an admission would cause laymen to disesteem them. These stand-pat ministers would like to bring about a country-wide onslaught against Pastor Russell and all other anti-hell-fire preachers.

Progressives, however, are not to be deterred by this minority element, which is evidently not in sympathy with the common need, and as a result the people inside and outside of all churches will, through the statements of ministers published in the press, learn that the Bible does not teach the unreasonable doctrine of a literal lake of fire and brimstone.

The Resolution as adopted in Washington follows:

RESOLVED: That it is the sense of the International Bible Students delegates here assembled, that we do not find the Bible to teach the doctrine of a literal "hell-fire" or place of "fire and brimstone" for the punishment of the wicked; but that secular history of the formation of the creeds of the Middle Ages reveals the fact that for various reasons, either wisely or unwisely, the doctrine of torment in "hell-fire" was added to the Gospel as taught by Jesus and the Twelve Apostles, necessitating many ridiculous interpretations of the Lord's parables. We, therefore, now unreservedly repudiate as thoroughly unscriptural the teaching of a place, state or condition of a literal "lake of fire and brimstone" for the torment of the wicked; and, further, we believe from many personal testimonials that the vast majority of ministers of all Protestant denominations have privately repudiated the "hell-fire" theory, but have for supposedly good reasons hesitated to fully inform their congregations; and, further, we believe, on

this account thousands and perhaps tens of thousands are being driven into skepticism or infidelity; therefore it is further

RESOLVED: That we appeal to every minister in the United States, to publish in his local newspaper, over his own signature, a statement declaring

whether or not he believes the Bible to teach the doctrine of a literal lake of fire and brimstone as a place, state or condition for the eternal punishment of the wicked, and that every Editor of a newspaper in the United States be requested to invite the ministers of his constituency to avail themselves of his columns for their statements. We believe that in this one act, they can just now serve their readers better than in any other way; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the Secretary of this Convention be instructed and authorized to mail a printed copy of this Resolution to every Minister and Editor in the United States.

After a general and full discussion, the matter was put to a vote, and unanimously adopted by the Association.

Note: The Resolution was passed on Monday, July 8, 1912. The date of this News Bulletin is not known. - Bible Students' Archives-Sept. 18, 1990)