

Levi Pennington

People

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Pennington to R.W. Ross, June 15, 1947

Levi T. Pennington

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June 15, 1947.

R. W. Ross,
New Port Richey,
Florida.

Dear Mr. Ross:--

Somebody, who was apparently unwilling that his identity should be known, has sent me a copy of your pamphlet, "What the Bible has to Say about the Townsend Plan", and since you seem to feel that every member of the church and especially every minister should agree with you and support the Townsend plan, it seems to me that I ought to take a bit of time to reply to the statements and the implications of your pamphlet.

Your apparent distinction between sins of omission and commission, making the sins of the prodigal son, who spent his patrimony on harlots, and of the woman taken in adultery so much less serious than the failure to provide extra oil in their lamps, which according to the bible itself was "foolish", seems to me a positively immoral attitude. The prodigal son and the woman taken in adultery were forgiven, not because their sins of commission were so much less blameworthy than sins of omission, but because they genuinely repented.

Your mention of Matthew 23 as if it were denunciation only of sins of omission is unfortunate. It is true that mention is made of certain omissions; but the hypocritical seeking after high places by public prayer and almsgiving and elaborate dress, the shutting of the door on those who would enter the kingdom of heaven, the making of proselytes two fold more the child of hell than themselves, the filling of the heart with hypocrisy and iniquity, the killing and crucifixion and persecution of prophets -- all these are sins of commission, denounced by Jesus in that most wonderful philippic which ends, "O Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest those that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together" And yet you would make it appear that this chapter is "a scathing condemnation of and promise of punishment for sins of omission and neglect", as if it did not condemn still more sins of commission.

Your description of those who would not be interested in the Townsend plan of course, and your description of those who of course should be interested in the Townsend plan gets nowhere until you tell in more detail what the Townsend plan is, and this you studiously avoid doing. Perhaps that is natural, since the Townsend plan has changed so much that it is like the boy's one-bladed knife which had had three different blades and two different handles but was still the same old knife. But perhaps this is not too good an illustration, for the last I heard the basic idea was the same as at first, a steady, fixed income for all who reach a certain age, irrespective of need, on condition that they cease income-producing employment and spend the entire income that is provided for them by those who are income producing. And that simply does not make sense.

We shall never be fully civilized, to say nothing of

being thoroughly Christian, until we provide adequate income for the aged and the needy. When you try to put all who do not favor the Townsend plan into those classes that do not care for others and are purely selfish, you not only put yourself in an undesirable class of those who have too little regard for facts, but you do the cause of justice to the aged and needy a real disservice. I do care for the aged and the needy, the poor and the unfortunate; but that does not mean that I have to approve a scheme that seems to me to possess some crack-pot elements that I cannot at all approve. I have spent most of my time and energy and what money I could spare for more than a year now in raising money, providing food and clothing, sending heifers and other means of living to those in Europe and Asia who are vastly worse off than the poorest and neediest tenth of our people. May I ask you to tell me in detail just what and how much you have done in the past year for the suffering millions across the sea? Or are your neighbors only those who live under the same glorious flag which is the emblem of the most fortunate and the richest country in the world, with the greatest responsibility for the well being of the rest of the world?

An adequate income for comfortable living to all the aged and the needy? Yes, by all means. A fixed income for everybody who reaches a certain age, if he or she will retire from income producing work? No. It does not make sense that the man with an adequate income already should be provided with more at my expense. A requirement that folks who receive an income far larger than they require (for the lowest figure I have ever seen named by the Townsend plan is vastly more than many elderly folk have now and on which they are living in entire comfort) must spend it all from month to month? No. It does not make sense. The provision that those of us who are working must provide more income than many of us are getting to everybody who chances to be of a certain age, irrespective of their need? No. It does not make sense. A requirement that in order to get this income the one who has reached a certain age must quit income producing work? No. It does not make sense. I know a man who is working for a mere pittance -- for a long time it was \$14.99 a month -- and who deserves additional income far more than many who would get it under the Townsend plan, and if this man were to quit his job it would mean additional suffering and starvation to thousands of poor. Make him quit his job, which now brings him in \$100.00 a month, much of which he spends for the relief of sufferers across the sea, and you've committed a crime that I'll never be party to.

Adequate income for the aged and the needy? Yes. The Townsend plan? Unless it has so completely changed that it is no longer fitting to call it by that name, no.

Sincerely yours,

Levi T. Pennington.