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CENTRAL ASSOCIATION DOCUMENTS.

THE REALITIES OF RELIGION.

THE CIRCULAR LETTER OF THE NOVA SCOTIA CENTRAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCHES OF WHICH IT IS COMPOSED.

(Published by Special Request.)

Dear Brethren,—

The subject of this Letter is "THE REALITIES OF RELIGION."—and our object in presenting it to your consideration is to produce, by the Lord's blessing, a livelier apprehension of those realities, and a deeper experience of their preciousness and their power.

Although we have not recited any creed in this meeting, as is done in the congregations of another denomination,—and although we do not admit the authority of any human standard of faith or morals, there is happily a substantial agreement among us with regard to the doctrines of the gospel and the duties of believers. We are not bound, indeed, to use the same words in stating or discussing them—for Christian freedom chooses divers modes of expression—but we all receive the same truths, and all our hearts yield to the influences which flow from the belief of those truths.—We believe, for instance, that God "hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. i. 9). We believe that "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i. 7). We believe that "the washing of regeneration," even "the renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus iii. 5) is essential to membership in God's family, here and hereafter. We believe that perseverance in faith and holiness is both a duty and a privilege. We hold that "he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John v. 12). This is the substance of our Christianity. Other items of belief need not be enumerated.

Now, correctness or orthodoxy of opinion is not all that is required of a professor of religion. If we really believe the truths that are comprised in the gospel of the Son of God, we are conscious of certain effects. "True holiness" (Ephes. iv. 24) is the holiness of the truth, the necessary effect of the reception of that truth. To be a Christian is to be the subject of specific habits, denoting character, and that character is the result, not of occasional impulses, but of continuous influence. It is to be "joined to the Lord," and to be "one spirit" (1 Cor. vi. 9); it is to "live by the faith of the Son of God" (Gal. ii. 20); to "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephes. iv. 24); to "forget the things that are behind, and to reach forth to those that are before" (Phil. iii. 13); to conduct ourselves as "strangers and pilgrims" (1 Peter ii. 11); to "lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. vi. 12).

We want soundness in the faith. It is the foundation. But we want something more. Cold, dry theology will not serve the purpose. We must have warm life—affectionate earnestness—a firm grasp of spiritual and heavenly realities. We must be what we profess, and live and act as those who have "put on Christ" (Gal. iii. 27).

Have we "fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us" (Heb. vi. 18)? What is now the position in which we stand before God? We are deeply in debt and have nothing to pay; but the debt is paid. We are rebels against the Divine majesty; but the sentence of condemnation is cancelled. Christ's righteousness covers us. Let us enjoy the blessedness, and delight ourselves in the Lord. Let us exclaim, with Toplady—

"A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing,
Nor fear, with his righteousness on,
My person and offerings to bring:
The terrors of law and of God,
With me can have nothing to do;
My Saviour's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view."

Let us sing, with Oliver—

"He by Himself hath sworn,
I on his oath depend,
I shall, on eagle wings upborne,
To heaven ascend:
I shall behold his face,
I shall his power adore,
And sing the wonders of his grace
For evermore."

As believers in Jesus we are sons and daughters of the Most High, and entitled to all the privileges of the adoption. How valuable—how precious they are!—We share in love which, as Leighton says, "exceeds that of others in tenderness, and that of fathers in wisdom." We are washed over, cared for, by God himself: and to his fatherly grace we may take all our wants, all our griefs, all our dangers, with the assurance that He, the "Father of mercies and the God of all comfort," "thinketh upon us" (2 Cor. i. 3; Psalm xl. 17). Believing this, we are "not afraid of evil tidings" (Psalm cxii. 7), and we have learned to say, when floods rise high and tempests roar, "It is the Lord" (1 Sam. iii. 18).

The covenant of heavenly love, the "everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure" (2 Sam. xxiii. 5), secures to us mercies, dignities, and glories unspeakable. We are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 17). All things are ours—all Divine perfections—all Providences—all spiritual influences, gifts, and graces. We are fully provided for while in the wilderness, and a rich inheritance awaits us at the end of the journey.

"This world is ours, and worlds to come,
Earth is our lodge, and heaven our home."

All this is true and real. It is actual matter of fact. The question then is, not merely what we believe, but what we are, or, to what extent we realize the blessedness of God's chosen, and live in the habitual enjoyment of the privileges which are common to all Christians. Some persons, as it appears to us, have fallen into a great mistake. They imagine that there is both a common and a higher Christian life, and they separate Christians into two classes; unmindful that personal godliness, as described in the New Testament, is attainable by all believers, and that there cannot be

anything higher—and, forgetful of the fact that the Apostle Paul, who unquestionably rose to the highest style of devotedness to the Saviour, disclaimed all superiority, and said, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" (Phil. iii. 12). Be it ours to follow so noble an example, and to resolve, by the grace of God, that we will be whatever a Christian may or ought to be—that we will carry into practice all our professions—and that we will "hold on our way," and "be stronger and stronger" (Job xvii. 9).

This realising experience is necessary as a sustaining element of Christian activity. The Lord Jesus calls upon us all to labour for him. Every member of a Christian church is bound to be a worker, for the salvation of others, and for the edification of his fellow-members. But we shall neither be fit for work nor able to sustain a steady course of action unless our souls are constantly nourished by gospel truth—intelligently apprehended, enjoyed, and felt—penetrating and inspiring every power. And we all know that such a state is attainable, because we remember the words of our Lord—"If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him," (Luke xi. 13). These words are as true to-day as they were when they were first uttered. But in pleading the promise let us bear in mind that we must "ask in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed; let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (James i. 6, 7).

Brethren, "The time is short" (1 Cor. vii. 29). Some of us are young and strong, and may hope for long lives of consecration to Christ. But a considerable number have passed the meridian. The day is far spent. The time of our departure may be at hand. Our remaining stay upon earth is not to be reckoned by years; it is not to be reckoned at all. The Saviour says, "Take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is" (Mark xi. 33). Does it not especially behove us to spend the few days that are left us in full harmony with our professions and our prospects, and to "gird up the loins of our minds, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. i. 13). Let us climb to Pisgah's top, and "view the landscape o'er." Let us familiarise ourselves with the grand outlook, and be as "men that wait for their Lord" (Luke xii. 36). Glorious visions are to be beheld by the ransomed Church of God. If we belong to that Church, we shall take part in events of the most solemn and inspiring character. The Lord Jesus will be "revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire" (2 Thess. i. 7, 8);—we shall see him come.—The archangel's trumpet will summon the nations to God's bar (1 Cor. xv. 52; 1 Thess. iv. 16);—we shall hear it.—The world's population from the beginning to the close of the history will be gathered together before the judgment seat:—we shall be there, and each one in his own proper place, nor will there be any mistake in the allotments. We shall hear the Judge when he welcomes the saved to the heavenly mansions. We shall hear him when he dismisses the lost. And oh! what ecstatic delight will thrill through every saved soul, when "a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, shall stand on Zion's hill, and the voice of the universal Church shall be heard, "as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia; for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth."—"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Rev. v. 12: vii. 9: xix. 6). Brethren, shall we be there? Shall we join in that song? Shall we take part in the triumph of the glorified, and dwell with them in the presence of the Lord for ever?

"For ever with the Lord—
Amen: so let it be!
Life from the dead is in that word,
'Tis immortality.
Here in the body pent
Absent from him I roam,
Yet nightly pitch my moving tent
A day's march nearer home."

Yes—"nearer home": for "our citizenship [conversation] is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. iii. 20, 21). Then—"we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John iii. 3). Having this hope, what manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness" (2 Pet. iii. 11)!

"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only-wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen" (Jude 24, 25).

The following Central Association documents, having some public interest, we have thought it desirable to give them, in full, in our columns, before they appear in the Minutes in pamphlet form.

REPORT ON EDUCATION.

1. The Baptists of the Province have affirmed in their annual meetings, for many years, their belief that education is an important ally in christian work,—that provision should be made by which the churches may have the services of an educated ministry,—that it is the duty of all parents to provide for the intellectual, as well as moral, development of their children,—and that the property of christians should be conscientiously used to promote the education in its various grades and departments.

2. That the repeated affirmations of these truths have been something more than idle words is plainly proved by the long continued and growing attachment cherished by our people towards their institutions of learning.

3. The advantages of an educational system, which is developed into distinct grades, are now within the reach of our people. Our children can find in the common schools preparation for study in our Academy; in that institution all students who desire it can be fitted for College; and in that department young men are conducted

through a higher course of education and are then sent forward to the various professional schools. Some of these departments of education may well be left in connection with a public educational system; but it will be better that the Academy and the College should be so far under denominational control that there may be in them a free and full recognition of the truth and claims of the Christian Religion, that thus mental power may be developed and used in subjection to moral principles and purposes.

4. All measures that are adapted to make the common schools better and more useful, should receive cordial support from us; but the educational agencies which are in more immediate connection with the denomination, demand especial consideration at the present time. In order that the Theological department may accomplish its purpose, it must have the generous and constant sympathy of the leaders of our churches. It is an occasion for great thankfulness that the Academy is so prosperous, both in its finances and in the number of students in attendance; but it must be remembered that a large debt still lies on the new Boarding Hall, and contingencies may arise in which this may prove a serious inconvenience. It is very important that the Governors of the College should have sufficient funds to meet promptly all demands that may be made on them, in order that the College may maintain an honorable position in the educational work of the Provinces. The increase in the Provincial Grant will give assistance for a short time; but the Governors must have larger resources at their command, or the promise of the College cannot be fulfilled.

5. Collegiate education in the Province is evidently passing through an important crisis. What will result from the changes that have recently occurred and from others that are contemplated, it will be difficult to foresee. But certainly the questions concerning collegiate education, which have recently been presented for consideration and decision, are so serious that they demand the calmest wisdom in deliberation and the greatest prudence in action.

A. W. SAWYER, Chairman.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON QUESTIONS IN LETTERS.

1. The Committee have to report that a communication from the church meeting in Gerrish Hall, Halifax, has been placed in their hands, representing their progress and present state—announcing certain contributions to the benevolent funds of the Association, amounting to 78 dollars—and expressing the assurance of their sympathy and co-operation with this Body, if admitted into it. The Committee would have been better satisfied if the evidence of the compliance of the church in Gerrish Hall with the recommendations of the Association last year had been clearer and more complete; nevertheless, believing that in all essential matters the above mentioned church has established its claim to be considered a Baptist Church, in harmony with our Associated body, notwithstanding any irregularities that may have occurred in the transaction of the business, the Committee recommend that the request of the said church be granted by its admission into the Association.

2. The Committee have also received an application from the church in Brooklyn, near Hantsport, recently formed, asking admission into this Association, and they recommend that the request be granted.

3. The brethren of the Western Association having resolved that the Legislature of this Province be petitioned to pass an Act of Incorporation of the Baptist Body, of which any churches may avail themselves in an inexpensive manner, and having requested that this Association will co-operate with them by the appointment of a Committee of three brethren, to meet with a like number of brethren appointed by each of the other Associations of the Province;—the Committee recommend compliance with this request, and that the Brethren J. W. Barss, B. H. Eaton, and W. A. Porter be such Committee, as representative of this Association.

4. The Committee further report the reception of the following communication from the African Baptist Church, Halifax:

HALIFAX, N. S., June 20, 1876.

TO THE MINISTERS AND DELEGATES OF THE CENTRAL ASSOCIATION CONVENEED AT HANTSPOET.

The African Baptist Church, Cornwallis Street, sendeth forth Christian salutation; also, we send by the Rev. E. M. Saunders, Pastor of the Granville Street Church, the following sums as were collected for the various purposes at the meetings held by us, viz:

| | |
|----------------------------|--------|
| Home Mission..... | \$1 30 |
| Foreign Missions..... | 1 62 |
| Acadia College..... | 2 25 |
| Ministerial Education..... | 1 08 |

Total.....\$6 25

The Church and Congregation also prayeth that Almighty God may prosper every effort that will be put forth for the building up of his Zion here on earth by your most distinguished and honorable Body.

Signed in behalf of Church,

JAMES THOMAS, Pastor.

J. P. McKEERROW, Fin. Secretary.

And they recommend that the thanks of the Association be presented to that Church for its donation to our funds.

J. M. CRAMP, Chairman.

REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON DEPARTED BRETHERN.

Your Committee beg to report that so far as they are acquainted with facts, the ranks of the ministry in this Association have not been broken by death during the past year.

In view of this gratifying state of things your Committee would offer the following resolution:

Resolved, That this Association hereby record its devout thankfulness to Almighty God, whose watchful care and gracious Providence have been around about his servants for their preservation during the year with their earnest prayer that they may long continue to enjoy the Divine favour and protection.

I. S. SKINNER, Chairman.

[It was somewhat remarkable that immediately after the above report had been adopted, Rev. Obed Parker entered the church