

Village Christadelphian Ecclesia

465 Dee Lane, Roselle, IL 60172 (630) 529-7976

February 13, 2005

To: Brethren of the Christadelphian NASU Steering Committee

Our ecclesia spent several Sundays examining the NASU Unity Proposal. In addition to the proposal, we entertained the other CNSC mailings and the Christadelphians for Doctrinal Unity (CDU) mailings. We have had only limited discussion with brethren of other ecclesias on this subject. On the basis of our prayer supported study we have decided we are unable to support your unity proposal. We would like to explain why.

Though your ad hoc committee is not composed of elected and universally supported representatives from across all Unamended Ecclesias in North America, we felt we should examine the scriptural basis of your proposal. We assume you entered into this endeavor in good faith and we too believe unity would be a blessing to the Christadelphian household provided that unity was anchored in the one faith. If your proposal was sound, we felt we might have reason to support it no matter what the representative status of your committee.

Your proposal restated in new terms four doctrines. You obviously feel that the newly stated doctrines embrace a common understanding among Amended and Unamended members in North America. Our ecclesia examined your proposal to determine whether it captured our understanding of these doctrines and therefore warranted our support. We also wanted to weigh any objections we might have to determine whether they were correct and critical to fellowship.

We examined "Adamic Condemnation", "The Lord's Involvement in His Own Sacrifice", and "In Adam/In Christ". Are the statements possibly not explicit enough to keep some Christadelphians from an alternate interpretation? Only time will tell but generally we agreed with the statements not finding any true objection in light of our own understanding of these three doctrines.

However, the statement of understanding regarding "Resurrectional Responsibility" offered by you does not fairly represent the belief of our ecclesial members. Your restatement of this teaching still seems only to clarify the amendment incorporated into the BASF. The way has always been open for Unamended Christadelphians to adopt the amendment and join the Amended brotherhood on the basis of the BASF. Thus we are not quite sure what sense it makes to adhere to the principles of the BUSF while accepting a statement of understanding that essentially amends the BUSF to make it like the BASF. For us the only reason to do so would be the determination that the

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amendment is scripturally sound.

We agree with the statement, “Those who have responded to the call of God through baptism (in this dispensation) will therefore appear at the judgment seat of Christ. His faithful servants will receive the gift of everlasting life, but the unfaithful will be condemned.” However, we would like to examine the scriptural support for the statement, “...God will raise to condemnation those rebels and unbelievers whom His justice so demands”, assuming “rebels and unbelievers” includes those not in Christ.

Our first problem is the vagueness of the proposal wording. Your statement of understanding regarding “Resurrectional Responsibility” speaks of rebels and unbelievers as a class (or classes?) of people without defining the term(s). It is certainly conceivable that anyone not in Christ that ever lived could be considered a rebel or unbeliever based on the general meaning of the words. That this is not your intended meaning we acknowledge in that you specify “factors of knowledge and calling” and God’s “justice” as grounds for determining which “rebels and unbelievers” should participate in resurrection judgment. However, this does not truly clarify the matter.

Consider the problem with the logical integrity of this proposal. You assert that “...God will raise to condemnation those rebels and unbelievers whom His justice so demands”. However, this event appears to be in question on the basis of your own caveats. Unlike the saints you cannot “identify or quantify” the individuals taking part or define the basis for their appearance? In theory this article of faith could have God convening a resurrection of condemnation in which no one was condemned. How? Since “no human can identify or quantify individuals in this category with certainty”, how do we know there are any rebels and unbelievers to be condemned on the basis of knowledge and calling? Furthermore the specific acts of rebellion and unbelief (God’s “justice”) that would actually warrant a resurrection to condemnation are not revealed to man. Again, how do we know there are any rebels and unbelievers with the required transgressions needed to queue them for judgment and justice at the resurrection? Looking at the other extreme, you could perhaps make a case for universal resurrection in the same manner. For us it is difficult to glean a coherent understanding of resurrectional responsibility of the unbaptized from your statements.

Clear logical wording is certainly desirable but what about the more important matter of a clear scriptural basis for this doctrine? Such a basis would be reason to embrace the resurrection and judgment of “rebels and unbelievers” even if God did not choose to reveal the details to us. Resurrection and reward for faithful or unfaithful service is a clear teaching with respect to the saints (Psa. 50:4-5; Mat. 24:30-31; 1 Cor. 15:21-23; 2

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Cor. 5:10). Is there similar clear teaching with respect to the non-covenanted rebels and unbelievers?

Your proposal lists Daniel 12:2 and Romans 2:5-8,16 among references supporting this doctrine. One could say, for example, that these passages speak in terms broad enough to support such a doctrine. But one must *assume* Daniel's "many" include "rebels and unbelievers" of the sort you describe and one must *assume* Paul's "contentious" include the uncovenanted. Providing support for an assumed doctrine is not the same as providing the clear teaching of that doctrine. The doctrines of the immortality of the soul and the divinity of Christ are argued in the same way by today's "Christians."

We examined the general principle, "Rejection of God's knowledge and calling are grounds of condemnation and punishment by God." Is this a clear scriptural basis for the resurrection of certain "rebels and unbelievers?" Certainly one may support this principle without teaching that God must raise some unbaptized perpetrators to execute his just ends. God has often judged men during the days of their sojourning. "In Adam all die." This fact alone ensures that "God is not mocked."

Do the judgments of Tyre, Sidon, Sodom, Gomorrah, and others support this doctrine? It would seem that God has already judged and executed his punishments upon these cities. There would be no reason to bring up their names in discussions of punishment if they weren't already dreadful icons of God's judgment. When Jesus said, "it shall be more tolerable for Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee [Capernaum]" (Mat. 11:23-24), did he mean that God would raise the inhabitants of Sodom and Capernaum for participation at Jesus' judgment seat? If he did, how could we understand Sodom's judgment being more tolerable than Capernaum's? Wouldn't it be a condemnation of death for them both? Further, how would the inhabitants of Sodom, who already died in a hail of fire and brimstone, find their new sentence of death more defining or terrible than the first? Finally, how would Capernaum's judgment in turn be found worse (less tolerable) than Sodom's? We might even ask why the Sodomites would be singled out. Jesus said of them, "if the mighty works, which have been done in thee [Capernaum], had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day" (Mat. 11:23). This would seem to indicate that even though they were sinners (Gen. 13:13) they were not rebels or unbelievers in the sense of having abandoned knowledge and calling. Again we have to *assume* "in the day of judgment" is a day beyond the grave to give support to this doctrine and we have to *assume* the inhabitants were unbelievers with knowledge and calling.

God testified of Abel's gifts and "by it he being dead yet speaketh" (Heb. 11:4). Isn't

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God's recorded testimony the means whereby the men of Nineveh or the Queen of Sheba though dead yet rise in judgment (Mat. 12:41-42)? Isn't this the way in which Tyre, Sidon, Sodom, and Gomorrah are called for comparison in the day of judgment? Didn't a judgment day with a particular Roman flavor already come to Jesus' generation and to the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum? Are there to be found those that will weep and gnash their teeth among these people at yet another judgment?

To be clear, we are not questioning whether unbelievers can be raised from the dead. There are certainly several cases in the Bible where men and women were raised from the dead on a basis other than the blood of the everlasting covenant. Were any of them raised for the purpose of condemning rebels and unbelievers? We could not find any. Yet amazingly the end of those individuals would appear to be the same as that of the rebels and unbelievers. The sentence of death remained in the only son of the widow of Nain, in Jairus' daughter, and others who were raised from the dead and they lived their lives and died again. How is it that these resurrections are recorded as acts of compassion and those of rebels and unbelievers as just recompense when they both receive the same condemnation, viz., eternal death (provided the former did not follow the teachings of the one who raised them)?

Another strange thought occurs to us regarding this matter. Wouldn't we have to conclude on the basis of your statement of understanding that the widow's son and Jairus' daughter could possibly be raised as rebels and unbelievers if in spite of their miraculous resurrections, they refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Thus they in theory could be raised, yet again, to be condemned to death a third (and final?) time. Does this make sense?

It is one thing to contend that God is **able** to do something but quite another to establish that he **will**. That God can and will resurrect and reward those in Christ is scripturally established and commonly believed by Christadelphians. That God can resurrect and condemn unbaptized rebels and unbelievers may be true but **will** he? We do not find the scripture that clearly lays out the doctrine that "...God **will** raise to condemnation those rebels and unbelievers whom His justice so demands." Further, we find the statement of understanding (NASU) regarding resurrectional responsibility worded such that the doctrine becomes less than useless. Summarizing your statement: Among the unbaptized none can determine who has been called, none can quantify those rebels in any manner, none can specify their crimes, none can define the basis of God's justice, and all are expected to refrain from dogmatic pronouncements regarding time and place of any such judgment.

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You state that the amendment was “inserted to guard against the teaching that God is restricted to raising only those in covenant relationship, and that in this regard His hands are effectively tied by His own laws.” At this point in time this is all water over the dam but consider the impact of this amendment. The J. J. Andrew position was not the only teaching guarded against. What about those Christadelphians who may have agreed with the substance of the amendment but who did not think the fate of some special group in Adam warranted attention as a tenet of our faith? Did they need to be guarded against? What about those Christadelphians who thought God could but may not raise certain rebels and unbelievers or those who thought God may but were not certain that he would? Did they also need to be guarded against? From our point of view, this amendment was inserted for the express purpose of denying fellowship to brethren who did not subscribe to the notion that God must raise certain of the uncovenanted for condemnation and/or did not consider it a first principle. It seems unnatural that your desire for unity between the fellowships should show such deference to the amendment that initially made that fellowship impossible.

The North American Statement of Understanding does not capture our understanding of “Resurrectional Responsibility” and therefore we are unable to accept it as a proposal for unity.

Respectfully,
The Village Christadelphian Ecclesia

cc: Unamended Ecclesias in North America