

RESURRECTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY and FELLOWSHIP

By BROTHER ROBERTS *All from "Christadelphian Magazine" 1894-1898*

CLARIFIED CLAUSE 24 THE ABSOLUTE FELLOWSHIP MINIMUM FOR FAITHFULNESS: NOT TO BE DILUTED BY COMPROMISE FOR UNSOUND UNION

All in this type is by bro. Roberts

All in this type by others

Our comments this type

May, '94, p. 203-4: *NORTH LONDON ECCLESIAL NEWS:* 'After a long series of controversial meetings on the new doctrine introduced by bro. Andrew, the ecclesia was invited to re-affirm the basis of fellowship heretofore in vogue among them, in which the doctrine of light being the basis of resurrectional responsibility was avowed. A majority refused to do so, in consequence of which bro. Lake issued a circular, of which the following is the principal portion—

"Dear brethren & sisters, You are aware that at the business meeting on Sunday last, when the ecclesia was asked to re-affirm its basis of fellowship against the false theories introduced by bro. Andrew, it refused to do so. We, therefore, who maintain the Truth as it has always hitherto been held and taught in the London meeting, have withdrawn from the meeting at Barnsbury Hall. Our first meeting will be held on Sunday morning next, at the Temperance Hall, Islington. We meet at 11 o'clock for the breaking of bread, when all who uphold the Truth in its purity, as hitherto taught among us, are cordially invited to attend." [End N. London]

"The refusal to affirm a doctrine is equivalent to its repudiation; which is a much more serious thing than inability to see it, especially when combined with avowed antagonism to it, as in the present case. The decision of the assembly left bro. Lake and those who act with him NO ALTERNATIVE BUT THE COURSE THEY HAVE ADOPTED"—Editor.

THIS was the beginning of the separation from Resurrectional Responsibility error, and the re-affirmed sound fellowship stand for the Truth, that culminated (in '98) in the clarification by amendment of Clause 24 of the Basis of Fellowship, and of the consequent necessary separation from all who did not accept that amendment (these becoming what was thereafter known as the 'Unamended' or 'Advocate' group. It appears conclusive from the above that they are wrong who claim that bro. Roberts would not have withdrawn from bro. Andrew. He says the withdrawers in London had 'NO ALTERNATIVE.' His later statements confirm this.

This was only the beginning. The problem was not settled. The Advocate Magazine took issue with the withdrawal from bro. Andrew. There was, in the Body, a wide range of view as to the question of where to draw the line in fellowship, apparently even to the extent of some insisting—as an enforced First Principle—that all who ever heard the Truth preached would be raised and judged. It would appear that the majority (or at least a large and very active number) in Britain leaned in the direction of an over-strong fellowship stand—considerably beyond what bro. Roberts believed necessary or scriptural.

He sought to avoid, or at least postpone, further fragmentation; and to defend the Body, by his deterring influence and persuasion, against the trend to an extreme stand.

He will be seen to consistently (though perhaps not always entirely clearly & obviously) take the stand that the absolute minimum fellowship requirement is what later became the clarified (NOT changed in meaning) Clause 24. This was indeed already the basis of FELLOWSHIP agreed on from the beginning, and he had been instrumental in its first formulation. He says its ORIGINAL WORDING was meant to state what the amendment merely reworded more specifically in a way that could not be misconstrued or evaded.

Bro. R will be seen, through these difficult years, to be leading the Body toward this clarified and re-affirmed position, fending off and toning down the extremists. Any who insisted on a stronger stand than this he allowed to depart, and would not print their Ecclesial News. But he did print the E.N. of the increasing number of ecclesias who individually took a fellowship stand that coincided with what later became the Amended Birmingham Statement of Faith.

Finally, as the issues became clear, and the position of the Body gradually took shape, the Birmingham ecclesia amended its Statement of Faith, which (in practical effect) set the fellowship position for the whole Body (as bro. R realized it would).

We are convinced from the evidence that bro. R, as of 1898, would accept no fellowship position weaker than the clarified Clause 24. It was adopted before his death and with his concurrence. It was unavoidable, to end the confusion and preserve the Truth. The issue had been forced by vociferous error. It had to be faced & dealt with. A clear minimum position had to be taken and faithfully defended & maintained. To go back now is unfaithfulness.

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June, '94:242: "The circular [by the Andrew side] points out that 'the ecclesia has not hitherto made this a test of fellowship.' That is true. And if it now becoming such, it is not because of any changed attitude on the part of those who believed it, but because some who believed it are now repudiating it . . .

"PERHAPS WE HAVE BEEN WRONG in winking at the denial of a truth that has *always* been recognized as a PART OF THE GOSPEL from the beginning. And it may be that God *in His providence* is forcing us into a MORE PROMINENT ASSERTION of the fact that He will not be mocked by any of the sons of men to whom the knowledge of His sovereign will is allowed to come, but that He will require it of their hands *in the Great Day of wrath*.

"We were invited 10 years ago to unite in the attitude now being taken by the London brethren, on the occasion of an Australian ecclesia having withdrawn from some on this very subject. Our answer (Apr.'84 Chdn, p. 190) was as follows—

"It seems a pity to make the fate of the rejected a cause of rupture, where First Principles are not compromised. It is the Glad Tidings of salvation . . . that is the basis of union in Christ, and not the details as to how the disobedient are to be dealt with—so long as it is recognized that death is the upshot of disobedience. Granted that responsibility should be preached. But it is a point on which there should be patience with those who do not see the full extent of the responsibility. No one can say where, among the rejecters of the Word, responsibility exists. We can only recognize the GENERAL AND REASONABLE PRINCIPLE THAT LIGHT, WHEN SEEN, MAKES RESPONSIBLE."

"The Sydney brethren answered—

"The discussion had lasted 3 months. A continuation of the proceedings would have been destructive of the unity and peace that ought to prevail in every ecclesia. Hence the action, which proceeded from no animus, but from a simple desire for a scriptural state of things; and to maintain the wholesome rule of responsibility laid down by the Lord, that—light having come into the world—if men knowingly refuse subjection they come under its condemnation." [End Sydney quote].

"The question has now been raised in a way that defies accommodation. We kept back bro. Andrew's name until he himself published it to the world. Having done all we could to keep the controversy at bay, we can but sorrowfully accept the situation created, believing at the same time that *the hand of God may be in it*, compelling the assertion and proclamation of the WHOLE TRUTH: concerning the day of His anger as well as the day of His favour"—Editor.

FROM the publication of the Sydney letter, coupled with the endorsement of the London action, it would appear that bro. R was recognizing that in light of developments, a stronger stand than in the past was becoming necessary, and that it was PROVIDENTIAL.

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Aug.'94:302: "The Advocate [Magazine] presentment of the matter is inaccurate and inconsistent . . . If the question of the fate of the enlightened rejecter of the Truth has not been allowed to 'remain where it was for 30 years,' it is because a public denial has been made of what for 30 years has been accepted as PART & PARCEL OF THE PROFESSED SYSTEM OF TRUTH on the question of what constitutes the ground of human responsibility to God. Such a question is naturally an INTEGRAL PORTION OF THE TRUTH.

"We have for 40 years been believing & preaching that the light of knowledge is the ground on which God holds man accountable IN THE GREAT DAY OF JUDGMENT . . . This has now been publicly repudiated . . . The fact that bro. Andrew has veered round to the doctrine which bro. Williams holds, explains why his sympathy should be with him, & why the action of the brethren here who differ with him should appear in the tragic aspect [he presents].

"Bro. Williams does not sufficiently appreciate the significance of differing with Dr. Thomas on the question at issue. It is one thing to differ with Dr. Thomas as to the meaning of a particular passage, and another thing to differ with him as to a PRINCIPLE OF DIVINE TRUTH.

"The question of what makes men responsible to the judgment of God IS A QUESTION OF DIVINE TRUTH . . . Dr. Thomas has taught that the ground of man's responsibility to God is the knowledge of His will. If this IS the truth, then differing with Dr. Thomas is differing with the truth" (R.R.)

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Dec.'96:474: "Bro. MacDougall of Cumnock, and the ecclesia of Kilmarnock, think the time has come for the re-affirmation of the truth that *knowledge makes a man responsible to the judgment-seat of Christ*. Bro. MacDougall says its denial has gone outside of London, and that there is a necessity for a firm and decisive attitude on the question AS AFFECTING FELLOWSHIP. Bro. G. C. Harvey writes in the same sense: . . . [Bro. Harvey's letter follows here in the Chdn. Mag.] . . .

"REMARKS: There is a good deal of force in this view of matters. We have for years felt uncertain—not as to the doctrine that men who knowingly refuse to submit to Christ are responsible to his judgment-seat at the resurrection—but as to how those ought to be regarded who deny it . . . Dr. Thomas was against making it a ground of fellowship . . . We admit it makes a difference when this error becomes aggressive . . . This is from my last letter to bro. Williams (Sept. 1,1896)—

"A NEW SITUATION has created new difficulties. A reserved and doubtful attitude has been changed into a *public and aggressive denial* of light as the ground of resurrectional responsibility. The remarks-you quote from the

Christadelphian WERE suited to a time when that denial was a doubtful thing. They are *NOT applicable* to the situation created by an organized attack. Circumstances always alter cases, as you know.

"The present difficulty has not been created by me, and IF I AM FORCED TO APPEAR TO TAKE A MORE DEFINITE ATTITUDE, it has not been my choice . . . If bro. Andrew's tactics have forced *a more definite attitude on me*, it may be that in this I am coerced into a COURSE OF DUTY NOT BEFORE SUFFICIENTLY RECOGNIZED" (R.R.)

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Jan. '97:32: . . . [This note follows the publication of 2 more strong letters urging more positive action] . . ."Bro. Walker endorses the foregoing. He thinks we ought not to countenance any doctrine which obscures or weakens the moral claims of the Gospel on those who come within the sound of its hearing. The Editor cannot add anything to what he said last month, except that he MAY HAVE ERRED IN THE LENIENCY with which he has acted in reference to this departure from truth."

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Feb. '97:78: "The question begins to appear in a MORE SERIOUS LIGHT as it comes to be considered thoroughly in all its bearings"—Editor.

SEVERAL had written pointing out the dangers of not taking a clear, strong fellowship stand. These letters bro. R published in full, with this editorial note at the end of them. Brethren who actively preached the Truth on the matter were being publicly opposed by those who disagreed, or who did not think it important, or who viewed fellowship more loosely.

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Apr. '97:166: "Where men agree that light brings resurrectional responsibility, apart from the question of obedience, there ought to be no-division" (R.R.)

THIS irreducible minimum for sound fellowship crops up repeatedly in bro. R's comments. It should be carefully borne in mind. It finally led to the necessary clarification of Clause 24 as a basis of fellowship. Most of the statements quoted from bro. R cautioning patience and restraint and toleration were directed at those who would force the issue beyond this point, in trying to define just WHO is responsible, and what DEGREE of knowledge creates responsibility. He adamantly opposed this. This was the big problem he faced: going too far.

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May, '97:206: . . . [Commenting on another strong letter he published] . . ."This is the right doctrine, undoubtedly. And when men oppose it, *as is now done in London*, there cannot be the unity of mind which is ESSENTIAL to walking together IN FELLOWSHIP . . . [This is crystal-clear as to whether he would fellowship Andrewism] . . .

"But it is altogether different when we are dealing with men who — ADMITTING THE PRINCIPLE OF LIGHT BRINGING RESURRECTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY—are doubtful whether the *degree* of light appertaining to our own particular day (where there is no open vision, & no visible authentication of the written Word of the Lord) is sufficient to attach that responsibility to the disobedient.

"A man believes the truth on this question who believes that LIGHT MAKES A MAN RESURRECTIONALLY RESPONSIBLE, but who may as the same time maintain that the great majority of unbelievers in our day are non-responsible, because of absence of conditions that in the apostolic age created this responsibility.

"We think there ought to be no hesitation in recognizing responsibility where *conviction* exists; because such a state of mind brings the subjects of it into the same position as those who saw the works. They 'see' in another way, and the moral principle involved is the same . . .

"The full application of responsibility no man can know. For who can tell the *degree* of light necessary to bring condemnation; or where that degree exists? So long as the *principle* above IS RECOGNIZED, the ground of fellowship exists so far as this question is concerned.

"WE ARE ALL AGREED THAT THE POSITION TAKEN BY BRO. ANDREW IS NOT AN 'OPEN QUESTION,' BUT ONE THAT INTERFERES WITH FELLOWSHIP. What we require to further agree about is that where PRIVILEGE IS ADMITTED to be the ground of RESURRECTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY, it ought not to be an objection to any man's fellowship that he is unable to say (what NO man can say) what *amount* of privilege is necessary before that responsibility begins to be operative. This may not suit those who advocate an extreme course, but it is a limitation which the calm exercise of reason will sanction.

HOW dare anyone say, in the light of this, that bro. R would have fellowshipped bro. A's doctrines? And surely it is becoming clearer and clearer just where bro. R drew the unyielding fellowship line; and the extremes he was contending with which went beyond that line. These latter were his great concern. By patience he nursed the Body thru this turmoil. Some very sincere extremists left, but he was able to prevent them rending the Body to pieces.

A fair consideration of all the evidence gives a very different picture of bro. R from the stumbling, hesitant, reluctant, having-to-be-prodded caricature that some—both then & now—have drawn of him. He could see aspects they could not, & dangers they were blind to.

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June, '97. inside front: "A community that would refuse to confess that though God 'winks at' times of ignorance, He will NOT wink at times of knowledge, but WILL hold men answerable IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT for knowingly refusing to submit to the demands of the Gospel, is a community that in that particular would refuse to consent to 'the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus' (1 Tim. 6:3). It might be necessary that you should SEPARATE from a community persevering in that attitude; only it would be necessary to be sure that such was really their attitude."

AGAIN we see clearly where bro. R draws the fellowship line. And note the signification of the quotation he uses. It deals with withdrawal.

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July, '97:294: FROM PLYMOUTH: "*We sorrow at losing 2 such able and zealous brethren as bre. Sleep and Williams, who take extreme ground on the right side of the Responsibility Question . . . We have passed the following resolution—*

"Our ecclesia affirms its belief that light brings responsibility to judgment If this is admitted by those seeking our fellowship, we will not judge a brother's doubtful thoughts as to the EXTENT of the enlightenment creating such responsibility, and—consequently—WHEN such responsibility commences." . . .

"We were willing to pass the resolution you advised bro. Sleep to submit to us, but he did not think it went far enough." End Plymouth . . . Bro. R comments—

"If we recollect, the resolution was to this effect: 'That though God winks at times of ignorance, He does NOT wink at times of knowledge, but WILL hold men answerable in the day of judgment for a knowing refusal to submit to the claims of the Gospel'—Editor "

AGAIN, the basic issue is clear, and the 'extremist' problem bro. R faced is manifest.

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Oct. '97:419: . . . [Someone asks] . . . "*Is it true that the Birmingham ecclesia teaches or permits to be taught, that 'Resurrection only affects those who have been baptized into Christ'? Or would it countenance in its midst those who OPPOSED the doctrine that knowledge of God's will is in itself sufficient to bring resurrectional responsibility? Or those who maintain that Prop. 24 of the Birmingham Basis permits the members to teach what they like on the question of Responsibility?*

"I put this question because we are asked fellowship by some who openly disavow the resurrection of enlightened rebels on the plea of having now adopted the Birmingham Basis in its entirety."

Bro. R replies: "The Birmingham ecclesia has from the very first taught the very *opposite* of what is above stated; and doubtless would NOT COUNTENANCE THE OPPOSITION OF THE TRUTH. Prop. 24 did not define the 'responsible' because it was not necessary. The current understanding of the term is exemplified in Finger Post 45, of which the ecclesia circulated 1000s. It warns the reader—

"Take care, while denying the responsibility of the UNenlightened, that you do not ignore the scripturally-inculcated responsibility of the WILFUL REJECTERS of the light. Some do this, with the result of reaching the demoralizing conclusion that those sinners ONLY who try to obey Christ in baptism will rise to punishment; while sinners who resolve to have nothing to do with him will be left to pass away with their ungodly deeds unrequited. Such a conclusion is CONTRARY TO SCRIPTURE."

"Open disavowers' of this doctrine ought not to seek fellowship under cover of the Birmingham Constitution" (R.R.).

IT is apparent why a clarification of Clause became necessary, and why it is essential TODAY to faithfully maintain that clarification IN FELLOWSHIP without compromise.

Nov.'97. inside front: "The thing at issue is the PRINCIPLE of *light being the ground of responsibility*. There are various classes in the controversy—

1. Those who out and out deny that God CAN raise knowing rebels to judgment, consistently with His law.
2. Those who admit that He can AND WILL, but who hesitate as to the *degree* of knowledge necessary to make a man a knowing rebel.
3. Those who are content with the broad principle that 'To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin'—and who therefore believe that ALL who know the Gospel to be the Truth and refuse submission to it, WILL rise to condemnation at the appearance of Christ.
4. Those who think that mere contact with the Truth in its public or private proclamation, or the possession of a Bible, is enough to make a man responsible.

"The 2nd and 3rd positions are consistent with each other, and represent the attitude of enlightened and prudent men. The first is inadmissible, and the 4th is unwarranted" (R.R.)

THIS shows the labyrinth he was working thru, & the educational job he was attempting.

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Dec.'97:506: Bro. Walker writes— "*The continuation of controversy concerning the Responsibility Question, & the widespread circulation of grave charges against the Birmingham ecclesia of sheltering error & suppressing or hindering the Truth, have induced the arranging brethren to recommend the ecclesia to define its position on the matter. Their recommendation will come before the ecclesia at the quarterly meeting. The Birmingham ecclesia has never ceased to warn men to flee from the wrath to come. There is no cause for the fears of some & censure of others.*"

BRO. Roberts was in Australia, but—according to his own testimony—very much in touch, and in charge of the magazine. He still held ecclesial office in Birmingham.

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Feb. '98, inside front: "We regret our inability to share the extreme attitude that some are taking on the Responsibility Question. Though the RULE of responsibility is clear enough, its *application* is impossible for man, because no man can say *where* knowledge and privilege exist to a sufficient degree to bring a man within its operation. We should therefore be content, as heretofore, with the RECOGNITION OF LIGHT AS THE GROUND OF CONDEMNATION.

"If a man comes openly denying—as some have recently done—that knowing rebels against the light will be brought to judgment, and insisting upon their view as a condition of fellowship, there is no alternative but to accept the breach that he creates. But there is no need for the retaliation implied in *extreme* action on the other side . . .

"We ought not to insist on uncertain details as a question of fellowship. Who can tell *which* of the rebels and unbelievers will be raised to judgment? . . .

"If they contended that non-baptism shields a deliberate rebel from the results of his rebellion, a principle would be at stake . . . But it is different where God's untrammelled prerogative to deal with the enlightened rejecter is admitted, AND THE CERTAINTY OF THE RESURRECTION OF SOME AMONG THEM TO PUNISHMENT RECOGNIZED . . . Men in THIS POSITION, believing the Gospel with all their hearts, are men entitled to our fellowship" (R.R.)

HE again insists, for fellowship, on acceptance of the principle that light brings Res. Resp.

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Feb.'98:79: "*On the question of the Responsibility to Resurrection and Condemnation of Enlightened Rejecters of the Truth, the [Birmingham] ecclesia adopted the recommendation of the Arranging Brethren, which ran as follows—*

"Seeing that this doctrine is contained in the Statement of Faith which forms our Basis of Fellowship; and that organized and active denial of it in London and elsewhere has taken place; also that the matter has been thoroughly discussed in our literature for more than 3 years past; and seeing further controversy concerning it resulting in division in certain ecclesias is still current; and that it is widely and publicly alleged that we are fellowshiping or sheltering error on the matter, it is

"RESOLVED: That we reaffirm Prop. 24 of the Statement of Faith in the following amplified terms, and that we FELLOWSHIP THOSE ONLY WHO HOLD THE SAME DOCTRINE:

"Prop. 24: 'That at the appearance of Christ prior to the establishment of the Kingdom, the responsible (namely, those who KNOW THE REVEALED WILL OF GOD, AND HAVE BEEN CALLED UPON TO SUBMIT TO IT), dead & living, obedient and disobedient, WILL be summoned before his judgment seat 'to be judged according to their works' and 'receive in body according to what they have done, whether it be good or bad'" (2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1; Rom. 2:5, 6, 16; 1 Cor. 4:5; Rev. 11:18)."

NOTE that FELLOWSHIP IS LIMITED to those who HOLD this doctrine. As we shall see, bro. R defends this, calls it a First Principle, calls it 'our' resolution, and denies the possibility of its rescindment. We believe bro. R's position is the only faithful one to hold. Any attempt to quote him to undermine this so frequently stated position MUST be a perversion of his words. The totality of these extracts demonstrates that.

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Mar.'98:128: "We cannot join in [this pamphlet's] judgment of what should be done in the case of brethren who ADMIT the LIGHT OF KNOWLEDGE as the GROUND of responsibility, but who are not clear as to the *amount* of light necessary to create this responsibility. These brethren say, 'Withdraw.' And not only so, but, 'Insist on it that all in fellowship should withdraw from all in a like uncertainty' . . . We cannot go to the *extremes* for which some are contending . . .

"In the present case, it is not a principle that is at stake, but a question as to the detached *application* of a principle. The PRINCIPLE is that *light brings responsibility*. THIS PRINCIPLE IS ADMITTED IN THE CASES IN QUESTION. But there is a lack of agreement as to how this principle will work out in an age like our own, when the light burns so low.

"Some dispose of the point by saying, 'Knowledge that is equal to saving men is equal to condemning them.' This does not dispose of it. ALL will agree that the knowledge in a man which is sufficient to make *him* wise unto

salvation, is sufficient to bring *that same man* into condemnation at the resurrection if he refuse submission to the commandments of God.

"But the question is—not as to *that same man*— but *other men* of whom no man can say they are sufficiently illuminated to become the subjects of saving faith, or sufficiently acquainted with the *evidence* of the Truth as to be resurrectionally responsible for rejecting it.

"This is a question which it is not in ANY man's power to settle. Who can tell where the light shines sufficiently to make a man responsible? For ourselves, we confess our entire inability to settle such a question. It would require the power of 'discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart' which God alone possesses.

"If *we* cannot settle such a question, why should we insist upon a man assenting to some particular definition of it before we will receive him as a brother? And, still worse, insist on his disowning all others who will not do likewise? 'Purity of fellowship' is a laudable cry, but it requires to be carried out with the discrimination of wisdom" (R.R.)

SURELY we can see what bro. R was driving at, and contending with, when he appears (to some) to be 'weak' on fellowship. He perceived the matter, and its pitfalls, more deeply and clearly than most. The GENERAL PRINCIPLE is crystal clear, and MUST be insisted on in fellowship, for faithfulness and for the welfare of the Body and the Truth.

But none of us has the discernment or ability to apply it specifically to any particular individual. We can be almost certain in some cases, and must urgently warn them so, but we cannot say for SURE in ANY case, & less so in cases of total rejection. And we cannot cumber fellowship requirements with such determinations. This is obviously what some in 'zeal' wanted to do, & insist on others accepting. Bro. R knew it would tear the Body apart.

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Apr.'98, inside front: "*Intelligence [Ecclesial News] communications from Partick, Barrmill & Beith, Heckmondwike, Newbury, and Radstock are referred to the Editor in Australia, the cause being embarrassments created by the Responsibility Question.*"

THIS (by bro. Walker) shows that bro. R was in touch and in control, and decided what Ecclesial News on the subject appeared. For confirmation, see July, inside cover, below.

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Apr.'98:160: To S.B.: "The extremes you are going to on the Responsibility Question are not justified by wisdom. The statements you quote with such emphasis ('He that rejecteth me'. . . 'He that believeth not,' etc.) have to be taken with the qualifications belonging to them. If not, do you not see that all Mahometans and all the benighted millions of Christendom will be raised? —for the first class 'reject,' and the second 'believe not.' You surely are not prepared for this! What are the 'qualifications'? Jesus supplies them—

"If I had not *come* and *spoken* unto them . . . if I had not *done among them* works which none other man did, they had not had sin [to answer for]. But now have they both SEEN and hated both me and my Father"

(John 15:22-24).

"The statements in question must always be understood with the qualifications supplied in these words. The effect is to deprive them of the indiscriminate application which some are giving them . . . To apply these statements *in their unabated force* to circumstances where the same ground of responsibility does not exist is, in my judgment, a mistake. They apply where a man *knows and believes* the Truth, & refuses submission, because the PRINCIPLE is the same: *sin against the light*.

But who can tell when such a knowledge exists? The question necessarily stands in the 'hazy' form which offends some . . . Where the GENERAL PRINCIPLE IS ADMITTED—that the *light of knowledge IS the ground of responsibility*—all is admitted that we can lawfully demand . . . It would be a wrong against Christ to refuse men who ADMIT THE SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE, but are dim as to its application, for the reasons hinted at" (R.R.)

BRO. R does not *always* insert 'resurrectional' before 'responsibility' when defining the 'scriptural principle' whose acceptance is the MINIMAL fellowship requirement for soundness and faithfulness. But he does it often enough to make it undeniable what he means. See 'General Principle' below. May, 1898.

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Apr.'98:176: **Ystrad Ecclesial News:** "*The distressing effect of the Resurrectional Responsibility trouble has made its appearance among us, preventing the hearty cooperation so necessary among the brethren, and jeopardizing the position of those who manifest interest in the things of the Kingdom and Name.*"

"*Bre. Jones, Fox and Green—having adopted the 'extremist' view—have seceded from us; their attitude on this matter appearing to be one of denying the possibility of salvation to those who know the Lord's will and do it, unless they can define the DEGREE of knowledge necessary, and the present day application of a few texts that condemn those without.*"

"We hope now to resume our duty to the Truth in its application to ourselves and others, fully endorsing the POSITION HELD BY BRO. ROBERTS AND THAT OF THE TEMPERANCE HALL ECCLESIA, as reported in the 'Christadelphian' of last month."

THEY refer to the Clause 24 clarification appearing in the February issue. We see again the basic minimal position, and the 'extremist' problem.

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May,'98:182-186: "True Principles and Uncertain Details: The Danger of Going Too Far: — It has pleased God to save men by the belief and obedience of a system of Truth briefly described as 'the Gospel of our Salvation,' and also spoken of by Jesus and John and Paul as 'the Truth': 'Ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free' (Jesus).

"For this reason it is necessary for believers to be *particular* in REQUIRING THE FULL RECOGNITION OF THIS TRUTH at the hands of one another, as the basis of their mutual association; and generally to 'contend for the Faith once delivered to the saints.' Those men are to be commended who *faithfully exact this recognition both at the hands of applicants for baptism & claimants for fellowship*.

"But there is a danger of going too far . . . There are General Principles as to which there can be NO COMPROMISE. But there are also unrevealed applications of these principles in detail which cannot be determined with certainty, & which every man must be allowed to judge for himself . . . An exception would, of course, be naturally made in the case of the construction of a detail that would destroy the General Principle involved . . .

"Responsibility: GENERAL PRINCIPLE—That men ARE responsible to the RESURRECTION OF CONDEMNATION who refuse subjection to the will of God when their circumstances are such as to leave them no excuse for such refusal.

"Uncertain Detail: But when, in our age, are men in such circumstances? Who can tell but God alone? Some think it is enough if a man have a Bible. Some think *that* is not enough unless the man have capacity to understand the explanation. Some think even *that* is not enough unless the hand of God is openly shown in certification of the divinity of the Bible, as in the apostolic age, when 'the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the Word with signs'.

"What are we to do? Are we to insist on a precise shade of opinion on a point which no judicious man can be absolutely clear about? All we can be *sure* about is that when men are 'without excuse' knowing the judgment of God (Rom. 1:20, 32; 2:1); when they have 'no cloak for their sin,' like the men who saw the miracles of Christ & yet both 'saw and hated both him and his Father' (John 15:22-24)—that they WILL come forth at the resurrection to receive punishment according to the righteous judgment of God.

"When men admit THIS, they admit enough for purposes of fellowship as regards this particular point. To insist on MORE than this is to go too far, and to inflict needless distress and cause unnecessary division . . .

"Where men ADMIT that rebels & unbelievers who deserve punishment WILL RISE AT THE RESURRECTION TO RECEIVE THAT PUNISHMENT, without reference to the question whether they are baptized or not, they admit all that can righteously be exacted of them" (R.R.)

MANY, in quoting from this article, completely miss the General Principle that bro. R lays down as VITAL TO SOUND FELLOWSHIP, and try to use the article to justify loose fellowship—the very opposite of bro. R's purpose. Get the whole article and read it carefully, and you will find it is no support for loose fellowship, which bro. R was dead set against.

Hold fast to this 'General Principle' OF FELLOWSHIP that responsible rebels WILL RISE to judgment. Bro. R says it cannot faithfully be compromised. Nothing quoted from him, in this long, patient struggle against the extremists, can be interpreted to contradict this basic & oft-repeated MINIMAL fellowship requirement. Hold it high aloft. Keep it crystal clear.

But we are very unwise to go ANY FURTHER, and to say of any rejecting individual that he certainly WILL rise—though we can and must vehemently warn him of its probability.

And we are certainly wrong to force on others as a required fellowship principle this position of judging specific individuals. Individual judging is always dangerous.

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May,'98:203: "The Scriptures teach the resurrection of *some* rejecters—not *all*. The benighted multitudes of Christendom are 'rejecters' of the Gospel. You don't imagine *they* are to be raised? So with the Jews and Mahometans. *Why* are they not to be raised? When this is answered, a principle comes into view that creates the uncertainty with which you are so impatient with regard to others. This borderland of uncertainty undoubtedly exists, whether we recognize it or not . . .

"But you misunderstand if you suppose the uncertainty has any reference to those who reject the Gospel *knowing it to be the Gospel*, because of the human inconvenience of conforming to its demands. Preach 'wrath to come' as

strenuously as you may concerning THIS class. But bear with your brethren who cannot say in what *particular cases* this class is to be found" (R.R.)

ANY merciful person will be among those who desire that the roster of the resurrected rejecters will be less rather than more. It betrays unChristlike vindictiveness to desire otherwise, or to glory in the expectation, especially as to particular individuals.

Certainly, deliberate wilful rejecters WILL be raised: God is not mocked. It is a dreadful thought, and none should delude themselves they are immune to that terrible Day. The very presumption that they are immune betrays the realization that creates responsibility.

And it doesn't need a full knowledge of the Gospel. It just needs a realized but rejected opportunity to learn the Gospel. But we personally lean to the conviction that the vast majority who even may appear responsible are really below the level of being called to account. God is jealous for His honour, and none can flout Him with impunity. But He is also well aware of man's pitiful weaknesses and limitations at best. This, we believe, is bro. R's point.

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June '98, inside front: To D.J.H.: "There is no question of 'cumbering' the Responsibility agitation with the question of the degree of knowledge needful to create said responsibility. The cumbering was done for us at the start. In at least 3 cases, the parties proposed to be withdrawn from were prepared to admit the light of knowledge as the ground of responsibility, but were not prepared to cast off some others who—while RECOGNIZING THE PRINCIPLE—were in doubt how far it might extend to unbelievers in a dark age like our own.

"*That was the BEGINNING of the difficulty, and REMAINS the difficulty.* It is NOT a question of rejecting the Truth [the General Principle], but of rejecting many who are not clear HOW FAR this particular truth applies in particular circumstances. Needless distress is being caused by the insistence of a ruthless rule of incision" (R.R.)

Surely THAT makes the issue clear!

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July '98, inside front: [To several] "If we do not publish your Intelligence, it is not that we differ from you *in doctrine*, but because we cannot share what we consider the unrighteous action of rejecting righteous men who believe and obey the Gospel, but are not as clear as you as to the *extent* of the operation of the law of responsibility in an age lacking some of the grounds of it . . . We cannot, in the name of 'staunchness and trueness,' be guilty of the injustice of rejecting obedient believers of the Gospel who may happen to be uncertain as to how far the Lord will hold men responsible in this dark and deserted age" (R.R.)

BRO. R refused to print some Ecclesial News because it went too far, and he could not conscientiously be a party to the stand taken. This fact gives deep significance to those he DID print. And he DID print (and thus endorse) many VERY strong fellowship stands that restricted themselves to the vital PRINCIPLE involved (in line with the Clause 24 clarification) and did not get into its specific application to cases, or the degree of knowledge necessary. See several at the end of this article.

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July '98, inside back: [To Y.R.] "There is a difference between those who are uncertain as to the application of the rule of responsibility, and those who deny it altogether. You are in the latter position in *denying that responsibility to judgment is created by knowledge and that ground of it is rebellion against the light*—a position aggravated by the virtual contention that a man must obey God a little before He can bring him to resurrectional punishment for disobeying Him much.

"Under this contention, it follows that the way for a sinner to keep clear of judgment would be to disobey God entirely from the start, & set Him at defiance by keeping out of the water. This would reduce the moral procedure of God to a monstrosity for which we CANNOT MAKE OURSELVES RESPONSIBLE IN FELLOWSHIP" (R.R.)

WE point out in all kindness, and not as judgment but as simple fact, that the Unamended (Advocate) group has been quite content for nearly 100 years to fellowship this error, & still DOES currently fellowship this error, which is still actively promoted among them—this 'reducing the moral procedure of God to a monstrosity' that bro. R dare not fellowship.

There are today those in this group actively loyal to bro. Andrew's views, and to his book, 'The Blood of the Covenant.' Have those among them who claim NOT to hold this error ever—in the whole past 85 years—made any move to separate from it?

* * *

Aug '98:356: "Resolutions in reference to this question have recently been omitted from Intelligence communications from various places. They were forwarded to the Editor in Australia, who cannot (for reasons already given) join in refusing the fellowship of obedient believers of the Gospel who may happen to be unclear as to the *amount* of punishment God will mete out to those who refuse submission in these times of darkness, *so long as they are prepared to admit that THE GROUND OF RESURRECTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY IS THE LIGHT OF KNOWLEDGE . . .*

"There are subtle shades in the question which call for careful discrimination. The men who *ADMIT that light is the ground of responsibility*—but who are uncertain whether (yet do NOT deny that) the amount of light on earth in

an age so unlike the apostolic age as ours is sufficient to subject rejecters to resurrectional condemnation—are not men to be branded by withdrawal as though they denied the Truth" (R.R.)

CAN we demand a universal agreement, on pain of disfellowship, that there WILL be rejecters from this age at the judgment seat? Bro. R had very strong convictions that there WOULD be such, and we believe most discerning brethren will share those convictions. And we must in our preaching urgently warn men of that strong probability concerning their wilful neglect or rejection of the Gospel command. And we cannot have a fellowship relation where this is in any way obscured.

But, in the ultimate, case by case, can we demand agreement they WILL be there? No, we cannot. This was the sticking point beyond which bro. R would not go. Some could not perceive the implications of this aspect. Bro. R could. He could see where it was leading. Therefore, his 'General Principle' that could not be compromised, the clarification of Clause 24: an essential minimum for sound fellowship. But do not pry beyond this into detailed applications, especially as to insisted-upon First Principles.

It may conceivably be that there are no rejecters in this pitiful, benighted generation that God feels necessary to raise for judgment and condemnation. We can only hope that this is the case. We can have no pleasure in desiring the suffering of any.

But, sadly, we have very strong convictions (and so did bro. Roberts) that this is NOT the case, and that there are many of this generation who will be called to that dreadful account, and we must warn such of the peril they stand in by treading under-foot the extended hand of Divine love and mercy.

But we cannot make it a first principle, enforced in fellowship, that any certain ones, or any at all today, WILL UNQUESTIONABLY be raised and judged. We can only stand where bro. R stood, and in faithfulness require, as a fellowship condition, recognition and belief and robust defence of the vital principle that LIGHT BRINGS RESURRECTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY, and WILFUL REJECTERS WILL BE RAISED AND PUNISHED.

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Oct.'98. inside front: [To J.B.] "We CANNOT publish the rescindment of OUR resolution on Responsibility [the Clause 24 clarification] on the understanding that it means the fellowshipping of those who deny that disobedient knowledge of the will of God renders a man liable to resurrectional condemnation.

"THIS IS A FIRST PRINCIPLE OF THE REVEALED SYSTEM OF TRUTH. Its rejection places a man in a totally different position from those who recognize perceived light as the ground of responsibility, but are uncertain ONLY as to its *application*" (R.R.)

THIS was directly from bro. R in Australia. It was published in the same issue that announced his sudden death in San Francisco. Following are a few of the many individual ecclesial resolutions in line with the Clause 24 clarification that bro. R DID print—

* * *

Jan. '98: MILNSBRIDGE: "On Dec. 1 we unanimously adopted the following resolution: 'That it is our earnest conviction that a knowledge of God's revealed will (irrespective of submission to it) is the ground of responsibility to the judgment seat of Christ at his second appearing, as taught by Christ and his apostles.

'This being so, we feel it to be our duty to withhold fellowship from any who believe the contrary. Neither can we fellowship any who are in doubt on the matter, and who therefore have not arrived at the same conviction as ourselves. We shall also feel it to be our duty to refrain from fellowship with any who, while believing as we do, yet—by their fellowship—tolerate those who believe otherwise.'"

PLYMOUTH: "We believe the Scriptures plainly teach that a knowledge of the Gospel is the ground of Resurrectional Responsibility, even though not followed by obedience. We therefore feel it our painful duty to stand aside from any ecclesia or individual who—while believing the doctrine—yet tolerates the error in other ecclesias by refusing to stand aside from those who do not make it a test of fellowship."

SWANSEA: "On Dec. 8 the ecclesia passed this resolution: 'We believe that the Gospel has claims upon those who hear and understand it; and that knowledge of the Gospel, even though not followed by baptism, makes a man responsible to the resurrection and judgment of the last day. We believe this to be a truth taught in the Scriptures, and we consequently refuse our fellowship to any who are unable to assent to it, or to any ecclesia which—while assenting to it itself—tolerates in its fellowship any who do not believe this truth.

"We repudiate any desire to pronounce arbitrarily WHERE the needful knowledge exists in individual cases, that being a matter beyond our jurisdiction, and one that must be left for the Judge himself to determine."

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Feb.'98: BRISTOL: "The following resolution was adopted Dec. 29: 'That we believe that the first principles of the Oracles of God include the doctrine that knowledge, irrespective of baptism, attaches (to all whom it may reach in our time, as in former days) amenability to the judgment seat of Christ. That we are, therefore, under the painful duty of

withholding fellowship from unbelievers and doubters of this doctrine, and also from those who extend fellowship to them."

AS in many other places, this was not strong enough for some, and they left the meeting. This illustrates the delicacy of the problem. Some very earnest brethren were leaving, not from under-zealousness, but from over-zealousness for an unwarranted extreme. Bro. R was acutely conscious of this ongoing tragedy, and strove mightily to keep it to a minimum, by patience and persuasion.

Feelings were very high, because the destructiveness of the Andrew error shocked and troubled many, and it was backed by a name that had been high in the esteem of the Body for many, many years. They feared its danger because of bro. Andrew's prominence & popularity, and they consequently desired very strong and clear bulwarks against it.

Bro. R did not want to frustrate or destroy this zeal, but to restrain its excesses, and rechannel its enthusiasm in a sound path. He repeatedly told them he agreed wholeheartedly with them on doctrine, but could not go to the extent of the course they took in its defence.

COLNE: "This resolution was adopted Jan. 8: 'We believe that the Scriptures clearly teach that a knowledge of the Gospel is the ground of Resurrectional Responsibility, even though not followed by obedience. We therefore feel it our painful duty to stand aside from any ecclesia or individual who denies or doubts this doctrine. Neither can we fellowship an ecclesia or individual who, while believing the doctrine, yet tolerates the error in other ecclesias by refusing to stand aside from those who do not make it a test of fellowship.'"

THESE bro. R-accepted stands may seem harsh to lax modern ears, but this is the only way the Truth was soundly preserved and passed on to us in the past. And abandonment of such a firm fellowship attitude, and the invention and popularization of the scare-bogey and straw-man called 'bloc disfellowship,' is the cause of conditions in many areas today.

MERTHYR: "We cannot but express our sorrowful astonishment that brethren and sisters expressing faith in the inspired Word should be sceptical or unbelieving as to the 'sorer punishment' awaiting rebels who know the will of God & will not do it—especially as the Bible clearly teaches that all souls belong to God (though alienated by wicked works); and should He condescend to speak to any who have ears to hear, COMMANDING them by His Word to 'Repent and be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,' we believe it is at their peril they disobey. Consequently, we place on record the following resolutions, unanimously passed by us—

1. That we refuse our fellowship to any brother or sister who shall deny, or say that 'Those who have attained to a knowledge of the Truth will NOT come to the resurrection of condemnation because they were not baptized.'

2. That we will not fellowship any brother or sister who is in DOUBT as to whether a knowledge of the Truth makes responsible, irrespective of baptism.

3. Neither will we fellowship with any brother, sister or ecclesia—though believing in a wholly-inspired Bible themselves, & acknowledging that 'light' makes responsible irrespective of baptism—if they fellowship any who do not so believe."

THIS is the kind of robust declaration on the PRINCIPLE itself that is essential as the official ecclesial stand, if the Truth is to be preserved in soundness.

PONTYPOOL: "We refuse association with any ecclesia, or individual member thereof, who either decline to affirm that the entrance of 'light' into the minds of unbaptized persons brings responsibility to resurrectional judgment and condemnation; or have any doubts about it; or tolerate those who are in doubt.

"We consider that the Scriptures are VERY PLAIN on the subject of responsibility, and that the matter has been sufficiently argued and proved from that source during the last 2 or 3 years.

"The AMOUNT of knowledge necessary to make a man responsible to resurrectional judgment is not for us to determine, but must be left to the 'Judge of all the earth' at the judgment seat of Christ."

To which we add a hearty 'AMEN!'

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MOVING the Body gently forward to a clear, sound, unified basis, with the least loss and damage, was a slow, painful task. There were many hotheads, and many laggards. It was not a clear-cut black-and-white issue as former divisions. There were so many degrees of perspective and conviction. A line had to be drawn, and a sound MINIMUM POSITION, that would preserve the basic truth of the issue, had to be fixed and resolutely insisted upon.

Those who were dim to see this necessity had to be persuaded, if possible. Those who demanded quick and extreme action had to be deterred, or sorrowfully allowed to depart with a minimum of damage to the Body.

Bro. R seems to have been somewhat alone in his full and balanced grasp of the situation. The extremists appear to have been the greatest problem and danger, and on these bro. R concentrated his effort.

The sea was very rough, but the boat did not capsize and sink. One by one the ecclesias lined up for the Truth, taking a robust but not extreme stand. At the appropriate time the Birmingham ecclesia clarified its Statement of Faith (which was, in a practical sense, the basic Statement for many), to terminate its misinterpretation, & to fence off the error more clearly.

THIS IS CERTAIN: bro. R at the end of his life endorsed and defended the clarified Clause 24 as a necessary and vital Basis of Fellowship. On the PRINCIPLE itself he was adamant—but he drew the line at any personal or specific APPLICATION of it. That is GOD'S prerogative (through Christ).

Any attempt to set any of bro. R's words against this clear, oft-repeated position is obviously unsound and unjustified. He frankly admits to a gradual and increasing realization of the necessity (due to ALTERED CIRCUMSTANCES) of a more diligent insistence—as to fellowship—upon the sound position the Body had always as a whole vigorously held.

His General Principle ('uncompromisable'), and the Clause 24 clarification, represent his final and MINIMAL FELLOWSHIP STAND. And this was the faithful stand of the Body thereafter until the modern trend toward compromise and relaxation of the principles of sound fellowship set in. For proof of this, read the later magazines, even well into this present century.

To relax in one iota bro. R's minimal stand in the clarified Clause 24 is to return to the chaos and turmoil he carefully and painfully led the Body out of, as seen in the above.

There will always be those who wish to broaden and loosen the standards of sound fellowship, and to abandon the gains for the Truth won by our pioneers in the sad but necessary battles of the past. 'When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find the Faith on the earth?'

This issue is a VITAL PART OF THE GOSPEL, and it has been under tolerated attack in parts of Christadelphia for nearly 100 years. It calls for a POSITIVE, unequivocal, robust declaration—like bro R's General Principle and the clarified Clause 24. All who realize the value of sound doctrine and sound fellowship will be MORE THAN EAGER to give such.

In the light of the history of the matter, hesitant, timid, negative concessions do not fill the requirements of the case. If there has truly been a change of heart, from error to truth, let such be frankly proclaimed, for the strength and glory of the Truth. The Body's appointed role is a 'City set on a hill': a shining, unhesitating beacon of Truth for mankind.

In any return to fellowship after separation, bro. R insisted on the sound scriptural principle of INDIVIDUAL acceptance, not the surreptitious cloak of a mere majority vote. So did his successors, well into this century—see Berean, May, 1980, p. 159. Surely this is OBVIOUSLY the only sound and faithful way.

From their own remarks, at the time and later, it would appear that bro. Roberts' closest associates and contemporaries did not understand the situation as well as he did.
