

*Some Observations, Takin in Part  
From an Address Delivered in the New  
Meetinghouse in Brattleborough, July  
7th, 1816: Being the First Christian  
Communion Held in that Place.*

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*Brattleboro, VT  
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SOME OBSERVATIONS, TAKEN IN PART FROM AN  
ADDRESS DELIVERED IN THE NEW MEETING-  
HOUSE IN BRATTLEBOROUGH, JULY 7th, 1816,  
BEING THE FIRST CHRISTIAN COMMUNION HELD  
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**I** AM thankful, my christian friends, that Providence hath so far favoured us in the erection of this place, that it is now completely finished ; that a regular christian church is established amongst us ; and that we are met together for the first time on such an occasion as this. May Providence preserve this building, which has been erected with so much cheerfulness, for many ages ; and may great numbers who are yet unborn, meet together here, to support christian ordinances, and to worship God in spirit and in truth, when our heads shall all be laid in the dust, and our names forgotten amongst men.

Dr. Doddridge observes, in his introductory sermon to his lectures against Popery, which I have in manuscript,—“ Such of you who have frequently attended my ministry, well know, that it has not been my custom to insist on subjects of controversial divinity. As my temper does not incline me to dispute, so I confess, when I seriously consider the importance of that eternal world to which we are hastening, I

can seldom persuade myself to employ in matters of criticism and debate, those sacred and important moments, which we separate from our common time, with a view to a more immediate preparation for it. Practical preaching is, under God, the great support of the gospel, as practical precepts have every where the greatest stress laid upon them in it."

I most sincerely and heartily assent to the sentiments contained in the above quotation. And you, my friends, can witness for me, that I very seldom indeed, bring matters of controversy into my publick discourses.—I shall, however, on the present occasion, give you my opinion, as briefly as may be, on some controversial points.

Before I came into this country, I wrote to Dr. Morse, respecting a removal hither; informing him, I was no great stickler for particular sentiments in religion; being well assured that many wiser and better than myself differed from me, both on the one side and on the other. But as it was generally reckoned there should be some considerable agreement between a minister and his people, I would observe, I might perhaps be justly styled a moderate Baxterian; there being no other I was acquainted with, who more generally agreed with me on religious subjects than he did. The Dr. answered, there were many ministers in New-England of similar sentiments with mine.

I landed in Boston the 13th of June, 1793, and in March, 1794, I came with my family to

Brattleborough, to settle on a farm. Immediately after my arrival here, I was desired to preach, and was the only minister in this town for twenty years; to which office I was chosen annually, that is to say, twenty times in twenty years; always, as I have been told, by large majorities, and often without a dissenting voice.

Here I have lived in great peace and comfort with my parish, having never had any difference, nor even a dispute with any one. I shall always reflect with pleasure on this part of my life, having reason to hope my labours were not without a divine blessing. I consider many people in this town, who do not now attend my labours, as my old friends, for whom I shall retain an affectionate regard to my dying hour. And I can appeal to my late flock to say, whether I was negligent of their spiritual welfare.

The latter end of March, 1814, in consequence of ill health, and other causes that need not be mentioned, I gave up my pastoral charge. The very next sabbath I was invited to preach at the village; the people there, with some others, having about that time, determined to build a new meeting-house, that themselves and families might be better accommodated, as to the publick worship of Almighty God. As my advanced age and infirm health did not admit of my having the charge of the whole parish, they wished me to preach to them, as a separate society. This I have done ever since the first sabbath in April, 1814.

When in the course of my education, I was called to study the controversial points, I paid great attention to them, and my opinions respecting them became established; and are now very much the same they have been the last fifty years of my life.

One would have thought, that being the only minister in this town for twenty years, my sentiments in religion must have been pretty well known. I always thought and said, we should worship one God the Father, through one mediator the Lord Jesus Christ, by the gracious assistance of one spirit. St. Paul observes, Eph. ii. 18, "through him we have access by one spirit unto the Father;" and chap. iii. 14, "for this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom. viii. 6, "To us there is one God the *Father*, and one Lord Jesus Christ." I always explicitly declared my sentiments, excepting on two points; the doctrine of *election and reprobation*, and the doctrine of *the Trinity*. On the former I seldom said any thing at all, and never professed to believe it. On the other, the Trinity, which I never could understand, I generally made use of scripture language. Had these controverted points been brought into the pulpit, I should have judged it a shameful waste of sacred time; and they would very likely have occasioned disputes and strife about what we can none of us understand. I therefore judged it more prudent to say but little about them; these difficult questions, though of little

importance, having been matter of bitter contention in the church for fifteen hundred years. For this mode of proceeding my heart will never reproach me so long as I live. In all other points, I always expressed myself without any reserve. And it may be fairly supposed, that had not my doctrine and manner of preaching, and manner of life too, been agreeable to the society in general, they would not have chosen me for their pastor, for twenty years in succession.

Within these two years, strange reports have been circulating respecting my erroneous opinions in religion, particularly as to the doctrine of the Trinity—a word that never occurs in the word of God.

It is well known, some professing christians deny our Lord's having had any existence before he came into this world. Such go under the denomination of Socinians. Some have charged *me* with being a Socinian; but this charge is altogether *groundless*.

The criticisms which writers of this cast have made upon the scriptures, to establish their own sentiments from them, always appeared to me forced and unnatural, and inconsistent with the general strain of the word of God. I would not, if I could well help it, stately attend a Socinian minister, provided he frequently brought these disputable points into the pulpit.

But notwithstanding I consider Socinianism as an error, I dare not condemn all that embrace it; our Lord having said, judge not, con-

demn not;—judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. And if our Lord's observation stands good, the tree is known by its fruits, it must be acknowledged, that many Socinians have been amongst the most learned, and most benevolent and pious among men.

Our Lord observes, Matt. ii. 27, No man knoweth the Son but the Father. From which it seems reasonable to expect, that there is and will be, a mystery in his nature that cannot be comprehended, and which we should speak of with reverence.

I would observe farther, our blessed Lord is called *God*. In what sense he is so, I cannot pretend to say. He is also spoken of as the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person; by whom God made the worlds—in whom all fulness dwells. The spirit is said to be given to him above measure. And as St. Paul expresses it, Phil. ii. 9—11, “being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Now from these and other similar expressions in scripture, I con-



clude our Lord is possessed of a nature and office, infinitely above and beyond any thing possessed by men or angels. Indeed, I *never did say*, I thought him a creature, or that there was a time when *he did not exist*. But I *have said*, and I *do say*, that in the business of our salvation, Christ is represented as inferior to the Father. But in what this inferiority consists, and how far it extends, I do not pretend to know. Our Lord declares, John xiv. 28, My Father is greater than I: and 13th of Mark, 32, speaking of the day of judgment, he observes, “of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, *neither the Son*, but the Father.” I am not ignorant of the interpretation given by some to the above texts, but they do not appear to me satisfactory.

In the whole scheme of our redemption, God the Father is represented as the first mover, contriver and director. Christ being sent into the world, is represented not as *the cause* of the love of God to sinful men, but as the effect. God so loved the world that he gave, &c. John iii. 16. The son is spoken of as acting in subordination to that direction, in order to the accomplishment of that gracious design. Christ speaks of himself, in a great number of places, as being commissioned and sent of the Father, as acting as his delegate, and as coming into the world, not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him.

I must confess to you, my friends, that I consider our Lord as having made an atonement for sin. Numberless scriptures might be quoted in proof of this. He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification. The Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all. Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. How the sufferings and death of Christ have this effect, I do not pretend to know. The gospel, as Dr. Macknight observes, "has discovered to us *only* the fact, without explaining to us the manner in which it is brought about." I therefore thankfully receive the doctrine, just as I would thankfully receive an efficacious medicine, that would certainly cure a most dangerous disease, though I knew nothing of the ingredients of which it was composed, or the manner in which it operated upon the human frame.

I am also fully satisfied, that our works, in no degree whatever, merit the favour of God. They are the *conditions* of our salvation, but not the cause. Not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to his mercy he saveth us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. I as firmly believe as any man can, that there is no other name given under heaven amongst men, whereby we can be saved, neither is there salvation in any other. It appears to me clearly revealed in the scriptures, that the work of

religion in the soul, is begun, and carried on, in the use of proper means, by the spirit of God, and that we are kept by his mighty power, through faith, unto salvation: and also that Christ ever lives to make intercession for us, and will come again to judge the world at the last day. I am well assured from the word of God, that we are great sufferers from Adam's transgression, by which pain, sickness, sin and death were brought into the world—that we are a race of fallen and depraved creatures, who all sink into actual sin and guilt, as we grow up in life; there not being a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not. The fall of man, as it is called, is our *misfortune*, but not our *fault*; what we *did not* commit, and *could not* prevent, but are great sufferers by. But that all mankind are liable to eternal damnation for Adam's sin, is what I do not believe; and as for innocent children being punished for ever in a future world, for the sins of their remote, or immediate parents, is so dreadful and shocking an idea, that it ought never to enter the human mind.

God says, Ez. xviii. 4, 20, All souls are mine, as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

If I am asked, Do you believe a Trinity in unity, or in the Triune God ; that there are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit ; that these three are one, the same in substance, and equal in power and glory ?—or, as I think the Church of England has it, that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God ? I answer, these are human phrases, which I do not understand ; and no two that have attempted to explain them, have agreed in their explication. They are doxologies, fetched from the dark and barbarous ages of Popery, unknown to the apostles and first christians, and have occasioned endless contention and animosity. “The subject of this fatal controversy, (saith Dr. Mosheim, vol. 1. p. 334,) which kindled such deplorable divisions in the christian world, was the doctrine of three persons in the Godhead ; a doctrine which, in the preceding centuries, had happily escaped the vain curiosity of human researches ; and been left undefined and undetermined by any particular set of ideas. The mutual relation of the Father, Son, and Spirit to each other, and the nature of that distinction that subsists between them, are matters that hitherto were neither disputed nor explained, and with respect to which, the church had observed a profound silence.”

This controversy began about the year 317 of the christian era, and hath been carried on with no small animosity, in almost every age since, during fifteen hundred years.

The doxologies above mentioned form, in a great measure, the standard of the orthodox opinions on the trinity; and if a person will subscribe and use them, that settles the matter, no suspicions of heresy are entertained. I must decline having any thing to do with them.— They perplex, rather than explain the doctrine in question, and were framed on purpose to ensnare the consciences of men. And if any will think hard of me, because I do not understand, cannot subscribe, and will not use, these unintelligible phrases, and will estimate me by these unjust measures and weights, and these false balances, which have no right to a place in the sanctuary of God—if for these reasons, they denounce me as rejecting the Saviour, and denying the Lord that bought us, I will say they *defame*.

Those good men (and many such there are) who admire, and almost constantly use, the phrases in question, do not tell us whence they came, nor by what authority they are used in the church of Christ, in preference to, and neglect of, those many excellent doxologies found in the scriptures, in which all christians can join. In some places, these spurious phrases are used so much, and the scripture doxologies so little, that the former are likely to be thought a necessary part of christain worship, though they were altogether unknown in the purest ages of the church. The use of them appears to convey this idea, that the word of God is not sufficiently explicit, allows of too much latitude, does not sufficiently guard the

truth, but men of different and dangerous sentiments may shelter themselves under its loose and vague expressions. Or, in other words, that fallible (not to say furious) men, have expressed divine truths in better language, and with more precision, than the apostles of Christ did, though they were under the immediate inspiration of the spirit of God.

If after all, our orthodox brethren like to use phrases which the Church did very well without for many ages, I do not expect the liberal party will find fault; but when they are to be *imposed upon us*, that alters the case. We do not wish to disturb them, but they will not live in peace with us." If for the sake of peace, we are rather backward in declaring our sentiments, that is considered as sufficient grounds for endless suspicions; an accusation is brought against us, and judgment is passed upon us, not for what we *do* say, but for what we *do not*.—If we are open in objecting to human authority in religious concerns, and say we cannot come up to the prescribed standard, then our guilt is considered as brought to light, and we are pointed at as lawful prey, for all that are inclined to hunt us down. But surely this unreasonable, harsh, and cruel conduct cannot be justified by the gentleness and forbearance the gospel inculcates; the religion of the blessed Jesus cannot allow such weapons to be used in its defence.\* To censure men as not sound in

\* It looks like an attempt to level with the ground, the two great pillars of the reformation from Popery, the sufficiency of the scriptures, and the right of private judgment.

the faith, as enemies to the truth, their preaching as dangerous to souls, though their lives are as pure as their opponents,—though they have enjoyed as many advantages for understanding the scriptures,—are as diligent in searching for truth,—as ready to embrace whatever they think clearly revealed or fairly deducible from the word of God; wishing for nothing so much, as to spend and be spent in being useful to the souls of men:—If we must be branded with opprobrious names, and unjustifiable measures used to prejudice our people against us; if we must be excluded from the pulpits of our brethren, and, so far as it can be done, driven from our parishes, and from the ministry,—and all this because we cannot make use of a few unintelligible human phrases, that have occasioned a world of mischief and misery in the Church of Christ; surely a conduct of this sort cannot be justified, though it be found in men who really think they are defending the truth, and contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.

Could we but ascribe divine honours to the Triune God, and speak of the Father, Son and Spirit as being three persons in one God, the same in substance and equal in power and glory, phrases unknown to all the inspired writers, all objections would vanish, we should have the right hand of fellowship presented to us at once. But as we cannot, and indeed dare not do any such thing, we must stand to the consequences, and bear our trials with patience,

well knowing our betters have endured them before us; taking comfort from being assured that our divine Master hath said, "Blessed are you when men revile you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely; rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." These groundless suspicions, hard speeches, unjust censures and cruel proceedings, will be found another day amongst the hay and stubble that will be burned: They will add nothing to the celestial crown of those, with whom they are found. 1 Cor. iii. 10—15.

Those who censure me for my opinions, (which, when they come to be viewed in the light of the heavenly world, will, I doubt not, be found to be very similar to their own,) did they know how anxious I have been to form my sentiments from the word of God, what pains I have taken, how many fervent prayers I have put up to God for divine illumination, they might think me mistaken, and pity, but not blame me for being so.

Here I am, between seventy and eighty years of age, full of infirmities which I expect to carry with me to the grave, waiting and hoping, and occasionally even *longing*, for a blessed immortality, where in God's light I shall see light. I have little to fear, or to hope, from the present world; and to be judged and censured of men, is with me a small thing indeed; especially by those who have taken up their opinions from others, and never had time or capacity for knowing much on these mysterious



points. It excites a smile of compassion to think, that men, that young men, who have never been in the habit of study and close thinking, should suppose themselves capable of pointing out and correcting my errors on the most difficult questions, though I have made them the subject of daily study, more or less, for fifty years; having never had any object in view but to find out the meaning of the word of God.\*

During the short period of life that may yet remain to me, I shall continue to preach, in my humble way, repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, urging upon my hearers that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. And I cannot but think, that ministers and people would be better and more usefully employed, were they to spend their zeal in doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God, rather than in preaching and talking, and taking so much pains to know what others think, on these high points, of which we can know but little, and what we do know is of small importance.

After the controversy about them has been carried on fifteen hundred years, it is high time to drop it. For us to copy after the example of Christ, be in this world as he was, and have the same mind in us that was also in Christ Jesus, would be more pleasing to our divine master, than to attempt to dive into the mysteries of his

\* And all this, notwithstanding great and good men have differed in their opinions concerning them for fifteen hundred years!

nature which are not revealed, and endeavouring to explain things altogether above our comprehension. As for myself, I shall leave these things to those that are fond of them, and direct my attention to the virtues and graces of the christian temper, in which all the sincere followers of Christ agree—cheerfully waiting for the happy time, when that which is perfect is come, and that which is imperfect shall be done away. When we come to be with Christ, we shall see him as he is, and know even as we are known.

*WILLIAM WELLS.*

Brattleborough, July 16th, 1816.