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CHRISTADELPHIAN NASU STEERING COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

REPORT ON CURRENT NASU UNITY EFFORT

Over the past 6 months the pace of activity has continued to pick up with the North American Statement of Understanding (NASU) reconciliation process. The NASU Steering Committee is meeting more frequently, as the discussion program is active in several areas. Currently, meetings are taking place in various parts of the U.S. and Canada. Successful meetings have recently been held over the last four months in the Mid-West, Ontario and the Atlantic regions. Other meetings in Ontario and parts of the U.S. are in the discussion or planning stage.

These recent developments are encouraging and give reason to be hopeful about the continuing success of this grassroots effort. We humbly pray that our Heavenly Father will help us to heal the breach in the body of Christ so that, as a stronger witness, the emergence of a united household will bring Him glory. (John 17:21,23)

RECONCILIATION

The process of achieving unity certainly involves agreement to doctrine, but also it involves reconciliation. Paul urged the Corinthians to be reconciled to God, and perhaps implicit in that directive was the need for those brethren to be reconciled to each other. (2 Cor. 5:20) Our Lord tells us to reconcile with our brother before we offer our gift on the altar. (Matt. 5:24)

Reconciliation requires that brethren “esteem other better than themselves,” and in humility seek the restoration of damaged relationships. Of necessity, this requires discussion – listening and explaining. The most valuable part of the NASU unity process has been brethren sitting down together, sharing biblical perspectives and concepts and praying together for God’s help to achieve reconciliation. This humble and respectful approach has been pivotal to the mutual success achieved in the areas where brethren have chosen to use the NASU framework to enter into beneficial dialogue with one another. (Eph. 4:2,3)

ASSURANCES

Part of the reconciliation process is the provision of assurances. As a result of years of separation, concerns have arisen as to what the other side believes. Also, concerns may exist as to what consequences could result when unity takes place. Would the Amended statement ultimately prevail? Would there be action to police what an ecclesia is doing? Are there any hidden agendas? And so on!

It is important that brethren voice these concerns so they can be clearly addressed in advance by the community at large. This type of honest dialogue is necessary in the process of reconciliation. More than anything else, reconciliation is ultimately a process and it cannot be hurried. We must feel comfortable with the brethren of the “other side”, so we can go forward together in trust, fully understanding each other’s perspectives.

RESURRECTION AND ATONEMENT

Some Unamended brethren have expressed concern about the NASU with regard to the resurrection. They feel that the NASU does not recognize the connection between the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ, baptism and the resurrection of the dead.

They assume that the amending clause in the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith (clause 24) precludes belief in this connection for those in Christ.

While related, resurrection and responsibility are two different subjects. One deals with rising from the grave while the other deals with a person’s individual accountability to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Resurrection is referred to directly in clause 23 of the BASF.

The focus of clause 24 of the BASF is not resurrection, but judgment. It is dealing with a basis of responsibility to judgment, and only secondarily implies a resurrection. This clause reads as follows:

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24. “That at the appearing 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 and 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.””

Although the NASU does not deal with all aspects of the Truth, but rather only those aspects that are held to be in contention, it certainly does recognize a connection between the atoning work of Christ and his resurrection from the dead. Under the heading of “Resurrection”, (page 3), the NASU reads,

“As a representative member of the human race he came to save, Christ became the first beneficiary of his own sacrifice and obtained eternal redemption through the shedding of his own blood. ——— He became the first man to receive its promise of eternal life through his resurrection, being freed from the dominion of death.” (Note that this statement is made in the context of resurrection.)

Further, under “Resurrectional Responsibility”, on page 5 of the NASU, bullet 2 reads:

“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.”

In the above clause, the word “therefore” was included to recognize the connection between baptism and resurrection.

IS THE DOCUMENT GOOD ENOUGH?

Some of us would say, “I would like to change this or that expression as it does not fully represent what I believe.” We could all say this of almost anything! The NASU is an effort by brethren to find common ground between the two fellowships and to remove the walls that have grown because of division. As a human document, it is not perfect, just as any other human document is not perfect.

The question we have continually asked ourselves is the following: “Is the NASU a satisfactory expression of understanding on the key points that have been the areas of contention throughout the years? Also, is this document adequate to remove the walls of separation and allow all brethren to accept each other in good conscience?” These are difficult tests because of the number of brethren involved. Clearly, each brother cannot insist on his own particular expression. What is important, however, is to achieve a common expression of concepts and principles that satisfy the collective judgment of the brethren involved.

The division has blighted our denomination for about 100 years. It has weakened ecclesias, disaffected young people, separated families and hampered effective preaching.

It is to be hoped that the process of discussion, which is the hallmark of this unity effort, will help dispel misconceptions and allow us to see that we may not have had the full picture. For unity to occur, a process of open communication, goodwill and godly resolve must accompany any final document of understanding. Our personal objective should be to see how we can help achieve unity, through prayer, thoughtful listening, forbearance, encouragement and ultimately, reconciliation.

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