

Beloved brethren and sisters of the Richard ecclesia:

June 24, 1973

Loving Greetings in Jesus' Name.

You address your recent letter to "All concerned brethren and sisters." Please do not assume that brethren and sisters are not very deeply and sorrowfully and prayerfully concerned simply because they do not believe it is wise to constantly agitate the divorce question and divide the Brotherhood over it. Many believe there are much more profitable ways of serving God, and they make it a matter of fervent daily prayer that the Brotherhood will be given the wisdom to realize this.

This is not to belittle or find fault with your concern, but to ask you to understand the views of others who are equally as zealous and concerned for the welfare of the Body. Many are very, very deeply concerned who believe the proper course is (1) much more self examination and self purification, and (2) getting on with the real, practical, constructive work of the Truth. Please have charity toward those who so believe.

I fervently pray that in your coming deliberations you will be guided in the course that is best for the Truth and the Brotherhood. I cannot personally feel that a Conference under the pressure of achieving results in a few days time is the best way to attack this problem that has so long been a difficult one. But inasmuch as you have decided upon it, I do pray with all my heart that it will be useful and not harmful and divisive.

I am tremendously encouraged by your very wise promise and firm commitment that there will be "no new terms of fellowship." As long as the Brotherhood has the patience and wisdom to stick to this course to which you have firmly committed yourselves, then I am sure that in God's mercy and with God's help this problem can be solved within the framework of brotherly love.

It is a great and unnecessary tragedy in these last days -- 140 years after the full discovery and elucidation of the Saving Truth by bro Thomas in the mercy and providence of God, and on the very threshold of the return of the Master -- that brethren should feel compelled to once again divide the Body by unilaterally legislating for all others their own "new terms of fellowship." I do not question their sincerity, but where is wisdom and understanding and recognition of the pioneer labors of the past?

And it is an even greater tragedy that these "new terms of fellowship" are unscriptural, and repudiate bre Thomas and Roberts as being in error on vital aspects of fellowship, and as not having the full and necessary Truth of salvation.

My strong conviction -- made daily stronger and firmer by these sad developments among us -- is that the course of true wisdom is a deeper study and appreciation and thankfulness for the writings and labors and tremendous spiritual comprehension of these two stalwarts of the Truth who gave all their life and strength to its service, and who left a full and sound foundation for all who have the wisdom to perceive it.

I have no desire to press any aspect of the divorce question. I do not believe it is a matter that should be pressed or agitated or become an obsession. Bre Thomas and Roberts had strong and clear and

consistent and scriptural convictions concerning it, but they did not agitate it, or make it prominent, or force their convictions upon others on pain of disfellowship. But I am firmly convinced and determined that if it IS to be pressed and agitated among us to the point of fellowship, then as far as I am concerned the only possible and acceptable formula for agreement is the teaching of bre Thomas and Roberts on this matter. But I repeat, to avoid any misunderstanding: I myself have NO desire to see any formula forced to the point of fellowship at this late date in the Truth's history. I believe this is a grave mistake. The Boston formula forces the issue to a First Principle, and repudiates bre Thomas and Roberts. To my mind, this is appalling, and should be appalling to any thinking brother who is aware of and takes into consideration the whole history and background of the Truth, and all that we owe to these providentially-raised-up brethren for our own very knowledge of the Way of Salvation.

Let any fair minded brother read the Christadelphian Magazines for the 1860's -- when bro Roberts was still in his 20's. The amount of traveling, exhorting, lecturing, conferring, debating, writing and corresponding he was doing was prodigious. It's hard to see, in these slower-paced days of the Truth's activities, how he could do even a 1/10 of what he was doing.

And above all, any who look into it will be overwhelmingly impressed -- as I constantly and repeatedly am -- at the tremendous amount of question-answering and error-opposing that he continually had to do, marshalling a great array of Scripture testimony and clear, logical, close-knit reasoning on a great number and variety of subjects and problems fired at him from every direction, inside and out. I am completely humbled, and even crushed, whenever I survey the range and extent of his activities and accomplishments at any time during his whole life in the Truth.

None of us have ever done even a small fraction of the completely devoted service to the Truth that he did. And it is clear from passing and incidental references that it was at the expense of health and material wellbeing. He had none of this world's goods. Pennies had to be counted, and living was a precarious day-to-day affair. All his vast energy and talent was given to serving the Truth and the Brotherhood.

This, my beloved brethren and sisters, is how the sound foundation was laid for which we should be infinitely more appreciative (and aware of) than we are. I for one have no intention of adopting any new fellowship formula at this late date that rules bre Thomas and Roberts as in error on fundamentals. To me (and please excuse the expression) that is the height of presumption and folly, and can only lead to shipwreck of the Faith. I do not believe anyone who is truly aware and appreciative of the vast labors of bre Thomas and Roberts could ever be a party to such a thing. If any of us today could present even a small fraction of the record of perception and accomplishment for the Truth that these brethren have left, then there might be some grounds for repudiating them and starting anew with our own "new terms of fellowship." But not one of us can begin to present such a record, and let us have the honesty to face the fact, and be thankful to God for their vastly greater abilities and efforts. It has been my own experience for the past 45 years that the more I studied the Scriptures, and the more I had experience with the practical realities of life and ecclesial problems, then the closer and closer I was forced -- often against my own natural prejudices to the mind and teachings of bre Thomas and Roberts. I am

constantly amazed at the spiritual balance and soundness and consistency and maturity they manifested, especially when I compare them with myself or any others today.

When I first got together all the quotations I could find from bro Roberts on the divorce problem -- about 40 years ago -- I did not like them at all. I was very sorry that he had left on record such "weak" statements. I was quite sure I was sounder on the question, and knew much better. I well remember thinking that bre Dowling and Sommerville were loose and over-tolerant toward sin in following bre Thomas and Roberts on the divorce issue. I fervently and very sincerely wished they could appreciate the wisdom of my own greater enlightenment. I was all for making new rules for others to manifest my own greater zeal and holiness and righteousness.

But I thank God that I was preserved from the tragedy (or lacked the influence and opportunity) of making ultimatums of excommunication, or breaking up ecclesias with my new and deeper knowledge.

And gradually, over the years, as I saw the sad shipwreck that many were making with the obsession and agitation of various new theories on this issue, and as I saw actual cases and actual problems -- the realities of this so sad and confused life of trial and error and pitiful stumblings of us all -- and above all as I came to better realize the sympathetic and understanding and fellowfeeling spirit of Christ as contrasted with the holier-than-thou, burden-upon-others spirit of the Pharisees -- gradually I found myself realizing that bre Thomas and Roberts were not the green ignoramuses on this question that they had appeared to be, but rather that they had a deep wisdom and understanding of it in full harmony with their obvious wisdom and understanding of the rest of the glorious Gospel message of hope and love to fallen and struggling mankind.

These brethren were not (as many infer) rank amateurs on this question. It is not a new question. This has been a historic problem from the beginning, as the Scriptures well attest from beginning to end. There have been times in history, both Jewish and Gentile, when divorce was just as common, or even more common, than the terrible conditions of today. And these very deeply versed and experienced and well-read brethren were fully aware of every aspect of it, both historically and scripturally. A few of us have not just suddenly discovered new truths in our own brief little day.

I constantly prayed for years that this issue would not, in the mercy of God, be forced upon the Brotherhood, seeing what sad damage it had done to other well-meaning groups where it had been forced to the point of division. I prayed that we might build up among us enough holiness and zeal and spirituality and closeness of brotherly love that God would not see the necessity of bringing the burden of this problem on us.

But God in His infinite wisdom has seen fit to permit the agitation of the past few years which has done so much harm to the unity and peace and brotherly love of the Body, but which doubtless has a good and wise and necessary purpose in the divine plan.

I fervently thank God that -- being forced by these agitations to come to a conclusion upon the matter -- I have come with increasing firmness and conviction to exactly the same beliefs as bre Thomas and Roberts. I would have been very deeply saddened if I had had to come to any other conclusion, upon full

study. I would have felt that if I had come to any other conviction, to a conviction requiring "new terms of fellowship" which repudiate bre Thomas and Roberts as not understanding the full Truth -- of being in serious error on matters that must be made issues of fellowship and elevated to First Principles, then basic decent honesty would require me to cease calling myself a Christadelphian (which identifies me with the foundation they so laboriously laid over 100 years ago with their lifetimes of service), and to stand aside and honestly and frankly set up and stand upon my own newly discovered and superior foundation.

In an effort to justify breaking up ecclesias over this matter, it has frequently been charged in letters recently that the fact that it took over two years in 1957-60 to reach an agreement on a form of statement on the matter of divorce shows that there was something "wrong" at that time in the Body that was "kept in check by faithful brethren."

True indeed! But would it not be fairer and kinder to say who and what was wrong, and who were the "faithful brethren" who kept the wrong in check? When the facts are presented, the case is seen to be the very opposite of what is sought to be presented by this line of argument.

What was wrong at that time was this: the majority of the ecclesias were willing, for the sake of unity and in the hope of "purity" and "peace," to accept as binding upon all the Brotherhood the formula of casting out the offender and bolting the door of fellowship permanently and irrevocably against him. This was a well-intentioned but very misguided and unChristlike course.

Happily for the Body, several better-informed ecclesias who held to the position of bre Thomas and Roberts (as Hawley, Whangarei, Lampasas, etc.) very strongly opposed the imposition of this new formula on the whole Body. Their strong objections saved the Body from locking itself into a dead end of well-intentioned Pharisaism.

What is so especially sad and unjustified is this. Some of those who are now vigorously pushing for division on other points have themselves only recently changed their views and have come to a realization that the stand of these faithful ecclesias was right, but they still use 1957-60 as an argument that something was "wrong" with the Body. Is this fair and brotherly?

How can they use the experience of 1957-60 to justify division now? Rather that experience of being saved from their own errors should make them very humbly thankful that the spirit of those who were right (yea, the spirit of the whole Body) in 1957-60 was not division and agitation and accusation, but patience and kindness and brotherly love.

The Body at that time had just had the sad experience of 1953, when so many abandoned the Body and joined a group that openly and frankly taught (and still teaches) suing at law for divorce. This was clearly pointed out at the time, but the fervor to leave the Berean Body was such that none would listen.

And is it not the very same ones that are now agitating the Body for division in the opposite direction? In 1953 they left to join those who taught suing at law. Now they leave at the opposite extreme. Where is stability? Where is consistency?

The sad experience of 1953 was still vividly in the mind of the Brotherhood in 1957-60. Therefore no one at that time sought to force their own ideas to the breaking up of ecclesias. No ecclesia sought to impose its opinions unilaterally on the whole Body on the pain of disfellowship. Every effort was made to work gradually toward a common basis acceptable to all.

The ecclesias who held the Truth on the aspect of forgiveness and reconciliation were deeply concerned. They strongly (and correctly) opposed the imposition of an incorrect formula on the whole Body, but they did not themselves attempt to forcibly and precipitately impose their own better understanding to the breaking up of the Body. Rather they relied on patience and persuasion and prayer,

Now, happily, the majority of the Body has in the past few years come increasingly to the realization that the position of these ecclesias in 1957-60 -- the original Christadelphian position -- was correct, and that the formula of casting out forever and bolting the door is not the answer, and can only foster the spirit (that always lurks within all of us) of self-righteousness and self-satisfaction and cold Pharisaism.

The basic issue of forgiveness and reconciliation and reclaiming of the sinner is at stake -- a far deeper issue than the divorce issue itself. The course we follow in connection with this aspect of the problem has a vital bearing on the state of our own heart and love toward others, and the hope of ourselves finding forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

The new unilaterally-imposed Boston formula will not face the passages that bre Thomas and Roberts so clearly understood and so ably expounded. When questioned directly on these passages, the proposers of the Boston formula just brush them completely aside and say, "Whatever they say, whatever they mean, they must be interpreted according to our interpretation of these other passages, on pain of disfellowship."

The Boston formula is a tragic oversimplification of what has always been a difficult question. It is easy to come up with a "simple" answer to any problem if we refuse to consider any evidence that contradicts our view.

Having scripturally compared the two views (the new Boston formula and the original Christadelphian teachings of bre Thomas and Roberts), I infinitely prefer the latter as manifesting a far deeper comprehension of both the Scriptures and the spirit of Christ, and also the practical realities of life and experience.

Again, the Boston formula imposes upon OTHERS, as a rigid COMMAND, the wise spiritual ADVICE of Christ and Paul. By changing this advice to a command, Boston imposes the admitted burden of lifelong celibacy for errors committed in complete darkness and ignorance according to the natural animal course of this world.

But, while they impose this upon others, I perceive absolutely no evidence of any zeal for applying this same very wise and spiritual advice of Christ and Paul to THEMSELVES. It is to be noted that they freely go their own way, according to their own desires, marrying and giving in marriage. This of course is perfectly permissible, if the advice of Christ and Paul does not appeal to them, but surely there could be

no more glaring example of "binding heavy burdens and grievous to be borne upon others, and not lifting them themselves with one of their fingers."

To me, this vividly illustrates the whole tendency of this present sad agitation about this unsavory subject: so much concern for legislating for others; so little concern for the far more pressing duty of disciplining and purifying and transforming ourselves. As I look upon the state of our ecclesias, and note how pitifully far short we fall (and I by no means exclude myself) of the beauty of holiness portrayed in the Scriptures as the necessary, required conduct of the Bride of Christ -- I just cannot escape the all-pervading impression of the power and deceptiveness of the natural Pharisaism of the human heart.

This weak mortal flesh can whip up just so much zeal for purity, and it is so tragically easy to burn up all this precious spiritual fuel in concern for the purity of others. How many motes of others are noticed and trumpeted! How many beams of our own are completely missed!

There is so much in which we ourselves fall short, so much to do in personal purging and perfecting, so far to go to reach the required scriptural standard of holiness and spirituality and complete dedication of the heart and soul and mind and life to the service of God, to draw increasingly and momentarily "nigh unto God," to fulfil the glorious (and urgently necessary) pattern and example and beauty of Christ.

Beloved brethren and sisters, I fervently implore you: please keep your balance. Please keep things in their true perspective. Please see where the real effort and attention and concern is urgently required. So many have made personal shipwreck through the incessant agitation and obsession with this unsavory subject.

Let us give ourselves more to the wholesome reading of the works of our pioneer brethren, to studying their lives, considering their tremendous labors, emulating their faithful example of constant service to the Truth.

Please do not be a party to the tearing apart of the body they labored so hard for, by now laying down new rules and regulations and resolutions for others. Let us learn from the example and increasing success of those who were right among us in 1957-60. Most in the Body now appear to have come, or be coming, around to an understanding of the importance of the principles of forgiveness and reconciliation as applied to this problem. The ecclesias who were right in 1957-60 could have very self-righteously legislated their better understanding as a unilateral rule of fellowship, but they chose a wiser and a kinder way.

We have all the rules we need. We have all the foundation we need in the sound labors and teachings of our pioneer brethren. Let us in the very few days that remain of this sad (but potentially glorious) pilgrimage, concentrate all our efforts on the much-neglected personal "perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord."

Keeping the Body open and alive and responsive to the transforming power of the loving, forgiving, reconciling spirit of Christ is every bit as important as keeping it pure.

For our own selves, we cannot possibly set too high a standard of holiness. None of us sets a high enough standard of requirement and achievement for himself.

But for others we must be careful that we do not self-righteously impose grievous manmade burdens upon already existing burdens that only God knows of, and thus fatally quench the weakly smoking flax--

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

With much love in the joyful bonds of the Truth, and with fervent prayers that you will be guided in love and wisdom,

Sincerely your brother,

G.V. Growcott