

Tracing the History of the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith

The BASF from its inception was designed to be a statement of the “One Faith” taught in the Bible. The brief propositions were all supported by numerous quotations: for brevity these were not printed in full but just the references were given. In actual fact, the Statement consists mainly of scripture with very brief explanations.

So why “Birmingham”? Birmingham became a centre of operations for the Christadelphian Faith in the very early days of its establishment in the UK. John Thomas after a speaking tour around the country in 1862 advised Robert Roberts to settle in Birmingham as he recounts in his autobiography:

“Before leaving us, Dr. Thomas advised me to go to Birmingham if I could arrange it. He said there was a wide field for the truth there. There was not only a large population, but circumstances specially favouring religious independence. The people were mostly radical in politics, and were not priest-ridden as in other parts. An interest had been aroused in the truth by his lectures, but there was no one to follow it up. If I went, he thought something might come of it. The place was central for the whole country, and it would be a good radiating point of operations”.

“My Ways and My Days” by Robert Roberts Page 119

So this he did in 1863 and by 1864 he had begun to publish a magazine he entitled “THE AMBASSADOR OF THE COMING AGE” (which he renamed “THE CHRISTADELPHIAN” in 1870). Dr Thomas’s advice did indeed prove to be good, and the faith flourished and grew.

In the earliest days of the formation of the Birmingham Ecclesia, it was felt necessary to formally adopt a statement that defined the “One Faith” upon which the Ecclesia was built. In 1868 there is a little advertisement in the magazine detailing such a statement having been published.

Neatly got-up, glazed cover (gold-lettered), 34 pages, price fourpence,

RECORD OF THE BIRMINGHAM CHRISTADELPHIAN ECCLESIA

Containing, amongst other things, **a verified Statement of the One Faith, on which they are built;** together with a scripturally-sustained Specification of the current fables of the Religious World, of which they require a rejection on the part of all seeking their fellowship

The Ambassador of The Coming Age, 1868 page 355

In 1873 there is mention of a tract being published that was an explicit statement of first principles.

...presenting an **explicit statement of first principles**, ... *the Record of the Birmingham Ecclesia*

The Christadelphian, 1873 page 480.

We see then the beginnings of the Birmingham Statement of Faith, and note that from its earliest times they were referring to “The One Faith” and First Principles”. The statement was designed to express what beliefs they thought to be essential for salvation. The Statement was widely approved of and began to be adopted by other Christadelphian Ecclesias, for example the following Intelligence from the Aberdeen Ecclesia in 1873:

The **statement of the one faith**, contained in the Record of the Birmingham Christadelphian Ecclesia (which we, as a church, accepted **as expressing Divinely revealed truth and our faith**), was transmitted by us to the brethren in Dundee...

...With the view of making our position definite and easily appreciable, we have this day formally expressed our adoption of the Birmingham Ecclesial Record’s **“Statement of the One Faith,” as embodying our faith and hope, and as the standard by which we shall henceforth test the claims of all to fellowship with us in the truth.**—In name of the brethren, *J. Steel, Secretary*

The Christadelphian 1873 page 564–565.

This extract also highlights that the statement was seen as not only expressing the “One Faith” but also a Basis of Fellowship. The following from the Intelligence of the Walkerton Ecclesia in Canada 1876 illustrates that its reach was far and wide:

“CANADA Walkerton.—... we unanimously adopted **the basis or statement of the One Faith**, drawn up and adopted by the Birmingham ecclesia in 1871, together with the statement of fables set forth in the Record of that year, to be rejected.”

The Christadelphian, 1876 page 143

We see here mention of what is now referred to as the “doctrines to be rejected”, a necessary inclusion when the inevitable deviations from the One Faith occurred. Another reference found to the Statement is found in the Intelligence of the Swansea Ecclesia in 1876

Swansea.— The brethren here have adopted and printed **the statement of the one faith** appearing in the *Record of the Birmingham Ecclesia* of 1874–5

The Christadelphian, 1876 page 192

By 1877 Robert Roberts was again advertising the statement as available in booklet form as follows:

Statement of Faith.—The Scripture-verified statement of faith appearing in **the Record of the Birmingham Ecclesia** has been printed separately for general circulation, under the title of “A statement of the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, set forth in a series of thirty-four Scripture-attested propositions, in which are exhibited the positive and negative aspects **of the one faith, forming the basis of fellowship among Christadelphians**, as distinguished from all other professing Christians.” The statement will be useful to put into the hands of both enquirers and strangers. It is stitched in coloured cover, and makes a little book like the Bible Companion —price 2d.

The Christadelphian, 1877 page 595.

Here again we see reference to the fact that they saw this statement as “forming the basis of fellowship among Christadelphians” . Further evidence of this is illustrated in the the Intelligence of 1883 from the Spottsville Ecclesia in the United States:

UNITED STATES Spottsville (Ky)

... The question of the nature of Jesus, which created so much trouble in England in “1873,” created some little stir, but was not regarded as a matter of much importance, the brethren for the most part, however, inclining to the free life theory. Since “1879,” the two subjects have again been brought before the ecclesia, causing some of us to resolve to unite ourselves on a surer basis of fellowship.

With a view to this end, on the eighth of October, 1882, an agreement was presented to the brethren, setting forth that we, the undersigned, agree that the (published) **statement of the “one faith” upon which the Birmingham ecclesia is founded**, is true and Scriptural, and that the fables specified therein should be rejected, that the above **should constitute the basis of fellowship among believers of the truth**, and that we hereby withdraw from fellowship with all who will not endorse the above by signing this agreement.

The Christadelphian 1883 page 96

Although Robert Roberts was more successful in establishing a larger and more cohesive fellowship there arose a group who taught or tolerated partial inspiration of the scripture, he reached the point of despair in 1885 with the prevalence of false doctrine infecting the fellowship, making the application of the doctrine of fellowship impossible. As he wrote in 1885

“The question is how are we to proceed to **get rid** of them in our midst?... what we propose to do is to take a line of action that will make no mistake... We propose to rally to the right doctrine, and then to **step aside** from all who refuse to do this..”

He continues:

“The community as a community has become **corrupt**. We propose to **cease our connection** with it on this account. We will **go out** in the name of allegiance to the bible as God's wholly-inspired and infallible word. This is a Scriptural line of action. To '**come out** from among them' [2 Cor.6:16-18; Isa 52:11] is a matter of **command** when a community, as such, has become **hopelessly corrupt**. We have **done it before** when we came out of the sects which claim to be Christ's people. **It is the only course** that can **extricate us** from the false position in which we have been placed by the the reception of a false and destructive doctrine by so many in our midst.

On 12th June 1885 the following resolutions were passed:

THE MEETING FOR ACTION

Resolution no.6

That being the greater number (both of the executive and general body) of those heretofore constituting the organisation known as the Birmingham Ecclesia, we hereby use the power residing in the majority, of dissolving the said organisation...

Resolution No.8

That we now and hereby re-incorporate ourselves as the Birmingham Christadelphian Ecclesia.

The Christadelphian 1885 page 306.

And as Robert Roberts notes in the following year:

Our New Constitution at Birmingham

“Over twelve months ago, advantage was taken of special circumstances, to suspend the constitution under which we had been working for twelve years, with a view to the introduction of improvements when a sufficient time had elapsed for their consideration” ...

“Our Foundation.—That the book currently known as the Bible, consisting of the Scriptures of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles, is the only source of knowledge concerning God and his purposes at present extant or available in the earth, and that the same were wholly given by inspiration of God in the writers, and are consequently without error in all parts of them, except such as may be due to errors of transcription or translation.

- 1.—That we are a Christadelphian ecclesia.
- 2.—That we accept and profess the doctrines and precepts of Christ, **as taught in the apostolic writings, and defined (positively and negatively) in the annexed Statement of Faith and Epitome of the Commandments of Christ.**
- 3.—That we recognise as brethren, and welcome to our fellowship, **all who have been immersed (by whomsoever) after their acceptance of the same doctrines and precepts.**

The Christadelphian 1886, page 362-365.

And CC Walker confirms this account in his biography of Robert Roberts:

...The great number, both of the executive and the general body, declared for a wholly inspired and infallible Bible: and so declaring, dissolved the ecclesia, and re-incorporated themselves as The Birmingham Christadelphian Ecclesia, placing at the head of their “**Statement of Faith**” forming their “**Basis of Fellowship**” the following:

THE FOUNDATION

That the book currently known as the Bible, consisting of the Scriptures of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles, is the only source of knowledge concerning God and His purpose at present extant or available in the earth, and that the same were wholly given by inspiration of God in the writers, and are consequently without error in all parts of them, except such as may be due to errors of transcription or translation (2Tim 3:16; 1Cor 2:13; Heb 1:1; 2Pet 1:21; 1Cor 14:37; Neh 9:30; John 10:35).

The minority formed a separate meeting, and the division endures to this day. Unity of mind of the subject was and is alleged by the minority, but one looks in vain for any such statement as the foregoing in their Basis of Fellowship. As for the ex-Congregationalist minister, he returned to his clerical associations, and afterwards even drifted into Spiritualism.

1917 His Days and His Ways CCW page 249-250.

The copy below is from an edition of the BASF printed in the days of CCW.

A STATEMENT OF THE FAITH FORMING OUR BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP

THE FOUNDATION.—That the book currently known as the Bible, consisting of the Scriptures of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles, is the only source of knowledge concerning God and His purposes at present extant or available in the earth, and that the same were wholly given by inspiration of God in the writers, and are consequently without error in all parts of them, except such as may be due to errors of transcription or translation (2 Tim. 3 : 16 ; 1 Cor. 2 : 13 ; Heb. 1 : 1 ; 2 Pet. 1 : 21 ; 1 Cor. 14 : 37 ; Neh. 9 : 30 ; John 10 : 35).

The BASF was adopted by Ecclesias not just in the UK but also in America and Australia as a good statement of the “One Faith” which Christadelphians believe.

In 1893 JJ Andrews promulgated his new belief that resurrectional responsibility only applied to baptised believers. To make plain that this is false doctrine, Clause 24 of the statement of faith was amplified, as explained below:

K. K.—There is no “amended” **Birmingham Statement of the faith in the proper sense of the term, The existing one is the same as that of 1886 to which you refer.** The only difference is in the wording of Prop. 24., which is briefly amplified by defining “the responsible” in this bracketed description—(namely, those who know the revealed will of God, and have been called upon to submit to it). You will perceive, therefore, that the report that “brother Walker had issued an amended statement” is without foundation. As a matter of fact, he is not even responsible for the few words introduced. They first appeared in brother F. G. Jannaway’s booklet, “*Why I am a Christadelphian,*” **having been suggested in revision of proof by brother Roberts.** They were afterwards incorporated in the Statement by the Birmingham ecclesia.

The Christadelphian 1900, page 518

It can be seen from this explanation that the meaning of the clause was not changed, but simply amplified so that it could not be misunderstood or misrepresented. But from this time on it was known as the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith.

As re-affirmed again by CCW In 1931:

The “Amended” Statement of Faith

K. In the proper sense of the term there is no “amended” Statement of the Faith in connection with the Temperance Hall Ecclesia, Birmingham. **The existing Statement is the same as that of 1886,** which was drawn up after the Inspiration Division, and which contains the opening statement on Inspiration under the heading “The Foundation” The only difference is in the wording of Prop. 24., which is briefly amplified by defining “the responsible” in this bracketed description—(“namely, those who know the revealed will of God, and have been called upon to submit to it”). This particular amplification was first suggested by the late brother Roberts himself, during the Resurrectional Responsibility controversy. It was after his death incorporated in the Statement as a result of that controversy. The addition of the words “or as police constables” to clause 35 of “Doctrines to be Rejected” is a minor matter.

The Christadelphian 1931, page 358.

Although it must be acknowledged that the BASF was not the statement used by every single Ecclesia in the Central fellowship it was very widely adopted and seen as the bench mark for all other statements. As CC Walker records in the following extract:

**‘The Christadelphian’ on the
Nature of Man and the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ**

During the last eighteen months we have drawn attention to what we believe to be the true teaching of the Bible on these subjects (The Christadelphian, 1937, p. 552; 1938, pp. 127, 173). **These doctrines have been maintained since the revival of the Truth nearly 100 years ago, and are set forth in the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith, which is in use in the majority of ecclesia’s** in the following clauses:—(He then Quotes Clauses 4-10)

The Christadelphian 1939 page 228.

So as CCW points out **“The Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith”**, was used **“in the majority of ecclesia’s”**. There are countless items of Intelligence stating that Ecclesias had adopted the Statement. Not just in the UK but from all over Australia and America. Even John Carter Acknowledged as late as 1947 that the **“The Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith,”** ... **“is recognized as the accepted standard in the Central fellowship as a definition of the doctrines to be believed”**. (Christadelphian 1947 page 68).

Intelligence such as the following from Wigan in 1948 were common:

WIGAN. — ... Due to recent developments we have resolved, “That this ecclesia re-affirm our whole-hearted acceptance and belief of the **Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith**, and we will **accept in fellowship only those who unreservedly subscribe to this resolution**”.—J. Winstanley.

The Christadelphian 1948 page 425.

This is just one of many occasions that could be quoted to illustrate that the Birmingham Statement was used as a basis of Fellowship, as it had been right from the beginning. A summary of its development can be found in The Christadelphian of 1955:

The Record of the Birmingham Christadelphian Ecclesia for 1868 which contains a **Statement of the One Faith**. This was evidently modified and slightly expanded between 1871 and 1875, The Record of 1875 containing the newer edition. In 1877 this enlarged Statement was published jointly by the London (Islington) ecclesia and bro. Roberts. We have a copy of the London (Islington) ecclesia's Statement which differs from this, and which presumably that ecclesia used before having the joint issue in 1877. After the division of 1884, bro. Roberts revised the Statement, and **in 1886 the revised form became The Statement of the Birmingham Christadelphian Ecclesia**.

The Christadelphian 1955 page 425.

From 1900 to reunion in 1957, there were several attempts at reunion with the Suffolk Street Ecclesias, for example the following from 1940:

“... the following resolution was adopted:

“That those brethren and sisters who desire the association of our fellowship shall **accept, adopt and profess the principles of the One Faith** and the commandments of Christ as defined in the **Birmingham Central Statement of Faith** (ie the BASF)”

They also resolved that:

...the Suffolk St brethren must accept unreservedly what we impose on ourselves and for any reunion there must be “a unanimous vote of the brethren and sisters comprising an Ecclesia in the Suffolk St Fellowship. A majority vote will prove unacceptable”

The Christadelphian 1940 page 131

From this it emerged that a major issue of concern was the prevalence in Suffolk St of the belief that resurrectional responsibility only applied to baptised believers. So the Suffolk St response was to Clause 24, was “that many of their brethren could not accept...” so that attempt failed.

Eventually reunion was achieved In the UK by abandoning the requirement of a “unanimous vote,” which had previously hindered the process. Instead, a system of majority vote was implemented, which meant that ecclesias wanting to be in fellowship could participate with reunion when 49% of the ecclesia could not accept the BASF in it’s entirety! We have personal knowledge of some who reject the BASF, but claim entitlement to Fellowship on that basis. Part of the way in which this situation was dealt with, was by publishing a “Explained Final Statement” and in Australia the “Carter Cooper Addendum”, and eventually “The Unity Document” which in 50 pages presented a form of words that both sides could accept.

Full details of the process can be supplied, but in essence, the BASF was undermined in the process of reunion, which effectively meant that it was no longer the basis of ecclesial fellowship: fellowship could be extended to those who cannot accept it in it’s entirety.

This being so, the current situation in the Central Christadelphian Fellowship is that generally speaking, the Bible principles described in the BASF are no longer adhered to. In various quarters, it is no longer seen as a statement of the “One Faith”, or used as a “basis of fellowship.” Rather it is seen as a humanly contrived doctrine which has no basis or authority. In short, the document is no longer a statement of the Christadelphian faith: members are welcomed who deny some of it’s clauses.

One member in the UK - prominent because of his preaching work- stated recently that he did not have a copy of the BASF and that it is not used anymore. He said much of it was untranslatable into other languages - so clearly the majority of Central members today won’t have read a copy. The same member said what is now being used instead, are the courses developed by the Christadelphian Bible Mission - but regrettably we find that they also contradict the BASF in various particulars.

This same member many years ago actually tried to deny that the BASF had ever been used as a “Basis of Fellowship”. In this article, we have demonstrated that this is incorrect: the Bible doctrines it states have been embraced by Christadelphians for many years, forming the basis of their fellowship. There is a vital need to maintain sound doctrine, and adhere to the faith held by those in the past.

Christopher Maddocks

“Be not downcast at the prevalence of trouble. Remember the words of Christ: 'Behold, I have told you before.’” This he said both concerning trouble in general and trouble in particular — in particular as concerning the troubles that were to mark the close of the Apostolic and Gentile ages; and in general as concerning the inevitable experience of his friends in the present evil world. And his object in telling it before-hand was that his friends might have consolation in the trouble. He plainly says; 'Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid'; 'In me ye shall have peace;' 'in your patience possess ye your souls’”

Robert Roberts, The Christadelphian 1885 page 103.