

Letter from Richard McNemar

TEXT¹

Henderson County (Ky.) March 3d. 1809.

Friend Roelosson,

Yesterday an open letter was put into my hand, containing your opinion of the people called Shakers, & your principal objections against the testimony which they hold. I had flattered myself with the prospect of seeing you, in my present rout, & conversing with you, face to face, but supposing, from the tenor of your letter, that my company would not be agre[e]able, I shall only trouble you, at present, with a few of my thoughts, on paper, which I shall communicate in a spirit of kindness & tender concern for the salvation of your soul. If God has given you a “right of private judgment,” I wish not to rob you of your gift, neither shall I dispute your privilege of forming any opinion of any people, for which you think you have a just foundation; but private judgment & human opinions make nothing at all in the matter of our salvation. The contradictory opinions & false judgments among men of private interest, have kept the world long enough in confusion, & it is a privilege that God hath given us, to cease judging after the flesh, but to judge righteous judgment; and we know, that the judgment of God is according to Truth.

You claim the forgiveness of God upon the supposition that you are wrong, because you “assert nothing positively” but give certain things “as your candid sentiments.” The world is full of what they call “candid sentiments” but they are all clashing one against another, & how is the honest enquirer to know whose candid sentiment is the best? If “God only knows who is in an error” (as you affirm) then, for certain, truth is perished from the earth, & there is no judgment or gift of God among men; of course it must be the period of Antichrist’s reign; & therefore as Antichrist is against Christ, & the world hateth him because he testifieth of it that the works thereof are evil, it need not appear strange, that so many should form their candid sentiments, & pass their private judgment in opposition to the present testimony of Jesus.

1. Transcribed by Natalie Paquette, July 2009.

Your objections against the testimony & your candid sentiment concerning the Shakers, are not new to me, & were you the author of these things, I should think it sufficient to say “The Lord rebuke thee” but as I consider you have only borrowed them from the general spirit of the world, for your sake, I consider them worthy of serious notice.

Then it is your candid sentiment, that the Shakers fill up all the base & abominable characters which the prophets & apostles testified should come, in the last time, or period of Antichrist’s reign—that they are the false christs, the deceivers, seducers, traiters heady high minded &c. It is your private judgment, that they are the Beast that came up out of the earth—that they are known by their evil fruits, & do most certainly commit sin, but have their consciences so seared that they cannot be convicted of it, &c.”

Now, Son, remember that when you entered up this private judgment, & published it in your letter as your candid sentiment, your gift did not exceed that which was common among the Jews & Romans in the days of Christ’s first appearing. The Pharisees supposed they knew Christ by his fruits, & could say, now we know that thou hast a devil. Moreover it was the private judgment of many that he deceived the people—was a wine bibber—a friend of harlots—a malefactor, a blasphemer, who deserved the most ignominious death.

In the writings of the learned Celsus (which are preserved unto this day) we find it slated as the candid sentiments of both Jew & Pagans, that Jesus of Nazareth was a bastard begotten by a Roman soldier—that in Egypt he learned the magic art by which he seduced a number of vile publicans & sailors to follow him—that he shunned the company of the wise & prudent & such as were of honest reputation, and even excluded all such from his kingdom; but said, “If any be foolish or wicked let him come” &c.

When the primitive Christians were charged with incest, sodomy, promiscuous debauchery, and even murdering & eating their own infants at their nocturnal feasts, their adversaries spake much more positively than you have dared to speak in attempting to criminate the Shakers. In a word, the least that a religious Pharisee could say of the Son of God, was, we know that this man is a sinner—and with as little evidence you make as bold an assertion.

Five years ago, you say you viewed the first beast “who is by all commentators said to be the pope of Rome in his largest extent”—but the

second you had no light upon until Shakerism made its appearance &c.” But Son, remember that all commentators do not say what you assert they do: Nor was it ever said that the pope was the beast by any of the thousands who commented on the Scriptures for 1400 years after the appearing of Christ. Yet a few years you saw that which has never to this day been seen by a Roman Catholic.

I dispute not your vision of the first beast, & as you are not positive about the second, you may credit my view of it if you choose. In the summer of 1804 I saw that the second beast was that monstrous body which came out of the Church of Rome, by means of the reformation & what I saw I testify upon the plainest evidence. ~~Beast begets~~ Beast, we know, begets beast—hence all the protestant churches acknowledge the Church of Rome as their mother. I saw & still see every beastly & devilish propensity & practice in protestants that ever exists in Catholics, which they themselves have never pretended to deny.

You say you wondered if these characters should appear in your day, & if you should know them.” So millions in the Church of Rome have wondered if they would know the first beast when he would come. Could they have seen & known the first beast, in the time of his dominion, the scriptures would have been broken, for he could not have deceived them; & so of the second. But your wondering after the beast was only fulfil[li]ng the scriptures, for every worshipper of the beast has wondered after him as well as you.

Long before I ever saw or heard the name of a Shaker, I believed that all those beastly characters were to be found among the fighting parties who called themselves by the name of Christ—and while I filled the honourable office of a presbyterian member, I could find among our own polite clergy, & even in my own profession & practice, sufficient marks of antixt. [Antichrist] to silence my fears about any more beast yet to come. Our general confession was, that our hearts were wicked & deceitful, & that no good thing dwelt in us, & all our dependance was on the imputed righteousness of Christ, to cover our actual sins & inward abominations. What could be a more manifest wolf in sheep’s clothing?

From the beginning of the late revival & the conviction I then received of the state of mankind, I never once thought of any worse beings coming into the world than were already in it: And as I read the promises of God in relation to the kingdom of Christ, that was to be set up in the latter day, & the truly righteous & holy people that should then arise & reign upon

the earth, so my whole desire & prayer to God during the revival, was, that all those promises might be fulfilled, & that God would carry on his work till sin would be wholly destroyed & the true church of God appear & be built up in that perfect purity & holiness which all the promises described as pertaining to the glory of the latter day. I knew that I had been deceived in all the churches within my acquaintance, in thinking them to be the pure church of Christ described in the New Testament; because the marks & evidences of the apostolic church were not to be found among them, & God knows that when I received the testimony concerning the present Church of Christ in his second appearing, I did believe it to be that long expected body of saints, & those very sons & daughters of God for which the whole creation had groaned & travailed in pain together until now: and in confident hope of eternal death to all sin by union with this body, I confessed my sins & forsook them once for all: and now from nearly four years experience, & the most intimate acquaintance with the people, I can say in the fear of God, I know I am not deceived. Call it not quibbling, or a dogmatical assertion, when I tell you that this Church is composed of a people redeemed from all iniquity & purified unto God a peculiar people zealous of good works. I am bold to say, that they do not commit sin—that in their mouth is found no guile—that they are faultless before the throne of God—and that they are virgins indeed & are not defiled with women, but follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth—that they do not live after the flesh or obey it in the lusts thereof, but have crucified the flesh with its affections & lusts—and as he who hath called them is holy, so are they holy in all manner of conversation.

You say the word of God cannot be broken, & therefore infer that your false christs & deceivers must needs come some time or other. Suffer me to apply the same argument to the coming of Christ to be glorified in his saints.

You swear by the life of God, that you think the Shakers are the ones “that answer to such particular scriptures as you are pleased to quote. You may perhaps think so; but in vain. Do you cite the faithful Believer to view himself in the light of such descriptions of wicked men who live in their lawless abominations—As well might you charge the innocent dove to cease her cooing in the pleasant sun-shine of a May-morning, & view herself a bellowing night-owl ranging through the shades of night in quest of something to devour. I shall not make so unreasonable a request of you. If God only knows who is in an error, & you do not know, I ~~shall~~ cannot

invite you to view yourself in the light of those scriptures which describe the true followers of Christ. I wish you to view yourself where you are, & if you can get the scales of prejudice taken off your eyes, you may view us where we are. And if you find that you are in the first Adam, that is, in the nature & works of generation, & we in the 2d Adam, that is, in the spirit & power of the regeneration, & if you determine to abide where you are, it will not be long till you find out that between us is a great gulf fixed.

I should be sorry that your lamp should go out & your soul be eventually numbered with the foolish virgins—And because I sincerely love you, I will neither flatter you nor deceive you. I tell you God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.

A readiness to meet Christ, in this day, is very different from making ready to subscribe a confession of faith—to make a profession of religion—or to take the sacrament. They that go in the marriage supper of the Lamb are ready to bring all their dark deeds to the light—to cease from their own works & forsake all for the kingdom of heaven's sake; therefore when you watch & pray, lest you be received by a Simon or a Demas, remember Son, that mon[e]y was the grand object with Simon, and Demas loved this present world.

Whatever characters our fellow creatures may fill, in the ~~eyes~~ of prejudiced eyes of private judgment, the first business for you & I, is to see whether there be a Simon or a Demas in us: i.e. the love of this present world. The strong man must be first bound & cast out, before the stronger can possess the palace. It was a wise saying of one of the first reformers, that “Every man had a pope in his belly. It is the surest work for every one to get the pope, and the beast, & the deceiver, & the false Christ cast out of themselves, & then there will be nothing to hinder them from knowing & embracing the truth; but so long as the love of the world & the deceitfulness of riches & the lusts of other things, seduce the souls of men, we must expect that their private judgment their sentiments & thoughts of the way of God, will be fashioned according to the spirit that rules them. To the upright God shows himself upright, & to the froward he shews himself froward (ps. 19) And to them that perish, the coming of Christ to consume the son of perdition, is after the working of Satan, with all power & signs & lying wonders, & all deceivableness of unrighteousness, because they received not the love of the truth they might be saved. Where the love of the truth is not received, there is the love of lies, & each will receive just what they love. Upon this ground the separation line is struck, & you must

either be led by that voice which condemns sin, shews the only way out of it, & testifies that the Shakers are in the strait and narrow way, which is the honest voice of truth, or you must be led by that voice which in defense of the unfruitful works of darkness has blackened the character of a harmless people with all manner of slander & filled the ears of the public with the most incredible and lying reports.

I know your soul has once been sick of sin & of that confused Babylon where it is covered with a sanctified profession: and if you sincerely continue to walk by the same rule, I can say to you as the angel said to the beloved disciple, Come up hither & I will shew thee the Bride the Lambs wife, & you shall see that holy city the new Jerusalem, and know of a truth that there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth or whatsoever worketh abomination, or that either loveth or maketh a lie.

With sincere regard I am yours —

Richard McNemar.

To Laurence Roelofson

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