

Sects and Cults

Christadelphians

Who are the Christadelphians? We read their ads in the Saturday edition of the newspaper. They invite the public to such lectures as: "Do you need to experience miracles to prove you are Christian?" or "The Antichrist is here NOW."

The Christadelphians are a sect founded by the medical doctor John Thomas (b. 1805), who came to America in 1832. In the middle of the century he abandoned the practice of medicine and gave himself full time to the propagation of his doctrines. He revisited England three times, where he founded little groups called Ecclesias. He also established such groups in the U.S. and Canada. In England, the most influential leader of the sect was Robert Roberts, founder of the journal *The Christadelphian* and expounder of Christadelphian doctrines in his standard *textbook Christendom Astray from the Bible*.

The sect accepts the Bible as its sole authority and claims to attempt to get back to first century Christianity. Its name is derived from "Christ" and "Adelphos," which means "Brethren of Christ" (Luke 8:21).

I Theology

1. Trinity

The Christadelphians openly deny the doctrine of the Trinity. Against the Trinity they write: "We reject the doctrine - that God is three persons." There is only one eternal and immortal God, the creator of all things in heaven and earth.

2. Christ

Christ, the Son of God, is not eternal. They teach: "We reject the doctrine - that the Son of God was co-eternal with the Father." Christ had no pre-human existence before he was born of Mary-except in the mind of the Father. The sinlessness of Christ is denied. "We reject the doctrine - that Christ's nature was immaculate." Though his body was "unclean," Christ is considered personally free from sin. When he was baptized, he received "the resident divinity from the Father through the Holy Spirit."

3. The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the name for the power of God in action. They "reject the doctrine - that the Holy Spirit is a person distinct from the Father."

4. Annihilation

The existence of hell and eternal punishment are denied. The wicked will be annihilated. "We reject the doctrine - that the wicked will suffer eternal torture in hell." Without Christ man is lost. There is no eternal life apart from him.

5. Salvation

What must one do to be saved? One must believe that Jesus is Saviour and Lord, repent of past sins, receive baptism by immersion and live a life that reflects one's relationship with God and Christ. Christ didn't die as our substitute for our salvation. His death was to "express the love of the Father in a necessary sacrifice." Salvation is through perseverance in good works, a not by grace and faith alone "We reject the doctrine - that the Gospel alone will save without the obedience Christ's commandments." "That the way to obtain this salvation is to believe the gospel they preached and to take the name and the service of Christ, by being thereupon immersed in water, a continuing patiently in observance of all things He commanded."

6. The Church

The Christadelphians are strict Congregationalists. Each ecclesia is an independent organization, although member of the wider Christadelphian fellowship. They have no full-time clergymen in the accepted sense, but each ecclesia elects their own leaders, who are divided in "managing brethren," "presiding brethren," and "lecturing brethren." They have no Bible schools or Seminaries for leadership training. An active and voluntary ministry may sound ideal, but it leads in practice to a ministry by the prosperous. B.R. Wilson observed: "The officials of the Christadelphian movement have not been or become a paid order or administrators; they remain amateur and self-recruited. There has been no professionalism, but clearly the work of the movement did in some spheres offer its more fully to those brethren, with time to spare, and so the wealthier or the retired, or the more leisured in occupation were those whose circumstances and abilities read brought them to the chi organizing positions."

Though the emphasis is the autonomy of the local ecclesia, there is still a strong informal leadership within the sect as a whole.

The editor of the sec periodical exerts considerable influence and authority. No sect can effectively function without a central office or figure. They are strict on discipline. No deviation in doctrine is allowed. A faithful Christadelphian will not fellowship with anyone who holds or condones any of the beliefs rejected by the sect. "Fellowship cannot be extended to anyone who holds, teaches, fellowships or countenances any of the doctrinal heresies referred to below:" (introduction to "Doctrines to Be Rejected").

7. The Doctrine of the Last Things

They are strict millenarians. At the second coming of Christ, the saints will be given immortality and the wicked will be destroyed. Christ and his followers will occupy the land of Canaan and from Jerusalem will rule the world. The promises of God in prophecy are for the Jews only. In a sense, the Christadelphians affiliated themselves with the Jews, though they themselves enjoy a superior redemption and better prospects in the coming earthly kingdom of God. In the beginning of the sect's history, their meeting places were in some cases called synagogues. Some Christadelphian schismatics in New Zealand refer to themselves as "Christian Israelites."

11 Life-style

The Christadelphians do not participate in the political life of their country. They neither vote nor hold office. They are strict pacifists. During World War I in England, they developed an organization to seek exemption from military service. They see themselves as pilgrims, who are "called out of the world." "The saints of the Most High have no kingdom until the kingdom shall be given to them at the coming of Christ." The Christadelphians, who spread their views mainly through public lectures, do not belong to the historic Christian faith. Since they deny the basic doctrines of Scripture, they cannot be considered truly Christian.

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