

1835 CIRCULAR CONTENTNEA BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

[Elders seated in this session were Elders: Thomas Dupree, Mark Bennett, George W. Wallace. Association present were Kehukee, Little River and Country Line.

NOTE: Being accustomed to the manner in which the other “Beebe Baptists” associations wrote; the Contentnea does not have that “peculiar sound” in their writings. We went back through the Warwick Minutes, and found that the Contentnea was first seated in 1871 session; and it was in 1872 that the Warwick sent messengers to it. Therefore, strictly speaking, the Contentnea Association was not a “Beebe Baptist” association, which accounts for its different organizational structure, and subject matter. At that point in time, (1806) the Regular Baptists and Separate Baptists merged their churches, and became known as “*United Baptists*.” In Kentucky, the Licking had already returned to the Particular Baptist nomenclature, leaving the United Baptists, but the Contentnea at this date is yet a United Baptist Association, albeit “anti-missionary.” The other correspondence spent their valuable time on more Gospel-related subjects than that found below. The Contentnea and Kehukee’s Articles of Faith would have shocked the other associations in the Eastern correspondence at this earlier period.

I had planned (and stated) that I would be posting these Circulars in Chronological order. After checking them, I am persuaded I should continue posting the Warwick and Lexington with the Contentnea chronologically, due to the more edifying Circulars of the first two.

I would note, also, that the manner of writing by the Delaware River, Warwick, and Lexington are very similar. The writers of these used “biblical” language – verses often strung together to form sentences and paragraphs; and some insisted this was the correct way of discussing Scriptural topics. Some modern readers complain that this type of writing is “taking verses out of context,” and such would probably like the writing style of the Contentnea. – SCP.]

CIRCULAR LETTER

The Contentnea Association now sitting at Pleasant Plains, Wayne County, this 25th day of October 1835, to the churches they represent,

Beloved Brethren:- No doubt you will be looking for a circular letter written upon some subject of importance. We have no other subject on our minds at present but the memorable subject of Religion from which if God will we shall undertake to offer you some few thoughts and in doing this it behooves us to offer some definition of the word *religion*. The understanding we have of this word is divine faith and worship and reverence of God. However, it is defined by others “binding together,” by others “inward piety of heart,” whereby God is acknowledged, while another says it consist in the “resolution of the will for God,” and to avoid whatever we are persuaded He disapproves. The word *religion* only occurs in Scripture, (perhaps) five times, and if this whole heathen theology was searched we know not whether it is to be found. Although there was nothing said about religion or the term not used in Scripture till the days of the Apostles, religious devotions were practiced in a very early age of the world; for we hear

in Scripture that men began to call on the name of the Lord which implies they worshipped God. Again, Abel offered to God a sacrifice which was accepted. –see Genesis account. But Cain brought of the fruit of the ground for his offering which was not accepted. Therefore we see plainly two systems of *religion* set up in the world that early. The one a true religion and the other a false or spurious one.

1st. All false religion or the principles of it was communicated to our fore parents in the garden of paradise and has been in exercise more or less from that day to this; false or spurious religion proceeds from our depraved nature, or a false conception of God and in proposition to the views we entertain of ourselves and God. So we set up our forms of worship. Man in his depraved state is not without some knowledge of a Supreme Being, but the views which he entertains of Him can never enable him to worship in a pure or holy manner. But to prove the fact stated we bring the following Scripture: “*For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*”- Romans 1:20. We only shall divide religion into four general heads (viz) The heathen religion; the Roman religion; the Mohammedan (Moslem) religion; and the Christian religion. To enlarge on all we have proposed would extend far beyond the bounds of a Circular Letter. Nevertheless we will glean a little as we pass on.

1st. It is evident that the heathen had some knowledge of the true and living God at some point in time or they would not have had so many idol gods which it is not expedient for us to name here; but it is a plain proof that there is one true God, and we read of no other characters denying His existence, but the fool, and he said in his heart, “*There is no god.*” The heathen gods were dumb and deaf, could neither see nor smell, and yet on critical occasions or in times of distress they invoked these gods. This is proven by the imprudent act of Goliath of Gath; again, by the case of Nebuchadnezzar, when he wanted Daniel to worship his god. –See Daniel. However, some of their gods were beasts, which were no better than stock or stone. Notwithstanding, they did sacrifice to them, and reposed confidence in their gods; they could not save them. Moreover, it is said the heathen religion can hardly be entitled a *system*, since the votaries thereof are subject to the most gross vices.

2nd. Under the tyranny of the pagans the followers and worshippers of God suffered many, very many abuses, and even death itself. See the unlawful decree of Nebuchadnezzar recorded by Daniel the Prophet, as well as others. The second thing we shall notice is, the religion of the Church of Rome which is said to have been in infancy a branch of the true church of Jesus Christ. True religion descend into false as novel inventions accumulate. We will ask the reader if the Church of Corinth in Greece was not entitled to the same honor – the church at Philadelphia in Macedonia – the church at

Galatia, the church at Colossi and the seven churches in Asia with many others? Therefore we do not see any cause why the church at Rome should claim any preeminence over those older churches, as to age or quality; and if she did ever possess any over the rest it is now nothing to her glory; for it is certain from the best authors we have who wrote of her proceedings, that she swerved from the Christian faith from time to time, until she and her votaries went into lasciviousness and went on to elect popes, cardinals and peers and established persecution against the true church, or followers of Jesus Christ in several kingdoms, wearing names, titles, and offices which Christ nor His apostles never did, nor intend should be given to officers of the Church; which names are unwarranted in the New Testament. And by their influences they troubled kingdoms established ecclesiastical laws, put many saints to death, proclaimed themselves “Vicar to Christ, successor to St. Peter,” having power to forgive all manner of sins, past, present and to come; which is more than Christ ever assumed to do.

Moreover they established universities, theological seminaries, the mass, infant sprinkling, preaching (as they said) men out of purgatory, selling indulgences, pardons, and in the meantime forbidding priests to marry, would not have wives of their own, but wanted every other man’s and went so far as to worship the relics of the dead. Many other errors they were guilty of which we shall not now notice. And popery is only paganism refined, or nothing better and if you want a proof of all this see “Fox’s History of Martyrs,” the “Biography of John Wickliffe,” Zwingli, Patrick, Hamilton, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Buck on the Church of Rome, and may other writers on the same subjects. Some of these men in the years 14, 15, and 1600 set her at defiance and proved to the world that she was nothing more or less than the Beast which the Revelation saw having seven heads and ten horns, and made it appear she was anti-Christ. We shall only now observe that “Christian” Rome (as it is called) did more injury to the followers of God and put to death more saints, than ever pagan Rome did.

3rd. We now come on to take a short notice of the Mahometan (Moslem) Religion. It appears Mahomet was a Persian or born under the reign of the Persian Empire towards the close of the Sixth century. [NOTE: Mohammed was an Arabian Catholic priest, whose mother was a Jewish convert to the Orthodox faith, according to Pasha (John Allen) Glubb – the foremost historian of that period of time and of the Middle East and Central Asia. Mohammed is the founder of the Islamic religion, which has yet retained many aspects of the early Orthodox Catholics in the Jerusalem Patriarchy’ form of worship- SCP.] His father being poor and dying when his son was young, he was necessarily raised by his friends and married a rich widow, which gave him many advantages; and he made use of them for the purpose of establishing a new system (branch of the Orthodox Catholic religion- SCP.) of religion and to break down paganism among the Arab tribes; which religion he was successful in setting up in several countries in a short time. He first fixed his plan: converted his wife, and near relations, and rich and noble friends; and by his own intrigues and the assistance of his friends he proselyte a sufficient number of men, and took the sword and forced his religion. The reason why men embraced the Mahometan religion was they were afraid of

Mahomet's sword, and it is presumable the overthrow of this religion will be caused by universal war, inasmuch as we think that Mahomet is the false prophet that John saw in the Revelation, and the Beast, the law religion. And the Beast was taken and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the Beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire, burning with brimstone. – Revelation 19:20. This religion is founded pretty much in the belief of one God, and that Mahomet was his prophet. They believe the most of the Old Testament is of divine authority. Mahomet sets himself up nearly upon an equality with Jesus Christ, but says he is the last prophet. He also has a number of other sentiments, which though is not known here for this kingdom is no better than the former, as men cannot be saved without Jesus Christ: therefore we shall leave it and come to the last thing proposed. See Buck on Mahomet.

- 4th. We now proceed to notice the Christian religion and in order to set it forth in its proper color, we shall try to define what kind of religion the Church at Antioch professed or believed in. Now they were scattered abroad upon the persecution that came about Stephen; travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus, and Antioch &c. It is also said some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which when they came to Antioch spake unto the Grecians preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Barnabas was also sent, whom when he came, preached (we believe) the Lord Jesus, whom the Scripture said, saw the grace of God, and was glad, and exhorted them all with purpose of heart to cleave unto the Lord. He then went to Tarsus, and finding Saul, and they returned to Antioch and assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people, and the disciples were called “Christians” first in Antioch.- See Acts 11th chapter, from 19th to 27th verses. Barnabas was a man full of the Holy Ghost.

Paul was a Christian and believed in the Christian religion, and practiced the worship of them, and taught Christians, with the rest of the apostles, the perfect rule of faith and practice, as you will see in all his epistles to the Christian churches. A few words relative to what the primitive Christians believed: - They believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; that He was the Son of God, the only Savior of Sinners; that he was God manifest in the flesh; that he was God, one with the Father;- They believed the Holy Ghost was one with the Father, and the Son, and was engaged in the work of redemption; *“for there are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these Three are One.”* This language proceeded from John’s own lips. God never was manifested to Adam in a trinity of persons till after the fall, yet He did exist as such; which appears from His own words: *“Go to, let us make man in our own image.”* We could bring many other proofs, see the New Testament abounding with proofs, but we have not time to insert them here. We must proceed to inform you that no unregenerate man is a “Christian,” let his profession be what it may; but is a foreigner, and an alien without hope and without God in the world. Thus having incorrect views of the

Supreme Being and of himself, he always worship incorrectly; in a word, a bad principle never produces a good work, which aggress with the words of our Savior, "*Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good also.*" But man in these modern times say, "They are making Christians almost as fast as they want;" but by what means? Most ministers, or our Arminian ministers, tell the people the atonement is general and the Spirit of God strives with every body, and if they will believe which is possible for them to do at any time, and reform, that is enough. God is merciful and He will save them, say they. This is the "Christian religion," we have not so learned Christ; and we never knew any tree to change itself or its fruit; neither have we ever known any tree to change another tree or alter its fruit. When the Ethiopian can "*change his skin, or the leopard his spots,*" then may an unregenerate man make himself a Christian; and then may man make Christians, and not till then.

To prove our position we will state a case: Suppose here is a spring, which in former times produced good water, but some enemy poisoned the spring, and of course it produced poisonous water, and before it is fit to be used the spring must be cleaned. We ask, therefore, can the spring cleanse itself, or can any other cleanse it? We think not. The Arminian says, the way to cleanse it is to send your servant and make them work upon the stream below and cleanse all the waters that run out of this spring, and that is the right way, If that be the way, what will be done with what runs out after such cleansing, seeing the fountain remains untouched? The waters will be like the original. Will they work on the outward passions of man, and the heart from whence all the actions flow is untouched; and when they sin again, (say they) "they have fallen from grace," when it should have been said they fell for lack of grace. There is another set of preachers that are manufactured over, according to the schemes of the day, that say, "O, no, brother Arminian, you are a little mistaken; let us prescribe a plan whereby sinners hearts can be cleansed, or that spring above named. They the proceed to say, destitute places, souls are going to hell in ignorance for want of the Gospel preached to them; the poor Brahmins are perishing for the word of life and Hindoos &c., and we have just studied out a plan of salvation to save them. What plan Sirs? Why let us erect Theological schools, state conventions, religious schools in different parts of the United States, and polish men to work upon the bad spring above named, or sinner's hearts; and teach them to persuade men, and beg them out of their money, and in a short time we can have servants a plenty. (Agreed for if you want martins, set up a plenty of gourds- and you will have them). However, they have proceeded to all the above, and are sending lazy young hired men, who are not willing to work otherwise, that can by even a shilling from selling a negro, and all he can get from others, in better stations in life, to carry their point, pay to him (or any of his chaps). Sir, who sent you to preach, and what is your motive? We (perhaps holding a temperance paper in his hand) will answer, "such and such a board of missions sent me. They are in want of a little money, and cannot you help us to some?" They have learned to cry to congregations and private individuals, "God loves a cheerful giver," and deceive the people and carry off their hard earned

money, and perhaps preach them an Arminian or a money begging sermon and leave the spring uncleansed or their souls unsaved. We will just remind the reader when the many beggars are gone to Hindustan, there is a salubrious climate, a fertile country, gold and silver mines, and no doubt but a rich reward like this will be an effectual call to a number of these fellows. What is the sign of their call to the ministry? 1st. Every power of their souls being filled with the love of money which is the root of all evil; 2nd. Put on a cloak of hypocrisy; 3rd. To beg well; 4th. Put on two coats; 5th. From the study of Dr. Gill's Divinity and Exposition of the Scriptures and others; 6th. The glory of the schemes of the day, &c. and thereby deceiving the people. But there are two or three ways by which they are known. 1st. by their wearing two coats. 2nd. By their begging of money, and 3rd. by their sowing discord among all the brethren. All such religion is nothing better than popery. Lo, they leave the hearts of men unclean still.

Next, we shall proceed to show how the fountain is cleansed, or the way to cleanse it. Begin in the very bottom of the fountain and take away everything that defiles it, and the water will be good. And this is the way God cleanses the hearts of men and makes them true Christians; the Holy Ghost kills the poison of sin, and kills the sinner to the love, and, practice of sin; changes the heart and shows the sinner the unholiness of his nature; brings to his views His own perfection and holiness, and the man dies to his former prospects of getting to heaven. The Apostle said "sin reviv'd and I died;" and again, "God granted repentance unto life," and gives faith by which the man believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is thus "born again," or a second time, as the Apostle and primitive Christians were; born "not of blood, or the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God;" a distinct birth from that of the flesh. This is the way the hearts of men are changed in circumstance, and from thence proceed good fruits, as the United Baptists, who are changed as they were in Antioch, and follow the same rule of faith and practice. Again: pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: "*to visit the fatherless and the widows in their afflictions, and to keep themselves unspotted from the world;*" which shows it must be a pure heart to perform this work. For when the Christian does this work he has no claim on God at all. In his visit to the house of mourning his religion is pure because it proceeded from a pure heart or soul. He discharges a Christian duty, prays for the afflicted, and perhaps comforts them knowing not but God may bless his visit to their soul's good, for God evidently saw the end of all his work before he pushed it into existence, and appointed His means to affect his work.

One *means* is the preaching of the word for it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them *that believe.*" But one of God's preachers come forward and say, "Sir, who sent you to preach, and what sign do you give of your call to the ministry?" He will say, "I believe Jesus Christ called me; now for the sign – I was once a hater of His kingdom and had no delight in holiness, but I hope He has changed my heart, for now I love a holy life, and the more like Jesus any Christian is, the better I love him; and

after this change in my affections took place, the worth of souls was impressed on my mind, the welfare of Zion, the honor of the Christian cause and the glory of God; all these lay so heavy on me I had an extreme burden, &c., and necessity was laid upon me to preach the Gospel, and woe is me if I preach not the Gospel of grace.” So the man goes without hire or reward, only he carries his reward with him. So he goes and strikes right at the fountain of sin in the heart; God the Holy Ghost sending conviction home, and changing the heart as at Antioch.

Of such are the Baptist in this association, and some others, made Christians by the eternal God. Therefore, beloved Brethren, make it *manifest* that you are in possession of pure religion in this dark time of the night. Pray without ceasing, and fill your seat in Meeting places, and be *temperate*, but not *obstainers*; and above all things, love one another; and keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Read the Bible every day of your lives, then you may know what the will of the Lord is; hold out faithful to the end, and you have the promise of a crown of life; for the day will surely come when we (if we be Christians) shall all meet in that great association of the general assembly above, where parting shall be no more, and sorrows never come. May God grant us a happy entrance into that assembly, for Christ’s sake, Amen.