

THE MACDONELL CASE.

VIEW OF CITY CLERGYMEN UPON THE QUESTIONS INVOLVED.

The following are the opinions of several of the resident clergymen of Montreal in regard to the Macdonell case, which has been so much attention at present. Several clergymen who were called on were either out of town, and quite a number of others declined for various reasons to make replies to the questions asked, which were substantially as follows:—

1. It is desirable that a person entertaining such doubts as those expressed by Rev. D. J. Macdonell, of Toronto, should be excluded from the ministry.

2. Should a clergyman be forbidden to speak in public about matters to him difficult until his own doubts are removed?

3. In your opinion does the Bible finally settle the question of eternal punishment?

4. Are confessions of faith or other equivalent standards of doctrine desirable, and in what authority should they be held?

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I do not think that a person who entertains such doubts as those expressed by Rev. D. J. Macdonell should be excluded from the ministry. For (1) his doubts may be only temporary, and may give way before further study; and (2) even though they do not, they do not constitute a bar to his usefulness as a minister of Christ, and a faithful preacher of the word of God, and the one ground of human salvation.

2. I do not think a clergyman should be forbidden to enter his doubts in public, because there are many cases in which the doubts of a minister or pastor may themselves be helpful to enquiring minds, as indicating an ability to sympathize with the people. But, as a rule, I should think the expression of his doubts in the pulpit extremely unwise. If he preaches his doubts, so far forth, no guidance. A minister should be careful not to let his doubts, or on matters on which he has no belief, speak generally, he should let his own be known.

3. I believe the Bible contains the materials for a final settlement of the question in dispute, and I look for the time when, in the progress of biblical and theological knowledge, the teaching of the Bible will be brought into clearer light. But in the present state of our critical resources, I believe it is possible for earnest and patient students of the Bible to entertain different views as to its teaching. It is not, therefore, possible because it appears to be the fact. However much to be regretted, it is, I think, true, that a large number of eminent writers in recent years have differed more or less seriously on this great question.

4. It appears to me that there is to be a standard of doctrine in every denomination, either expressed or implied. It is not, therefore, confined to writing it, I think, be brief, reduced to fundamental propositions, and occasionally revised and enlarged. I prefer, also, the practice of those denominations which do not exact subscription.

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Answer to question 1.—No. No. Answer to question 2.—Inasmuch as the ability to doubt is almost the condition of intellectual progress, and as spiritual progress is intimately connected with that of intelligence, it becomes the duty of the minister, at times, to speak in public of his doubts, if he is not able to do so in private.

Answer to question 3.—To my own mind, yes, and adversely to Mr. Macdonell. In my view of the possible varieties of Scriptural interpretation, and the actual existence of Unitarian Christianity, I am compelled to say that, evidently, the Bible does not finally settle the question in dispute.

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