

FIVE POINTS OF FAITH

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649373109

Five Points of Faith by Charles Gordon Ames

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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CHARLES GORDON AMES

**FIVE
POINTS OF FAITH**

*"Blest be the Light that shows the Way,
And blest the Way the Light has shown!"*

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BY

CHARLES GORDON AMES

MINISTER OF THE CHURCH OF THE DISCIPLES, BOSTON



BOSTON

GEO. H. ELLIS CO., 272 CONGRESS STREET

1903

For sale at A. U. A. Book Rooms, 25 Beacon Street, or at the Library of
the church. Price 50 cents net.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

On the walls of many Unitarian churches and Sunday-school rooms hangs a large square of card-board, bearing these words:—

OUR FAITH.

WE BELIEVE IN
THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD;
THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN;
THE LEADERSHIP OF JESUS;
SALVATION BY CHARACTER;
THE PROGRESS OF MANKIND ONWARD AND UPWARD FOREVER

“Such will be the theology of the Church of the Future, which will be emancipated from ritualism, dogmatism, and sectarianism, and will possess more and more of the mind and heart of Christ Jesus.” So wrote James Freeman Clarke, who formulated what he called these “Five Points of the New Theology” in a sermon preached May 10, 1885, in the Church of the Disciples, Boston, and printed and reprinted in America and England. The title presents it as a contrast to those Five Points of Calvinism “which have been the main and essential doctrines of Orthodoxy in the past.”

Dr. Clarke saw the Divine Word “revealed in creation, embodied in Christ, and immanent in the human soul”;

taught by Jesus, not as a definite system, but as an ever-unfolding principle; not as something we are to grow out of, but as something we are ever to grow into; and, *because* it is a living and growing germ, it has "no finality in any of its past forms."

Many of us regard this simple statement as so compact of spiritual verity, vitality, and sweet reasonableness as to make it "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and instruction in righteousness"; and we believe it will be helpful to sincere and inquiring souls who are looking for the city that hath foundations.

The five discourses gathered into this little book were preached in the Church of the Disciples during November and December, 1902.

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THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD.

"I bow my knees unto the FATHER, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named."—EPH. iii. 14 (Rev. Version).

THESE are words of light and power. They offer us no dead and empty theory of theism, but the Living God, in warm and loving relations to us all, as born to be sharers of his nature. They bring before us a vision of the spiritual universe as a home, and of the countless multitude of beings who inhabit it—in whatever part of the infinite realm they dwell—as belonging to one household, all bearing the name of one Father, because, even though they know him not, they are known to him as sons and daughters. The mansions are many; the family is one.

The end of the apostle's toil and prayer, like that of his great Master, is "to make all men see" this blessed mystery of the Fatherhood,—a mystery hidden from the ages (along with many another waiting wonder), but now made manifest by the appearance of one great Son of God, who impressed those who knew him best as pre-eminent among many brethren. Paul thus sees Jesus as the Leader of a mighty procession which in the fulness of time will gather the spiritual creation into the unity of a Divine Humanity, that God may be all in all. Such is his grand conception of the eternal purpose that runs through the world's history.

Of Absolute Being we may not speak, for we cannot think. Unable as we are to fathom our own nature, how by searching can we find out God? In a very real and awful sense, he is hidden in impenetrable darkness and silence. No man hath seen him, nor can see. No image of the Infinite can be fixed or graven on our minds as an object of worship; nor is it probable that there is any *such* God as we fashion to ourselves, because the Reality must be inconceivably beyond our childish measurement. But his greatness adapts itself to our littleness. Of all the vast breadth of sunlight, one ray suffices for the human eye; of the seemingly boundless air, one breath at a time is enough for our life. Perhaps we may "know God" as we know any author or artist by his works, or as we know what infinity means, without being able to grasp it; or, better still, as a little child may know the parent.

Thus the High and Holy One, the Inhabitant of Eternity, may dwell and reveal himself in the lowly heart

"As shines the sunbeam in a drop of dew."

The God Absolute is above the reach of our puny thought, but the God Relative — the God with whom we have to do, because he has to do with us — is manifest in nature, in mind, in history, and in experience.

We cannot *think* him, but we think *about* him, because we must. And we can apprehend, or take hold of, that which we cannot comprehend, or take in. We feel after him, because we have unspeakable need. We did not make ourselves, and there must be a Maker. We cannot care for ourselves, and the world would be a bedlam if there were no Care-taker. How welcome,

then, is the message that this Maker and Benefactor is also our Father !

The doctrine of the Fatherhood of God, whatever else it may include, appears to hold these implications :

1. That he is the **only** Source and Producer of Life, the exhaustless and ever-active Power behind evolution. Once there was no life on this planet. How did non-living matter ever become living? How did breath enter the forms which arose from the dust? How did the primal egg get laid, or the first vital cell get itself formed? Philosopher and scientist can give but one answer : "There is an infinite and eternal Energy from which all things proceed." To that Cause of all causes Jesus gives the name of Father.

2. That the Divine Love, being the Supreme Parentage, must be also the continuous and friendly Providence. It is just as impossible that we should live another minute by our own power as that we should have given ourselves life at first. This is the ground of our dependence. We have nothing, and can have nothing, which does not come to us as a gift. If some forms of good are placed within our reach, the very power to reach them is itself a gift. We are capable of self-help only as we are helped by "the Power *not* ourselves." The Maker keeps making us ; the Father keeps providing ; and he "knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him."

3. The fatherly guardianship includes impartial discipline. We are placed under a system of wise law and order. Man's freedom, within elastic limits, is a part of the order, and is necessary to his development as the child of such a Father. The Power which produces and