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THE PRESBYTERIAN

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Philosophy and the Cross.

The Cross of Jesus Christ stands for something peculiar and distinctive. It denotes a religion that is redemptive and practical. It produces an experience. It appeals to facts. It has done much for man. It can do much for him. It affects the conscience, the heart and the life. It introduces a Christ—a Messiah—an anointed One. It tells of a God-man. It brings forth the Son of the Highest for human benefit. He is a Prophet to instruct; a Priest to atone for, intercede and to bless; and a King to rule and to subdue. His life is a pattern; his blood is justifying; his grace is renewing and sanctifying. His Word is enlightening, comforting, directive and helpful. His Spirit is co-operative and all-adequate to the purposes for which he was given. Jesus offers his salvation to fallen, guilty man. He is a Saviour for all conditions and relations, for all classes, for all ages, for all climes, for time and for eternity.

Some persons look upon this as mere boastfulness—a sentimental appeal, and in contrast exalt the virtues of philosophy and demand for it a hearing. It is no new thing for wisdom and the Cross to come into conflict. Between them lies the wide domain of experiment. A fair test between them can be made. Their respective merits can be determined; each man for himself. The world has long been making proof of them as claimants for its attention. Philosophy was tried in Greece and Rome, and found wanting. It has been modified or enlarged since in scope and application, but still fails at many fundamental and essential points. It may suit the intellect and the reason, but not the conscience and the heart. It takes with certain types of men to a large degree, but does not measure up to the necessities of human nature in its varied activities, feelings and convictions. It meets many phases of life, but fails in affliction's hour and at death's door. Its voice is sweet and luring, but one wearies of it as a solver of the mysteries of life and eternity. It has a delicate touch, a subtle power and a discerning eye, but each and all are limited in range, penetration and application. On the other hand, the Cross has a voice richer, sweeter and more enticing; a touch more exquisitely tender, and a power deeper and more universal; a discernment far more piercing and reliable. The Gospel extends its intellectual, emotional, material, spiritual and eternal blessings to all zones, all nationalities, all characters and all lives. Philosophy may be in certain directions ethical; it may proclaim a fine morality; but Christianity offsets it with a purer and more comprehensive system of ethics. Plato, Socrates, Confucius and others have been outdone, in the lines where they stood pre-eminent as philosophers, by the humble Galilean Teacher. The decalogue and the Gospel create the purest and completest of lives, and make their demands upon all men in all relations and in all ages of the world.

Philosophy has a message for the man of leisure and of special aptitude, but it develops no universal experi-

ence. It lacks sympathy with suffering humanity. It is the spirit of the Crucified which causes a rejoicing with them that rejoice and a weeping with them that weep. Christians develop a fellow-feeling with human kind, a brotherly interest and helpfulness, a kinship, which link soul to soul and touch the innermost depths of man's need.

Philosophy in its various branches and studies covers a wide range of subjects and is fruitful in its panaceas for social ills. The press teems with the books, pamphlets, recipes and devices, but the supremacy of the Cross remains unbroken, and ever will. It, too, has its literature. First of all, it has its own inspired story. Then it has given birth to an endless variety of Christian experience, narrative, records, testimony and accomplishments, affecting the home, the State, society, the Church and the world. It has quickened the pen of Christendom, and has cast a flood of light upon every subject in which men are interested, touching beneficently every phase of life and of nationality.

Whatever may be the record of philosophy, the Cross far exceeds it in worth and results. It shows a philosophy far more profound and distinctive—a philosophy of redemption; the wisdom of God solving the problem, How can man be just with God; the philosophy of love, whereby God became incarnate and reconciled attributes that seemed to conflict, and effected the recovery of a lost world to God. It is no mere sentimentalism; it demands a life of righteousness. It calls for a spiritual regeneration. It requires a perfected nature. It does not ignore the place and power of intellectual speculation; it allows the widest scope to the philosophizing and formulative tendencies of the human mind; it recognizes the province of the reason; but it holds philosophy to its special domain, and claims for itself a sphere of operation unique and all-embracing, where its greatest triumphs are won. It deals, first and last, with sinful nature. It makes its main appeal to lost men. The world cannot redeem itself. The heart of fallen humanity must be renewed. Sin has wrought ruin. The Cross assures of grace, hope, purification, elevation and redemption. It cares little for brilliant speculation; it covets and works for the erring soul and its restoration to the divine image. Its aim is not high thinking, cultured thought, scientific formulations and human cults, but spiritual renovations, purified sensations, holy lives, triumphant deaths and heavenly exaltations.

It is along the line of the experimental and practical that it achieves its greatest triumphs and secures its most telling demonstrations. The more persons the Church brings under its transforming, ennobling and redeeming influence, the greater her incontestable witness-bearing power. She is to glory, not in her wealth, social status and material possessions, but in her soul-saving Cross, and in its conquests over sin, Satan and the world. She must rely upon it supremely for her aggressiveness and propagation. She must hold it up at all times and under

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Confessional Supralapsarianism--The Precise Issue.

By Rev. John T. Duffield, D.D., LL.D.

The question at issue between revisionists and anti-revisionists, respecting Chapter III. of the Confession, is not a question of orthodoxy. The intimation that it is, is unfounded, and in the interests of the truth should be scrupulously avoided. The question does not involve the fundamental doctrine of the Calvinistic system—the absolute sovereignty of God. It does not involve the essential doctrine of the Calvinistic system—the election of some men to everlasting life and the consequent “passing by” of others. In opposing the revision of Chapter III., elaborate defenses of these undisputed doctrines are irrelevant and misleading. The question relates purely and solely to the place of election in the order of the Divine decrees.

The Divine decrees, included in the one Divine decree which is eternal, cannot be conceived of as having a chronological order. Events, however, which result from the Divine decrees, occurring as they do in time, in a certain order, we cannot but conceive of the corresponding decrees as having a corresponding logical or natural order. The decree to cause “the grass to grow for cattle and herb for the service of man” presupposes a decree to create the earth and the creatures that dwell upon it.

The question at issue is this: Are we to conceive of the decree of election and consequent passing by of the non-elect as preceding or succeeding the decree to permit the fall? If the former, then in the discrimination between the elect and the non-elect mankind were regarded as mere creatures, not as sinners, and the decree is to be regarded as an exercise of God's sovereign power. If the latter, mankind being regarded as sinners, election was an exercise of Divine mercy, and the passing by of the non-elect an act of Divine justice. The former view is known as supralapsarianism, the latter as infra-lapsarianism—the etymology of the words indicating their meaning.

The statement of the doctrine of election in the Confession differs from the statements in the Shorter Catechism, and

the statements in all the other Reformed or Calvinistic symbols, except the so-called Lambeth Articles, formulated by a few English divines in 1595, which never had any ecclesiastical authority, and the “Articles of Religion” adopted in the Irish Church in 1615, which were superseded by the adoption of the Thirty-nine Articles of the English Church in 1635.

In comparing the Westminster Confession with the other Calvinistic Confessions, two points are to be noted; first, the order of doctrinal statement; second, the terms in which the doctrine of Predestination is stated.

In the Gallican Confession of 1559, the draft of which it is said was prepared by Calvin, the doctrines are stated in the following order: Concerning God, The Scriptures, The Trinity, Creation in General, Providence, The Creation of Man, The Fall, Original Sin, Predestination. Predestination is stated as follows:

“From this corruption and general condemnation in which all men are plunged, God, according to his eternal and immutable counsel, calleth those whom he hath elected by his goodness and mercy in our Lord Jesus Christ, without consideration of their works, to display in them the riches of his mercy, leaving the rest in this same corruption and condemnation to show in them his justice.”

The doctrine is stated in substantially the same order and terms in the Belgic Confession of 1561, one of the doctrinal Standards to-day of the Reformed Church of Holland, Belgium, and the United States.

The Synod of Dort in 1615 may be said to have been an Ecumenical Council of the Calvinistic Churches of that day. In addition to the representatives from the Reformed Churches of Holland and Belgium there were delegates from the Calvinistic Churches of France, Switzerland, Germany, England and Scotland. The Canons adopted were intended to be an authoritative statement of Calvinistic doctrine, called for by the Arminian controversy at the close of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century. In the Canons, the “First Head of Doctrine,” is “Divine Predestination.” Under this head, Article I. treats of the Fall; Article II. of the love of God as manifested in sending his only begotten Son into the world, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish but have everlasting life; Article III. of the Gose!; Articles IV. and V. of salvation by faith. Then follows the doctrine of election as follows:

“Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby before the foundation of the world he hath, out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of his will, chosen, from the whole human race which had fallen through their own fault from their primitive state of rectitude into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ.”

This is followed by a paragraph in which it is stated:

“The express testimony of sacred Scripture is that not all, but some only, are

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electd, while others are passed by in the eternal decree, whom God, out of his sovereign, most just, irreprehensible and unchangeable good pleasure, hath decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have wilfully plunged themselves . . . for the declaration of his justice.”

With the order and form of statement of the doctrine in question in the Shorter Catechism all are familiar—the creation of

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man in the image of God, the Fall, then Election in answer to the question: "Did God leave all mankind to perish in an estate of sin and misery?"

It will be observed that all these Calvinistic symbols are explicitly and distinctly infra-lapsarian.

When we turn to the Westminster Confession we find a striking difference from the other Confessions in both the ordinal place and the form of statement of the doctrine of Predestination. It immediately follows the chapters relating to the Scriptures, to God and the Trinity, and precedes Creation, Providence and the Fall. Its ordinal place is supra-lapsarian. There is an equally marked difference from the other Confessions in the form of statement. Instead of an election out of the mass of mankind regarded as sinners in the exercise of Divine mercy, and the passing by of the non-elect in the exercise of Divine justice, the race, so far as is indicated, are regarded as mere creatures, and the discrimination is simply an exercise of sovereign power. The statement is as follows: "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated into everlasting life, others foreordained to everlasting death." The statement is a bold didactic declaration of the destiny of immortal creatures, some to everlasting blessedness, others to everlasting perdition. The conception that in the decree mankind were regarded as sinners would seem to be excluded by placing angels and men in the same category.

How is this exceptional form of statement and ordinal place of the doctrine of Predestination in the Westminster Confession to be explained?

The prominent members of the Assembly were men of rare intellectual ability, high scholarship, profound thought, subtle in discrimination, precise in expression, with unquestioning faith in the infallibility and supreme authority of the Holy Scriptures. They had not only the courage of their convictions, but of what they regarded as the logical consequences of their convictions. In an ordinary logically constructed plan or purpose what is last in execution is first in intention. They seem to have appreciated that logical inferences from super-logical truths were not always reliable when to the declaration in Section I of Chapter III., that God hath "ordained whatsoever cometh to pass," they added, "yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established." There were, however, those in the Assembly whose conception of God's decree respecting the everlasting destiny of men and angels was determined by the ordinary principle in a logically constructed plan or purpose referred to; accordingly, a number were supra-lapsarians. As to the dominant influence on this point in the Assembly there is some question. Dr. Hodge says: "Twisser, the Prolocutor, was a zealous supra-lapsarian; the great majority were on the other

side. the symbols of that Assembly"—which expression includes the Shorter Catechism—"while they clearly imply infra-lapsarianism, were yet so framed as to avoid offense to those who adopted the supra-lapsarian view." Theol. Volume II., p. 317. Dr. Mitchell, the editor of the Minutes of the Assembly, by appointment of the Church of Scotland, says: "Care was taken to avoid the insertion of anything which could be regarded as indicating a preference for supra-lapsarianism." The implication in this statement is that the majority were supra-lapsarian. According to Dr. Mitchell, in the report of the committee on the important Chapter on "The Divine Decree," the statement of the doctrine of Predestination, Chapter III., Section 3—as quoted above, was followed by the statement: "To bring this to pass God ordained to permit the fall." To this the infra-lapsarians objected as express supra-lapsarianism. After discussion, the report of which is meagre, the latter sentence was omitted.

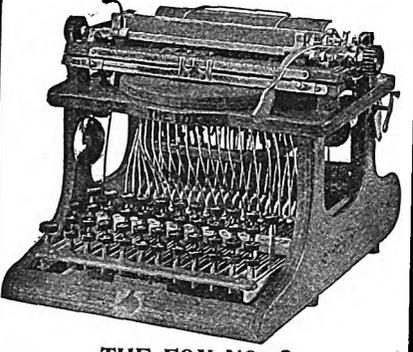
From the above it appears that whilst our doctrinal symbols, including the Shorter Catechism, may be said to imply infra-lapsarianism, the form of statement of the doctrine of Predestination and its ordinal place in the Confession is as it is that it might admit of a supra-lapsarian interpretation and be acceptable to those who held that view.

Supra-lapsarianism in the Presbyterian Church has become obsolete; not only so, it is declared by Dr. Charles Hodge to be "not consistent with the Scriptural exhibition of the character of God. He is declared to be a God of mercy and justice. But it is not compatible with these Divine attributes that men should be foreordained to misery and eternal death as innocent, that is before they had apostatized from God." Theol. Volume II., p. 319. Dr. A. A. Hodge says: "This scheme is unquestionably the most logical of all. . . . But the case is too high and too vast for the a priori application and enforcement of the ordinary rules of human judgment." "This view represents God as reprobating the non-elect by a sovereign act, without any respect to their sins, simply for his own glory. This appears to be inconsistent with the Divine righteousness, as well as with the teachings of Scripture." Outlines of Theol., p. 233. It is not strange, therefore, that to many ministers, elders, and laity, whose orthodoxy is unquestionable and whose opinions are entitled to respect, a form of statement that admits, and was designedly framed to admit of a supra-lapsarian interpretation, is not only seriously objectionable, but offensive. Its extension subjects the Calvinistic system to misapprehension and unmerited odium. It is but reasonable that the doctrinal symbols of a distinctively Confessional Church should state as precisely and accurately as possible the actual faith of the Church. This the Confession on the important doctrines of Predestination does not do. The practical question, therefore, which the Presbyteries are now providentially called to decide, in respect to the revision of Chapter III., is: Are the

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interests of the truth or of the Church promoted by the retention in our most prominent doctrinal Standard of a Form of Statement that admits of an interpretation so seriously objectionable, the only purpose served by its retention being to make conspicuous that in former years there were for a time Presbyterians who held the views that are now repudiated?

At the first fall meeting of the managers of "The Presbyterian Home for Aged Couples and Aged Men," held at Bala, on Monday, September 10th, the following Minute was adopted: "That in the death of Robert Graham, D.D., the Home has lost one of its earliest advisers and warmest friends. For many years he was one of our faithful auditors. By his practical advice, as well as by his uniform kindness and courtesy, he endeared himself, both to the family and the Board of Managers, and we shall long miss his familiar face. Resolved, That a copy of this Minute be sent to his bereaved widow, who has our deepest sympathy in her affliction. Resolved, That these resolutions be sent to the religious papers for publication."

As far as the vote has been reported to us, at the present date, seven Presbyteries have voted that the whole subject of revision of our Confession of Faith be dismissed, and five favor a supplementary creed, or moderate revision. The Presbytery of Mahoning is hard to classify, the vote standing 10 for revision, 7 for a new creed, and 15 for dismissing the whole subject.

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