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Rev. J. WILLIAM FLINN.

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I. COMPLAINT* AGAINST THE ACTION OF THE SYNOD OF SOUTH CAROLINA IN ADDRESSING AN OFFICIAL COMMUNICATION TO THE CIVIL COMMONWEALTH.

TO THE VENERABLE,

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN THE UNITED STATES :

We, the undersigned Ministers and Elders of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and members of the Synod of South Carolina, submitting to its authority, hereby present to your venerable body this our Complaint against the action of said Synod of South Carolina taken at its meeting at Darlington, S. C., on Monday, November 1st, 1897, in the matter of a petition to an official representative of the United States, touching certain civil affairs which concern the commonwealth.

*This Complaint as here given appears in an amended form. The nature of the subject, the time limit imposed by the Constitution, and the circumstances in which the writer found himself, combined to render it impossible for him to put the first draft of the Complaint in such form as was desirable.

The writer ought to add that he found it impossible to confer with the individuals who authorized him to sign their names to this paper as co-complainants, or even to submit to them for their formal approval the Complaint as drafted by himself. (Rev. W. T. Hall, D. D., is the single exception. To him the writer is indebted for valuable and valued advice and suggestions.) He has reason to believe, however, that on all material points he has faithfully represented the mind of his co-complainants. W. M. MCP.

III. THE FEDERAL PRINCIPLE IN THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS.

Something ought to be said on this topic before the present interest in the work of the Westminster Assembly subsides. It has not been embraced in any of the elaborate programs used in the memorial services of Assemblies, Synods or Presbyteries: nor has it been mentioned in the religious journals, so far as we have observed. This omission is remarkable when it is remembered that the doctrine of the Covenants is peculiar to the Westminster Standards. We have searched in vain for any other instance in Schaff's *Creeds of Christendom*. It is still more remarkable when the prominence given to the Covenants in the Standards is considered. One entire chapter in the Confession is devoted to the subject; and the Catechisms are equally express. This is not, however, the only, nor the principal, way in which the Covenants are made prominent. They are the mould in which the Westminster Creed is cast. The plan of salvation is treated as a Covenant. Sin and Grace are alike taught in the light of the Covenants. One might almost venture to say that the doctrine of the Covenants constitutes the distinctive feature of the Westminster Creed. It is certainly the distinguishing characteristic so far as the Reformed Creeds are concerned. And, as we shall see later on, the doctrine would not fit any but a Reformed Creed. The omission is due, no doubt, simply to an oversight. It is liable, however, to be misconstrued. The Rev. Dr. Francis R. Beattie, in his work, *The Presbyterian Standards*, says: "It is quite true that the Standards do not push the Covenant idea so far as some representatives of that type of theology, but it is evident that on broad scriptural outlines they are constructed under the control of the federal principle, both in regard to the natural and the legal relations in Adam, and in reference to the gracious and redemptive relations in Christ. There is

some need to emphasize this aspect of the structural principle of the Standards at the present day, as there is a tendency in certain quarters to overlook or lay it aside."

It is plain enough now that the Westminster Assembly followed the Bible closely in the prominence given to the Covenants. We find a definite word for Covenant in both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. Not only the Word, but the elements of the Covenant, parties, condition and promises, are found there. How deeply embedded in the Scriptures the federal principle is may be learned from the parallel drawn in the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans between Adam and Christ. But it happened in the case of the Covenants as it did in relation to other great doctrines that seem to us now so plainly taught in the Scriptures. It was only after the lapse of centuries, and in many cases after heated controversies, that the Scripture doctrine was distinctly formulated and defined. It has been said that to the Greek mind and to the Greek Church was assigned the task of elaborating the doctrines of the Bible concerning the Trinity and the Person of Christ; to the Latin Church, the doctrines concerning sin and grace; to the German Church, the doctrine of justification. It may be added that it was reserved to the Dutch Church to be chiefly instrumental in developing the doctrine of the Covenants. The Westminster Assembly met just in time to reap the benefit of their labors, and to incorporate the doctrine in a full and final statement of the Reformed theology.

There is a very natural connection between the work of the Reformers, Luther and Calvin, in ascertaining and formulating the true doctrine of justification, and the subsequent work of the Dutch on the Covenants. The doctrine of the Reformers, as stated in the Shorter Catechism, is: "Justification is an act of God's free grace; wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us, and received by faith alone." The act terminates on the legal relations of man; consists of a title to eternal life as well as pardon of sin; and is grounded on

the perfect obedience of Christ to the precept as well as the penalty of the law. The act of justification secures to man far more than was possible under pure moral government. All that unmixed moral government can secure is the favor of God as long as the law is obeyed. Under such a system man's destiny must forever remain precarious. A single sin at any point in his career would alter his relation from that of innocence to that of condemnation. But the introduction of the federal principle modified moral government in two important respects. First, one was made to stand for the many. Under pure moral government every member of the human race would have stood for himself, but in the modification under the first Covenant Adam represented all his natural posterity. The representative character of Adam made it necessary also that another limitation should be placed upon pure moral government. The question of his allegiance had to be settled before the birth of the first of his posterity. Now the first of these limitations necessarily introduces the principle of imputation; and the second, the principle of justification. From this brief statement it will be seen how the apprehension of the Scripture doctrine of justification would tend to the development of the doctrine of the Covenants. No other than the federal arrangement could secure such a result as that implied in justification.

Before passing from the position of the Covenants in our Standards, we cannot forbear to refer to the important service rendered by Dr. Thornwell in this connection. From the time when we studied under him as a candidate for the ministry, we have felt that he deserved the credit of some original work in removing the obscurities that attach to the Standards when dealing with the Covenants. We are glad to see our impression confirmed by so competent a judge as the late Rev. Dr. Thomas E. Peck. We quote a brief passage from his *Miscellanies*, Vol. II., p. 365: "As to the nature and purpose of the Covenant of Works, the great merit of our author, it appears to us, is the clearness with which he brings out the

precise points of difference between the dispensation which goes under this name and the dispensation under which man was by the mere fact of his creation ; or, in other words, the difference between moral government absolutely considered and the same as modified by the Covenant. The Westminster Standards throw no light on this subject. They say nothing, in describing man's condition under the Covenant of Works, from which we can gather the import of the promise of life, or determine why such a promise could not have belonged to a dispensation of *mere* moral government."

To this want of clearness may be added apparent inconsistencies in the statement of the doctrine of the Covenants. Leading theologians, who differ on some important points, claim with equal confidence the support of the Standards. It does not fall within the scope of this paper to interpret our Constitution, or to decide whether the differences which have emerged are due to the Standards, or lie back of them. Whatever may be the source of the differences, they are most likely to disappear at an early date. Take, for instance, the question whether there are two Covenants, or only one, relating to the salvation of fallen man. The chapter on the Covenants in the Confession mentions but one relating to salvation, which is called the Covenant of Grace. But when the question is raised as to the parties to that Covenant, two different answers appear to be given in the Standards. Chapter VII., Section III., of the Confession implies that God and his elect people are the parties. The answer to question thirty-one (31) in the Larger Catechism says: "The Covenant of Grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with the elect as his seed." The chapter on the Covenants is followed immediately by one "Of Christ the Mediator." In this chapter it is said: "It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the mediator between God and man, . . . unto whom he did, from all eternity, give a people to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified and glori-

fied." This is enough to show why it is that there is now, and always will be, two views drawn from the Confession and Catechism. One class of readers sees two distinct statements as to the parties; and the troublesome difficulty of making Christ at once one of the contracting parties and the mediator in the same Covenant. The other class sees in the Larger Catechism an explanation of the statement in the Confession as to parties, and seems to feel no embarrassment from the specified difficulty. One class sees in the Confession two Covenants, the other only one. And when they go back to the Scriptures, the divergence is not healed. One class sees on the face of Scripture two distinct Covenants, with distinct parties, conditions, and promises: the other sees only the parallel between Adam and Christ, and a testamentary dispensation founded on it. Another instance of apparent discrepancy, giving rise to like divergence of view, is found in connection with the question of imputation under the Covenant of Works. Chapter VI., Section III., of the Confession reads: "They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed." Chapter VII., Section II., says: "The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience." In the Larger Catechism the statement is: "The Covenant being made with Adam, as a public person, not for himself only, but for his posterity; all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression." With the Larger Catechism the Shorter agrees. The Standards thus set forth the dual relation of Adam to his natural posterity. He was to them a natural and a federal head. But it is not so clear what is taught as to the reason why Adam's posterity became involved in the guilt of his sin. The Confession seems to teach that imputation proceeded on both relations. The Catechisms make it proceed exclusively on the federal relation.

Passing now from the position given to the doctrine of the

Covenants in the Standards, we come next to inquire why the dispensations under which man has been placed have assumed the federal form? The answer of our Confession to this question is in these words: "The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of Covenant" (Chapter VII., Section I.). This is a statement worthy of our serious consideration. It may be broken up for convenience into several connected propositions. The duty of obedience to the Creator, on the part of an intelligent creature, springs necessarily from the relation involved. On the other hand, the fruition of God by the creatures, as their blessedness and reward, is a matter of sovereign grace. Since this is so, God has been pleased to offer this fruition of himself to man by way of covenant. The first of these propositions is self-evident. The obvious relation implied in the term *creature*, is that of absolute dependence on the will of the Creator. This gives God an absolute right of property in them. The right to govern, on the one hand, and the duty to obey, on the other, begin with the being of the intelligent creature. The second proposition is equally true, but not always as readily admitted. There is at least some obscurity attaching to the utterances of many in this connection. Perhaps a disregard of a very simple distinction lies at the root of the perplexity. It will be granted on all hands that the subject of God's moral government is sure of immunity from suffering as long as he obeys. This is implied in the verdict of conscience. But mere immunity from punishment is not all that conscience promises. It is clear from the light of nature that divine justice is a guarantee of all the positive rights belonging to the creature. It guarantees to the loyal servant all the blessedness attaching naturally to his nature and state, *but no more*. To infer from what God has done that he may be expected to do more; to reason from the

precarious situation of a free moral subject to some further sovereign interposition for his safety ; all such reasoning is fallacious. The act of creation brings the creature under obligation to God, but it cannot bring the Creator into obligation to the creature. Creation itself is a signal act of grace : and, being such, cannot endow the beneficiary with a right to more grace. Otherwise, grace is no more grace. Obligation attaches to the creature necessarily, and every increase of grace heightens the obligation : but God is under no sort of obligation to give being by creation, or to add other gifts where he has bestowed one. The third proposition is vindicated by a study of the teaching of the Scriptures as to the Covenants. It is true that no mention of a promise is found in the account of the Covenant of Works given in Genesis. That a promise was made to Adam in that Covenant, and that it was a promise of life in the sense of the fruition of God, is put beyond question by the fact that the Covenant made with the second Adam was intended to secure all that was lost by the disobedience of the first. The only trouble with this third proposition is that it simply affirms a gracious fact and goes no further. The Covenant was introduced to secure for man a fruition of God, which mere legal relations could not give ; but why the promise of life belongs to the Covenant and not to pure Moral Government, we are not told. How Moral Government was modified by the Covenant in order that God might bestow the fruition of himself upon man, is not explained. Let us not, however, overlook the great truth stated distinctly in the Confession, because of regrets that it was not accompanied with an explanation as to details. The Covenant was devised by infinite wisdom under the prompting of divine grace. Not content with having made man in his own image, and with having set him over the work of his hands, God would introduce him into closer fellowship with himself, and give him a participation in his own blessedness. How soon the Covenant was made, we are not informed. The impression made by the narrative in Genesis is that it was very soon after man's

creation. This is an additional mark of the divine goodness. What happened immediately on the transgression, we are plainly informed. It is impossible for the mind to dwell upon the history of the Covenants without feeling the infinite goodness of God. To put man in his original innocence beyond the reach of sin, and to give him unrestricted fellowship with the Creator, was the design of the first. To rescue the lost, and make them joint-heirs with Christ, was the purpose of the second.

By the side of the statement of the Confession of Faith we will place the following from Witsius *On the Covenants*: "God, by this Covenant, acquires no new right over man; which, if we duly consider the matter, neither is nor can be founded on any benefit of God, or misdemeanor of man, as Arminius argues; nor in anything without God; the principle and alone foundation of it being the sovereign majesty of the most high God. . . . But man, upon his accepting the Covenant and performing the condition, does acquire some right to demand of God the promise. For God has, by his promise, made himself a debtor to man. Or, to speak in a manner more becoming God, he was pleased to make his performing his promises, a debt due to himself, to his goodness, justice and veracity." There is a thought here additional to the ground taken in the Confession. The Covenant places man upon a different footing. The promise held forth calls into play his activities, and the Covenant conveys the right to plead the promise. It is, however, in this connection, as we have already intimated, that the Rev. Dr. Thornwell has rendered valuable service to the Church. His view is that the design of the Covenant is to turn the relation in which the rational creature naturally stands to God from that of a servant to that of a son. "Though God in justice might have left man to the operation of a pure moral government, conducted by the rule of distributive justice, and might have forever retained him in the attitude of a servant, yet the Divine goodness seems to have contemplated from the very beginning

a nearer and tenderer relationship, and a destiny of inconceivably greater dignity and glory than mere justice would or could have awarded. It was always God's purpose to turn the servant into a son." That it was the design of the Covenant of Grace to make believers sons of God is the explicit teaching of the Scriptures. "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." The relation of the Covenants, as we have seen, is such as to necessitate the inference that the first Covenant must have had the same purpose. The relation of a son, it may also be remarked, evidently secures that nearness upon which the fruition of God may be obtained which according to the Confession is not found in man's natural situation. The ground of a son's right to the blessings he enjoys is the love of the father, and the principle on which he possesses it is that of inheritance and not of debt. A son has ready access to his father; nor is he the subject of judicial discipline. The son is his father's companion and heir. Thus far the case is clear. But how does the Covenant turn a servant into a son? It does so by introducing the principle of justification. Moral Government could never justify in its pure form. Perpetual and perfect obedience would only secure perpetual innocence. A sin at any period would bring condemnation. Justification is a final state of exemption from the possibility of condemnation. In our Standards it includes a title to eternal life as well as pardon. There is no mistaking the import of the Scriptures as to the matter. There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died." The obedience of Christ under the Covenant secures justification for his people, not simply pardon. And if Adam had obeyed the Covenant of Works, he and his posterity would have been secured forever against the possibility of sin or condemnation. The

time of probation was limited for that very purpose. And, of course, in case of justification the relation of a servant ceases. The only relation consistent with a justified state is that of a son. In other words, adoption is founded on justification. So it is presented in the Epistle to the Romans.

The design of the Covenants shows that the federal principle is one of benevolence. If Adam had obeyed, none of his posterity would have criticised the principle. That he failed was not the fault of the principle. Its vindication by the second Adam was complete. And it was the only principle that would have availed to rescue any sinner. But the question has been raised, whether the federal relation is founded in justice? Our Standards assume that it is, without debate or even mention. Where the Scriptures are silent, they have nothing to say. It must be confessed that the efforts that have been made to justify the relation upon principles of reason have not been satisfactory. That our native depravity is sin is the verdict of conscience as well as the doctrine of Scripture. That it is the penal consequence of the first sin of the first man is equally clear from the Scriptures. That Adam represented in the covenant of works all his posterity descending from him by ordinary generation is also a plain fact of Scripture. We are glad that our Standards are content simply to state the case as it is taught in the Bible. Our understanding is that the construction commonly placed on the teaching of the Standards in this country is that imputation proceeds upon the federal relation, while the natural tie determines who were represented in the Covenant, and serves as the ground for the representation. This theory avoids the metaphysics of personal unity; and, at the same time, is regarded as sustained by the Scriptures. It also accounts for the fact that Adam's influence upon the race was limited to his first sin. That God adopted this method in dealing with Adam and his posterity is ample guarantee for its essential righteousness.

There is a third consideration connected with the subject of this article which remains to be mentioned. The federal

principle should be made prominent in our creed not only because it is scriptural and gracious, but it should be cherished because of its apologetical value. This is the citadel of our characteristic doctrines. Calvinism triumphed in the Synod of Dort, and excluded Arminianism. The Westminster Assembly endorsed the works of the Synod, and committed the Presbyterian Church to the defense of that system which gives all the glory to God. It is a noble trust, but not to be executed with human weapons. All that is intended here is a hint as to the vantage-ground we have in the doctrine of the Covenants. It lies upon the face of the fifth chapter of Romans that there was a Covenant of Works. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." "By the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation." The reference is unmistakably to the record in the second chapter of Genesis. It is all spoken of as known and understood: and used simply in the way of illustration. The matter in hand was the method by which a believing sinner becomes righteous. Paul says that Adam was a type of Christ. The analogy is made to lie in the federal principle. Adam was the representative of his natural descendants in a Covenant, and the consequences of his disobedience were imputed to them. In this he was a type of the second Adam, who also represented a people in a covenant, and the consequences of whose obedience are imputed to them. The second Covenant is a reality, call it what you may. The parties to it are God and his eternal Son. It is not so much a covenant with a people, as about them. The work of Christ is not to make it possible for God to enter into Covenant with Adam's descendants, but to fulfil the terms of a stipulation by which some of them are to be saved. To this agrees the whole tenor of Scripture. Christ constantly speaks of the commission under which he acted, of the work given him to do, of his people as given to him by the Father and of the promises made to him. As sin entered into the world by the violation of one Covenant, so redemption was secured by

obedience to another. Milton was orthodox when he proposed to sing :

“Of man’s first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat.”

Suppose, now, that the question of the decrees of God be under consideration. Let the decree of election particularly be the subject. There is no lack of proof as to the nature of the decree, particularly that it is not founded on the foresight of faith and repentance. The facts of providence, of the Bible, and of experience are all on the side of unconditional election. It is, however, significant that the Scriptures couple the decree with the Covenant. As, for instance, in Ephesians 1:3-6: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; According as he hath *chosen us in him* before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love; Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” The Augustinian doctrine of election could not be stated more clearly and comprehensively than it is in this passage. We have italicized the clause which connects it with the Covenant. The elect are chosen in Christ. The only reason they are treated differently from others is that he represents them. They were given to him before the foundation of the world. They were given to him not because it was foreknown that they would be holy, but in order that they might be holy. Representation is incompatible with any conditional scheme. Or take the doctrine of original sin. There can hardly be a question as to the fact that men are born with a depraved nature. The testimony of the Scriptures is so fully sustained by observation and experience as to leave no room for debate. But is the case so utterly desperate as the Reformed theology represents? Here, again, there could be no difficulty if the

doctrine of the Covenants was received and understood by all. The penalty of the Covenant of Works was "death." "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." What death is eludes our grasp. What life is we are unable to say. But we do know life as the condition of consciousness, activity, and blessedness. It is easy to detect its presence or its absence. Death, on the other hand, is the absence of life. A dead man neither sees, nor hears, nor feels, nor moves. Life and death are alike pervasive. When a man is dead he is dead all over. Adam died spiritually the moment he disobeyed. Not a vestige of his original holiness remained. Not only so, but at the same moment "death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." And so we might illustrate as to the extent of the atonement, efficacious grace, justification, and the perseverance of the saints. But we have said enough to indicate the value of the federal principle from this point of view. And here we make an end.

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