

# The Union of the Churches

AND THE

## Coming Presbyterian Assembly.

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By Rev. P. B. Fraser, M.A.

A MEMBER OF THE UNION COMMITTEE.

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WITH LETTERS AND CRITICISMS OF  
"THE ARTICLES OF THE FAITH"

FROM

MR. PRINCIPAL RAINY, D.D., REV. PRINCIPAL DYKES, D.D.,  
RIGHT REV. HANDLEY MOULE, D.D., LORD BISHOP OF  
DURHAM, REV. THOMAS WHITELOW, D.D., REV.  
PROF. C. W. HODGE, PH.D., REV. PROF. B. B.  
WARFIELD, D.D., LL.D., REV. PROF. W. M.  
M'PHEETERS, D.D., AND REV. E. B.  
HODGE, D.D.

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*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.*—1 Thes. v. 21.

*"Hold fast the form of sound words."*—11 Tim. i, 13.

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with emphasis, because on it as a hinge everything else turns: and here at its sharpest emerges the great evangelical question: Is it really by the power of God and not by my own power that I am saved? After such eliminations it seems scarcely worth while to observe that the open assertion of eternal punishment is also balked at (Article XXIII.). After God has been pushed into the background in the whole process of salvation, need we talk much about His eternal justice at the end of the story?

It does not seem to me possible, my dear Mr Fraser, that the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand is seriously contemplating purchasing external union with sister Churches at the cost of her testimony to that pure evangelicalism which it is her mission to proclaim. She will surely remember, when it comes to action, that it is her part not to sell the truth, but to give it.

I am, very truly yours,

BENJ. B. WARFIELD.

The Rev. P. B. Fraser,  
Otago, New Zealand.

## VIII.

**Reply from Rev. C. C. Hodge, Ph.D.,**

Professor in the Theological Seminary, Princeton, U.S.A.

### **THE PROPOSED CHANGES IN THE ENGLISH PRESBYTERIAN ARTICLES.**

Mr Fraser says in his pamphlet\* that there are three things upon which the Presbyterian people of New Zealand wish to have accurate information—(1) "Have the members of the Assembly's Union Committee unanimously adopted Dr Gibb's new Creed?" (2) "If not unanimously, who are the persons that have assented to that Creed, and are responsible for its now being before three Churches as the Creed of the Union Committee of the Presbyterian Church?" (3) "What is this new Creed? What is its attitude to the Presbyterian Creed, to the Reformation doctrines, to the catholic faith of Christendom?" It is on the third of these questions that I shall say a few words. This is the most important question of the three, although the other two are, or should be, of great importance to the Presbyterian people of New Zealand.

The Creed upon the basis of which it is proposed that the Union take place is "The Articles of the Faith Approved

\*"An Inquiry into the Origin and Sanction of Dr Gibb's Articles of Faith."

by the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of England," May, 1890. This Creed is a somewhat brief and only mildly Calvinistic symbol. What is the amended Creed? We shall consider it under two main heads—(1) Its doctrines of sin and of grace, where grace is taken to denote the work of the Holy Spirit in the application of Redemption. These topics should be treated in connection, because they are so closely related, and because by so treating them we shall see clearly a glaring inconsistency of the proposed Creed. (2) Its doctrine of the objective side of Redemption—i.e., its statements on the Work of Christ and on Justification. We consider Justification under this second head, for, although it is one step in the application of Redemption, and never to be confounded with the Atonement, it nevertheless is an objective step in the *Ordo Salutis*, and may most conveniently be considered here.

(1) The doctrines of Sin and of Grace in the subjective sense. In Sec. 5 of the English Articles the effects of Adam's sin upon himself, his representative relation to mankind, the fall of the race in Adam, so that they are born guilty, depraved, and unable, are all confessed, although the statement as to the original state of Adam is described as merely one of "innocence and communion with God." Now, in the proposed Creed this section is struck out, and another is substituted for it. This new section 5 confesses that all men have disobeyed God, and so are under condemnation, from which state they cannot deliver themselves. Thus this Article cuts out any race fall in Adam, any guilt or inherent depravity derived in any way whatsoever from our first parent. It thus not only strikes out the doctrine of imputed guilt, but also that of inherent corruption. And consequently it cannot affirm any inability of the sinner, since the condition out of which it is said that "no man is able to deliver himself" is stated to be simply one of condemnation for actual sins. Consequently this section, by implication, affirms that sin is simply an act of choice, contrary to God's will. Now this, it will be observed, is Pelagianism, and contrary to the "catholic faith of Christendom." If there are no subjective effects of sin, there can be no need of supernatural grace, and so it is not strange that Augustine felt that in warring against Pelagianism he was fighting, not some heretical form of the Gospel, but a denial of the Gospel itself. It is a matter of astonishment to us that the Evangelical Arminians should think of consenting to this section on sin. It would cause us utter amazement should the Presbyterians subscribe to a doctrine of sin which cannot be termed Evangelical.

Having excinded the doctrines of the Fall and of Original Sin, the proposed Creed is quite consistent in striking out altogether No. 12 of the English Articles on Election and Regeneration. If men are not dead in sin, obviously they do not need to be made alive by the almighty power of God

the Holy Spirit. If men are not only free, but have plenary ability to turn to God, obviously the sovereignty of God in Election is not only unnecessary, but is necessarily denied by implication. Consequently it is only in obedience to the demands of logic that the proposed Creed thus proceeds to eliminate the very heart and core of the Reformed Faith, and—let us be perfectly frank—the very heart and core of the Gospel of God's grace as it is made known to us in the Scripture. It is not only Paul who represents the Christian as the product of God's almighty power, as a new creation, and who likens the power of God which remakes the Christian a new man to that almighty power which God exercised when He raised Christ from the dead; it is our Lord Himself who tells us that we must be born over again (or perhaps "from above," i.e., in a supernatural manner), or we cannot see the Kingdom of God. The very fact that the logical consequences of the doctrine of sin must lead to the elimination of the very heart of the gospel of Divine Grace is in itself a condemnation of the said doctrine of sin.

But the proposed Creed is not so consistent after all. Its doctrine of sin leaves no place for any doctrine of internal grace at all, and yet this Creed does seem to have retained a doctrine of internal grace. It does seem to hold fast to some operation of the Holy Spirit on men's hearts; for it allows to remain unaltered No. 11 of the English Articles, which is on the Holy Spirit, in which section it is said that the Holy Spirit moves on the hearts of men, enlightens their minds, and persuades and enables them to obey the call of the Gospel. Also in No. 13, on Justification by Faith, the statement remains that "everyone who through the grace of the Holy Spirit repents and believes the Gospel . . . is freely pardoned, etc." Now, if the doctrine of Sin in the proposed Creed is allowed to remain, the logic of the situation would demand that these phrases implying any internal grace should be struck out. Perhaps they were overlooked by the Committee, or perhaps they were driven by their knowledge of Scripture and by their Christian experience not to abandon the whole of the Gospel at the demands of logic.

But let us not suppose that the doctrine of grace in this proposed Creed, when considered by itself, is one which the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand should be willing to adopt. In the English Articles the above expressions on the operation of the Holy Spirit on men's hearts in sections 11 and 13 were perhaps somewhat ambiguous, but in the light of No. 12, on Election and Regeneration, and of No. 16, on Perseverance, they could be interpreted as denoting efficacious and irresistible grace. But since the section on Election and Regeneration, and that on Perseverance, have been struck out from the new Creed in order to allow the Methodist Church to come in under this Creed, it is obvious that in it these expressions in sections 11 and 13 are to be interpreted in a universalistic sense. It will thus be seen to

be simply the Arminian doctrine of "sufficient grace" and of the "*ordo salutis*," except that while Regeneration gave the Arminian theologians trouble, not only in its place as to the "*ordo salutis*," but also as to its nature, this Creed very logically cuts it out altogether. Its doctrine of the "*ordo salutis*," then, is that an influence of the Holy Spirit is given to all men (who, according to the doctrine of sin, we should remember, do not need it). Those who co-operate with this grace, and repent and believe, are justified, adopted as sons, and sanctified. It is obvious, then, that one of two things will follow from this—either this grace must be affirmed actually to save all men, in which case the doctrine will become a doctrine of efficacious grace, but will contradict fact by becoming universalistic, or else it is man who determines ultimately whether he shall be saved or not, and man may resist the purpose of God. It is plain that this latter is what this Creed means to affirm, since it strikes out the doctrines of Election, Regeneration, and Perseverance. But this is unevangelical just in so far as it places the work of salvation in man's hands. And this it does. It makes man able to co-operate with or to resist God's grace; it can become completely evangelical only by becoming thoroughly universalistic. And not only so, but in taking out of God's hands such important events as the entrance of souls into His Kingdom, and in its implication either that God has no purpose with reference to individuals, or else that man can thwart God's purpose, this system of belief comes very near to being inconsistent with Theism.

If this be the doctrine of Grace which this Creed teaches, it is again quite consistent in its omission of the section in the English Articles on Perseverance. For upon the above interpretation of its doctrine as to the nature of Grace, which is the only one possible to put upon the statements of this Creed, it is quite plain that any doctrine of Perseverance is impossible, and Christians cannot be said to be those "who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." For the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand to adopt this Creed, as embodying its belief as to the nature of Redemption in its subjective side, would be for it to give up that which gives that Church a *raison d'être* as a separate Church. But this will not appeal to those who desire to cease—at least in New Zealand—to exist as a separate Church. We would say, however, that this is too dear a price to pay for union. It would be to sacrifice to an external union the core of the Gospel and the precious heritage of the Presbyterian Church—i.e., the Reformed Faith. We would be surprised if the Methodists should be willing to adopt the proposed doctrine of Sin. We would be surprised should the Presbyterians be willing to adopt the proposed doctrine of Grace. We would be astonished should anyone think of adopting both doctrines in conjunction, for surely it is a strange mixture, this Pelagian doctrine of Sin and Arminian doctrine of Grace.

In the second place, turning to the objective side of Redemption, what is the doctrine of this proposed Creed upon the subject of the work of Christ? The English Articles confess Christ as Mediator, and after mentioning His prophetic and kingly offices, state that by His perfect obedience and death on the Cross He "did fully satisfy Divine Justice," thus confessing what is known as the Satisfaction doctrine of the Atonement, confessed by the Latin, Lutheran, and Reformed Churches. The proposed Creed, for the sake of making a statement sufficiently broad to admit of the three Churches uniting in its adoption, have omitted to state this cardinal doctrine of the Gospel, and have substituted for the words "did fully satisfy Divine Justice" the words "did fully satisfy the demands of the Divine Nature." But in so doing, this Creed has become so broad as to make room for almost any theory of the Atonement. What does the Divine Nature demand in order that sin may be pardoned? Perhaps God only demands that men should be made morally better, or better instructed, or turned back to Him. If so, there is room for all the various Moral Influence theories of the Atonement. Perhaps God only demands that humanity as a lump be leavened by having infused into it a new life. Then Christ would save us by His Incarnation, rather than by His life and death, and all those who hold to mystical theories of the Atonement could come under this Creed. Perhaps God's Nature only demands that in forgiving sin His hatred of it may be shown, and men deterred from sinning, so that His moral government may not be jeopardised. Here, then, the advocates of the governmental theory can find shelter. Or does God's nature perhaps demand that we shall approach Him only with a sacrifice, not of itself sufficient, but which He has determined to accept to render Him propitious. There is room, therefore, for the Remonstrants under this symbol. Perhaps God's Nature only demands repentance, and Christ offers for us a repentance which we cannot offer. But, not to multiply words, it may be said that this statement of this proposed Creed on the Atonement is so wide as to make room for almost anybody. In adopting it, therefore, the Presbyterian Church, while it need not abandon the precious truth that Christ has borne the penalty of our sin, and has satisfied Divine Justice, must nevertheless abandon its duty and privilege of witnessing to this truth before the world. For the sake of a union which, on such a basis, is no true union, the Presbyterian Church is asked to silence its testimony to the world concerning Him who was made to be sin on our behalf in order that we might become the righteousness of God in Him, is asked to forbear to speak of Jesus as one "whom God has set forth to be a propitiation by faith, through His blood, to declare His righteousness . . . in order that He might be just and the justifier of him that is of the faith of Jesus." We cannot think that the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand will show such an unfortunate want of ap-

preciation of one of its most vital and most precious truths. We cannot even think that the Methodist Church of New Zealand, even if many of its ministers may hold the Remonstrant doctrine of the Atonement, would be willing to adopt a statement on the subject which will admit all those who do not believe that there is any obstacle at all on God's part to the forgiveness of sin.

The Article on Justification, as changed, shows the same unhappy breaking down of the Presbyterian Church's confession to truth for the sake of a union of the Churches of New Zealand. In the English Articles the Protestant doctrine of Justification is stated. We are said to be accepted as righteous in the sight of God "solely on the ground of Christ's perfect obedience and atoning sacrifice." In the new Creed these last words are omitted, with the evident intention of making room for the Arminian doctrine that faith and evangelical obedience enter into the ground of our justification. What, then, would the adoption of this section as revised mean for the Presbyterian Church? It would mean that while the statement is so broad as not to exclude their doctrine, yet that the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand must omit to testify in its Creed to a cardinal doctrine of the Protestant Reformation. It would mean that it must adopt a Creed which is broad enough to admit those who cannot logically utter the words of that hymn which should express the religious sentiment of every Christian: "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe." It would mean that the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand will be in symbolical union with those who, "logical," must hold inadequate and unscriptural views of the nature of Divine Justice and the immutability of God's law. Surely no branch of the Presbyterian Church can afford to do this.

Finally, the utter license of the desire for union is manifest when in No. 23, on the Last Judgment, the doctrine of eternal punishment is struck out, and thus not only the doctrine of the whole Christian Church excised, but the authority of Jesus as a teacher of truth impugned, since the words struck out are the very words of our Lord Himself. Surely, when the words of Jesus are not to be admitted into the Creed of a Christian Church, for fear someone cannot subscribe to it, it is time to call a halt.

We have already dwelt too long upon this Creed. To put it briefly, it is an attempt to find the basis of a union of different Churches on a basis of common evangelical truth, but it has not succeeded in keeping itself evangelical. In Mr Fraser's pamphlet we saw that the question we were asked to answer was "What is this new Creed? What is the attitude to the Presbyterian Creed, to the Reformation doctrines, to the Catholic faith of Christendom?" In reply, we must say that it abandons some doctrines of the Catholic faith of Christendom—i.e., that the race fell in Adam, the Satisfaction doctrine of the Atonement, and eternal punishment. It abandons also some of the Reformation doctrines—i.e.,

Lutheran and Reformed doctrines—i.e., the doctrines of total inability and justification on the ground of Christ's work alone. Finally, it abandons doctrines of the Reformed Faith, and so of the Presbyterian Church—i.e., election, efficacious and irresistible Grace, and Perseverance. And all of these are Scripture doctrines. The doctrinal indifferentism of the present day is most discouraging, for these doctrines are just the precious realities of God's salvation of sinners and of this sin-cursed world. A union of Churches at the cost of saving truth is no true union, and it is our earnest wish and prayer that the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand will not sell its birthright for a mess of pottage.

C. W. HODGE.

Princeton Theological Seminary,  
Princeton, New Jersey, U.S.A.,  
March 30th, 1904.

## IX.

### **Reply from Rev. Thomas Whitelaw, M.A., D.D.,**

Author of "Pulpit Commentary on Genesis," "Preacher's Commentary on Acts," "Exegetical Commentary on St. John's Gospel," "Old Testament Critics: An Inquiry into the Character, Effect, and Validity of Their Teaching: A Question for the Christian People of To-day," etc.

Kilmarnock, Scotland,

13 April, 1904.

Dear Mr Fraser,—In complying with your request that I should offer a criticism of the Articles of Faith proposed, or about to be proposed, for a basis of Union between the Evangelical Churches of New Zealand I shall endeavour to state, as far as possible without theological bias, whether and how far (in my judgment) the Articles in question are an adequate presentation of the teachings of Scripture on the several subjects of which they treat, whether and how far (again in my judgment) they are in harmony with the interpretation put upon Scripture by the Westminster standards, and whether and how far (once more in my judgment) they are fitted to serve as a basis of Union for the Evangelical Churches of New Zealand, or indeed of any land.

I deal of course only with those Articles mentioned in your overture, and I assume that your citation of them is correct. I assume also that the other Articles in the New Zealand Creed correspond substantially with the English Presbyterian Church Articles which I have before me.

### THE NEW ZEALAND ARTICLES AND SCRIPTURE.

Do the proposed Articles furnish an adequate representation of the teaching of Scripture?