

THE PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

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I.

THE REVISED CONFESSION.

THE Northern Presbyterians have published their Revised Confession of Faith, and it is proper for other Presbyterians, not of that communion, to review the changes which have been made, with a view to ascertaining whether they are alterations in the mere superficies or in the substantive body of the Calvinistic system. The hilarity with which the revision has been received by such diluted Calvinists as the Cumberland Presbyterians, together with the promptness and enthusiasm with which they offered organic union on the basis of these changes, awakens apprehension, and calls for cautious examination.

An inventory of the changes which have been made will show that the Northern Presbyterians have, (1) explained their former doctrine of Predestination, (2) interpreted their doctrine of the salvation of Dead Infants, (3) restated their doctrine of works done by unregenerate persons, (4) amended their doctrine of Oaths, (5) withdrawn their charge that the Pope of Rome was Antichrist, (6) added a new chapter on the Holy Spirit, (7) and added a new chapter on the Love of God, and Missions.

We are not going to take up these points in detail, but elect, for animadversion, the changes which seem to affect the integrity of the Calvinistic system.

We quote now the new language which is the basis of our fault-finding:

'the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord,' and in the new relation now contemplated, enable us to keep 'the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.'"

We have thus given the general facts of the proposed scheme, that they may be known in connection with the discussion which is likely to follow. Manifestly the debate will be chiefly about the concurrent declarations. To the Southern Church the relation of the entire matter is one of a practical rather than of a theological nature. The effect upon the Southern Church of the sudden conversion of a great multitude of people, entirely out of sympathy with our Calvinism and methods of work, into nominal Presbyterian churches right alongside of us will be practical and far-reaching. It is a problem the forcing of which upon us is greatly deplored in many quarters. The majority of the Cumberland Church is in the territory occupied by the Southern Church, and while the relations between the two peoples have always been pleasant, the affiliations of the Cumberland Church people have always been very much closer with the Methodists in both doctrine and methods.

PROPOSED UNION OF PRESBYTERIANS.¹

THE ATTITUDE OF SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIANS.

Are we Southern Presbyterians ready to consider the question of our entering into the proposed union of the Northern and Cumberland Presbyterian Churches, on the basis of a common acceptance of the Westminster Confession of Faith, as recently revised by the Northern Presbyterian Church?

It is to be noted that to the Southern Church it is not yet a practical question. We are not called to take any official action on it. It is for us to consider only whether our church shall in the future take any action looking to union with a body yet to be formed.

On the other hand, to our Cumberland Presbyterian brethren it is an immediately practical question whether their church shall unite with the Northern Presbyterian Church, on a basis proposed to them, and recommended by their committee of conference. At their approaching General Assembly action must be taken for or against union.

¹ A paper read at a social meeting of the ministers and elders of the Southern and Cumberland Presbyterian Churches in Nashville, Tenn.

The union of all the forces and resources of Christ's kingdom in one great outward organization for the conquest of the world for God not only appeals to the imagination by its splendor, but it also appeals to the highest sentiments and the noblest impulses of the heart. Surely it is "a consummation devoutly to be wished," provided it can be effected with loyalty to truth, and without the sacrifice of conscience and of principle.

But we need something far more firm than mere sentiment as a basis for permanent union and effective service. An outward unity of form does not insure real unity of spirit or coöperation in effort. The great divisions of Christ's church into various denominations have not been an unmixed evil. These divisions have had a reason for their existence. They have arisen from circumstances or conditions which called for separation at the time, if men would be faithful to the Lord. And they have been used of God for good in extending his kingdom.

The evil has been that in many cases the divisions have been perpetuated, often in bitterness, long after the reasons for them have ceased to exist.

It is of the utmost importance that Protestantism present a united front against the powers of darkness, and that its forces be so organized as to work together, and not against each other, in extending the kingdom. To this end, the reunion of Protestantism should begin in the union of those denominations or divisions which are nearest akin in historic and doctrinal position. Thus the various families of Baptists might be more closely allied, and so of the families of Methodists and of Presbyterians.

The matter of the reunion of the various bodies of Presbyterians is in the air, and it is the part of wisdom to consider its desirableness and its possibility. The Northern and Cumberland Presbyterians, through their joint committees, have proposed a plan for the organic union of the two churches, the proposed union to be on the basis of the Westminster Confession of Faith as revised by the Northern Church in 1903.

We are asked, Is the Southern Presbyterian Church ready to come into such a union on the same basis?

If real union is to be accomplished, it must be founded on real unity in fundamental principles and doctrinal beliefs. Of course, we recognize that there should be liberty in non-essentials, and that differences which do not invalidate a system should not keep us

apart. But our church has ever stood for clearness in doctrinal belief and statement, because we think that the great doctrines of the Bible are essential to the formation of Christian character and the exercise of Christian living. In a word, we believe that the Bible ideal is true doctrine translated into good life.

In considering the question of union it is well to bring to mind the origin and historic position of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Southern Presbyterian Church, to see whether there are insuperable barriers to union and to see what facts favor union with each other and with the Northern Presbyterian Church. And I am free to say that I shall rejoice if the barriers are small and the reasons for union are large. And in this discussion I may be pardoned some personal references, inasmuch as my relations to the origin of the two churches are closer than those of many of my brethren. One of my ancestors was one of the founders of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and I am the only Southern minister or elder here who was a member of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States and of the Nashville Presbytery when the latter joined in the organization of the Southern Presbyterian Church in 1861. Samuel McAdoo (or McAdow), in whose house the Cumberland Presbyterian Church was organized, was an uncle of my grandfather and grandmother.

Samuel McAdoo was a Presbyterian minister of learning and piety. He was a man of sincerity and candor, who would sacrifice any earthly advantage for his conscientious convictions. In the great revival of 1800-'10 he was active. The Cumberland Presbytery, to which he belonged, to meet the demand for ministers to carry forward that great work, ordained several men who did not come up to the educational standard of the Presbyterian Church, and the Synod of Kentucky, at the instance of the anti-revival leaders, called in question and finally condemned this action. Again, in the preaching of the revivalists there was larger emphasis laid on the freeness of the gospel, upon man's free will and responsibility in the work of salvation, and they were charged with a denial of the doctrine of God's sovereignty and decrees, and so they were arraigned for heresy in doctrine. Thus the two grounds on which the Presbytery was condemned were that they had violated the standards of the Presbyterian Church in order and in doctrine.

The controversy grew bitter, and, of course, there were faults of temper and of action on both sides. But now we can see that a spirit

of concession and of gentleness and patience would have prevented a split. There was probably an orthodoxy that was too stiff and formal on the one side, and a zeal and enthusiasm on the other which savored of radicalism.

But the new movement stood for the evangelizing of the masses. It was a sincere attempt to meet extraordinary conditions. They saw the great need of more ministers, and felt that they could not wait for the slow process of a learned training. So they did what seemed best—used the best material they could lay their hands on. They were only doing on a larger scale what our Presbyteries are now doing in a smaller way, that is, ordaining men, in extraordinary cases, who have not received academic training. It is unfair to say that they advocated an uneducated ministry. They took their action only to meet an exigency, and it was an emergency which lasted for many years in a new country. The record of the church in education is an answer to the charge of favoring an ignorant ministry, though doubtless there may be found in the church fanatics who decried education.

Then as to the charge of heresy in doctrine. At the beginning there was no absolute break with the Confession of Faith. In an old edition of Buck's *Theological Dictionary*, which was in my grandfather's library, I have read a paper which was adopted as the basis of the church's creed. In it they say that they object to the doctrine of fatalism, which seems to be taught in the mysterious doctrine of predestination; but that if any minister can adopt the Confession of Faith, without making that exception, it shall be no bar to his entrance into their ministry.

The great revival movement brought out more fully and clearly man's responsibility and his freedom. It emphasized more the fullness and freeness of God's grace—while, no doubt, many carried their preaching to a denial of God's sovereignty in salvation.

The old manner of preaching, illustrated by Jonathan Edwards, laid chief stress on man's helplessness and his absolute dependence on sovereign grace. It was the kind of preaching needed in that time and in those conditions. Edwards' sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," could hardly be tolerated now. Yet it was a mighty instrument of revival then. I remember that a pioneer preacher of Texas once said to me, that in the early days of the State the only way to reach men's consciences was to preach "hell-fire" to them.

In the beginning of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church an

uneducated ministry was only a method of meeting extraordinary conditions, and the doctrinal divergence from the Confession of Faith was really very slight. It was more a different emphasis on certain doctrines.

McAdoo was educated according to the Presbyterian standard, and I have heard from the older ones of our family that he accepted the Confession. He and his companions hesitated about organizing the new church. But when Ewing and King visited him, to discuss the matter, he spent the whole night in prayer, and when the morning came he was satisfied, and at once the Presbytery was organized. In the following twenty-five years the growth of the new church was remarkable, and the blessing of God on its labors seemed to justify the action of its founders.

The Southern Presbyterian Church was organized in 1861, as a consequence of the war between the States, which had just begun. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church met in Philadelphia, and over the protest of some of its ablest members, both Northern and Southern, it passed a series of resolutions defining the duty of all its members in the pending conflict, asserting that their allegiance was due to the Federal Government rather than to the State Government, and denouncing all who upheld the State against the Union as rebels and traitors, to be disciplined by the church. The Southern Presbyteries held that this action was political and beyond the sphere of the church, and that the conditions and institutions of the South could only be ministered to by a separate organization. The church then organized was a protest against the political deliverances of the Assembly, and was also justified by geographical position.

The action of the Northern Assembly was for several years after the war in the line of its original deliverance, and effectually prevented fraternal relations. And when finally it withdrew or disavowed its utterances impugning our Christian character, the message of its Moderator, Rev. Dr. Herrick Johnson, so modified or cast doubt on its action that it was several years before there was any cordial fraternity. That "Herrick Johnson rider" practically insisted that we Southerners are rebels and traitors, though we are not schismatics and blasphemers. Still it is only fair to say that our Northern brethren claim that their reunited church should not be held responsible for the deliverances of the old school or the new school branches, made before reunion, unless those deliverances have been specifically

reaffirmed. Since the war the question of the ecclesiastical relations of the negroes has been differently treated by the Northern and Southern Churches. But the plan of union adopted at St. Louis seems to concede the Southern view.

Also the Southern Church has very strenuously opposed the preaching or bearing rule by women in the church, as being contrary to the divine order. On this subject we have been somewhat dubious as to the position of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. But we believe their experience has satisfied them, and they "won't do it again."

The time has come in the providence of God for a calm, fair, candid discussion of union. The tendencies of Christians are to closer fellowship, and the forces of opposition to Christianity are driving its defenders together.

The state of the case seems to be this: The old Westminster Confession of Faith has been revised by the Northern Church, not so as to eliminate its Calvinism, but to explain its statements, where there are two interpretations. That Confession, the grandest of the Reformed creeds, was prepared in times of fierce doctrinal controversy, and is in a sense a controversial document, framed to meet errors of doctrine. So all the great historic creeds sprang out of controversy. And their statements are to be interpreted in the light of history, and in view of the errors they combat. On some of the statements of the Confession there has been difference of interpretation, some saying that they teach one thing; some say they do not so teach. As an instance, the Cumberland Presbyterian says the clause about "elect infants" teaches that some infants dying in infancy are lost. The Presbyterian says that the clause does not teach such a doctrine. The purpose of the revision is to clear up doubtful statements, and to give fuller and clearer expression to certain truths inadequately stated. Now the Cumberland Presbyterian said, "We understand the creed to mean so and so." The old church says, "No, this is the true interpretation." Then says the other, "If that is the meaning we accept it. If that is authoritative Calvinism, we are Calvinists." The Southern Church then says, "In the revision, we find no departure from Calvinism, nor surrender of distinctive doctrine." The old church replies, "No, we give up no doctrine, we only make our meaning plain." If this is the actual state of the matter, then it seems to me the way to union is plain. In the year 1863 a conference of the Old School and New School branches of the Presbyterian Church

in the South made a declaratory statement, showing their doctrinal agreement, and in 1864 they united on the basis of the Confession of Faith. So if a conference of the churches shows that they agree on the Confession as revised, it seems to me they ought to unite.

And surely the times demand that all the forces of the Reformed churches holding the Calvinistic system should be joined, as the mightiest conservative agency of Christian thought and life.

A crisis is near which threatens the very existence of Protestantism. The social, political, economic, religious unrest demands for its settlement the proclamation of the great fundamental spiritual realities which the Bible reveals. Superstition with its formalities, rationalism with its doubts and criticism, secularism with its materialistic commercialism—these are the foes which are assailing the Protestant world, and to meet the crisis we need not only a union of forces, but also a virile doctrine to be preached.

The namby-pamby æstheticism that takes the place of the gospel; the “culture” which seeks to supplant Christ the Saviour; the unmanly softness that passes for religion; the many organizations that are sapping the distinctive church life—all these things are largely responsible for the weak Christian character, the grievous falls of elders, deacons, Sunday-school officers, the sad dishonesties of church members. Preaching too often is an appeal to the weaker elements of our nature, instead of a trumpet-call to duty. We need doctrines that take hold of the depths of the soul; that touch men’s consciences with fingers of fire; that bring men and women face to face with God and eternity. Doctrines like these—strong statements of truth—form strong characters, put iron into the blood and stiffness into the spine. There is nothing like the old Calvinism to make the profoundest truths realities in human experience—realities for which men and women die. It was this Calvinism that made Scotland and Holland lands of martyrs and homes of civil and religious liberty, and it is this Calvinism that is the glorious heritage of the Presbyterian Churches of this land. Would God our children knew its magnificent history!

The sovereignty of God needs to be again emphasized. The freedom of man has been asserted almost to the point of making him a law unto himself. The church should proclaim that the only true freedom is to be the servant of God in carrying forward his eternal purposes, and that what he requires of us is obedience, whether we can understand or not. The highest faith submits to God’s will with-

out curious questioning as to his reasons. And this need for the proclamation of God's rights in his own universe is coming to be recognized by candid minds who do not accept our doctrine of predestination. A recent writer in the *London Quarterly*, a magazine representing the higher Arminianism, declares that the world is losing sight of the fact that God is an absolute sovereign, who rules in righteousness and love, and he insists that the old conception of God needs to be restored to its proper place in men's thoughts and lives. The Calvinistic system of theology makes God and his rights the foundation rather than man and his needs.

Now, if union is to be properly effected, there are certain preliminary requirements in the discussion of the question.

1. There must be absolute candor and sincerity. Each party must give the other credit for conscientious faithfulness to the truth, as God gives us to see the truth. There must be no evasions in stating our views. There must be no slurring over of differences, no gush of sentiment which shall discount strong, clear statements of doctrine. And so there must be no magnifying of differences which do not involve essential truth. We all ought to come to the discussion with a sincere desire to find essential agreement if it be possible.

2. We must take time for the discussion. It will require patience and brotherly love to discover the best method of union. We are not to rush into it impulsively, trusting the future to correct mistakes. Neither are we to give up the effort as soon as we find obstacles in the way. With prayerful diligence we can solve the difficulties if the union ought to be accomplished. There are many details of order and administration to be settled, as well as statements of doctrine. We shall need the wisdom that can wait as well as act.

3. There must be no spirit of boasting one over the other, claiming that there has been a surrender by either side. Neither party must claim that the other has yielded essential points. We must understand that, in uniting, we both are true to our convictions of truth; and that we find those convictions in essential agreement. In a word, that our outward union is founded on a real unity of doctrine and sentiment.

4. It will require, for a cordial union, that all parties to it withdraw and disavow all the bitter expressions and denunciations of former times. All expressions impugning Christian motive or character were uttered in the heat of controversy, or in days of excitement, and were really spoken in a misunderstanding of each other, and should be heartily withdrawn.

Of course, these expressions stand on record as parts of history. They show what was thought in the past to be true. But we are not to be bound by anything that we now know was not true. As Christian brethren we are to join in this union, confident in each other's character, and unwilling to dishonor our past by preserving its mistakes and prejudices; while, at the same time, we honor the fidelity of the fathers to truth as they saw it.

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CIVIL GOVERNMENT.

"There is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God."—
ROMANS xiii. 1.

It is the glory of the religion of the Bible that it touches human life at every point, and wherever it touches, its effect is to purify, elevate and ennoble. It touches the individual life of man, making every man who receives it and lives it a better man. It touches the domestic and social life, expounding the right relations between husband and wife, parents and children, man and woman, friend and friend, by the observance of which, and in no other way, the home may be made happy and society kept pure. It touches the commercial life, laying down those principles of integrity, honesty and regard for the rights of others, without which commerce ceases to be peaceful industry and becomes a brutal struggle for supremacy or for bare existence. It touches the civil life, laying down those basal truths on which civil government is founded, and defining the mutual relations and duties of the governing and the governed.

Many seem to think religion has nothing to do with our civil life or with politics, for politics in its true sense is the science of civil government and the conduct of state affairs. We are reminded that our Federal and State constitutions expressly prohibit the union of church and state; and, therefore, any mingling of religion and politics is stoutly resisted in some quarters as a crime against our liberties, and the cry is often raised, "Don't mix religion and politics; you cannot do it if you would, and you must not do it if you could;" and so it has come about that there is practically no religion in the politics of our time and country.

But an important distinction is needed here. We rejoice in the separation of state and church. History proves that the union is an