

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



||| A PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL DEVOTED TO STATING, DEFENDING
AND FURTHERING THE GOSPEL IN THE MODERN WORLD |||

SAMUEL G. CRAIG, Editor

H. McALLISTER GRIFFITHS, Managing Editor

Published monthly by
THE PRESBYTERIAN AND
REFORMED PUBLISHING CO.,
501 Witherspoon Bldg., Phila., Pa.

MID-FEBRUARY, 1932
Vol. 2 No. 10

\$1.00 A YEAR EVERYWHERE

Entered as second-class matter May 11, 1931, at
the Post Office at Philadelphia, Pa., under the
Act of March 3, 1879.

Christianity and the Visible Church

THERE is great diversity of opinion concerning the relation between Christianity and the visible Church and *vice versa*. This diversity of opinion will be found in the main, we believe, to be rooted in and to grow out of different conceptions of Christianity itself. Here as elsewhere, if we mistake not, the primary question is the old yet ever new question, What is Christianity? Be that as it may, the problem of the relation between Christianity and the Church is one of great practical importance. It is not merely true that the different solutions offered have divided and sub-divided those who profess and call themselves Christians into different camps; it is also true that the solutions offered have had and continue to have a more or less determining influence in shaping their conception of their duties and obligations as Christians.

That view of the relation between Christianity and the Church which has prevailed most widely (thus far) has received its fullest and most consistent expression in Roman Catholic circles. According to this view the relation between Christianity and the visible Church is so close and vital that they become practically identical. According to the Roman Catholics, all of God's saving activities in the present dispensation are exercised through the instrumentality of the Church. They teach as fully as any that salvation is ultimately from God and so proclaim a supernatural salvation; but they hold that in distributing this supernaturally wrought salvation to individuals God employs

the Church as His exclusive agent. This means that the Church stands between the individual soul and God and that it is to the Church to which men must immediately look for salvation. This is not to say, of course, that the Roman Catholic supposes that the salvation that the Church dispenses has been obtained independently of CHRIST. He holds as explicitly as any that there is no salvation apart from CHRIST. None the less he holds that CHRIST in dispensing to men the benefits of His saving work operates not directly but through the instrumentality of the Church which He has established for that purpose. This matter is so important that for its fuller exposition we avail ourselves of the words of Dr. W. P. PATTERSON of Edinburgh:

"Observe the extraordinarily important place that is occupied in the Roman Catholic

scheme of salvation by the idea of the Church. It is hardly incorrect to say that in the Roman Catholic conception the central feature of the Christian religion is the supernatural institution which represents CHRIST, which carries on His work, and which acts as the virtual mediator of the blessings of salvation. Instead of making the relation of the believer to the Church depend on his relation to CHRIST, it makes his relation to CHRIST depend on his relation to the Church. It may not be anywhere expressly affirmed that the Church is the central provision of Christianity, but it is certain that the doctrine of the Church dominates and colors the whole interpretation of the Christian dispensation. . . . Its vocation or commission is nothing less than the perpetuation of the work of the Redeemer. It does not of course supersede the work of CHRIST. Its presupposition is that CHRIST, the eternal Son of God, laid the foundation of its work in His incarnation and His atoning death; that from Him come ultimately all power, authority and grace; and that as from Him all spiritual blessing proceeds, so that to Him belongs all the glory. But in the present dispensation the Church, in large measure, has taken over the work of CHRIST. It is, in a real sense, a re-incarnation of CHRIST to the end of the continuation and completion of His redemptive mission. Through His Church CHRIST continues to execute the offices of a Prophet, of a Priest, and of a King. His prophetic office it perpetuates by witnessing to the truth once delivered to the saints and by interpreting and determining doctrine with infallible authority. . . . It represents Him so completely in the priestly function of mediation between God and man that there is no covenanted salvation outside the pale of the visible organization of which He is the unseen Head. It further represents Him as sacrificing priest by the perpetual repetition in the Mass of the oblation He once offered upon the cross. . . . And finally it administers the kingly power of CHRIST on earth. It has an absolute claim to the

IN THIS ISSUE:

Editorial Notes and Comments.....	3
The Heretical "Auburn Affirmation". Rev. H. McAllister Griffiths	4
The Proposed Doctrinal Basis of Union. John Murray	8
Notes on Biblical Exposition..... J. G. Machen	11
Books of Religious Significance.....	14
Letters to the Editor.....	15
Current Views and Voices.....	16
Ministerial Changes.....	17
News of the Church.....	18

I would depart in sadness, but would do it because I "ought to obey God rather than men."

No Liberty to Defend the Gospel?

Further, I am amazed at the position taken by some: that in the Presbyterian Church there is liberty for men to attack the doctrines of the Bible and our standards. (As the Auburn "Affirmation" does)—to belittle the very Person of Christ as He is described in Scripture, but *no liberty* to defend the standards of the Church, the doctrines of the Scriptures and the person of our Lord by calling public attention to attackers and their attacks. *They* are to be given liberty to attack the Church by boring from within; *we* are to be denied the right in the name of the law of the Church, to defend that Church's law, doctrines and Head. *They* may attack Christ. *We* may not attack *them*! What could be more absurd?

Please allow me earnestly to repeat that the preaching of this sermon is no easy matter. It has followed literally months of heart-searching and seeking of Divine guidance. Once that guidance came there could be but one question left,—namely the *time* that should be chosen for speaking out. What our age needs is a profounder emphasis upon God as the source and ground of truth than it has ever known before. Because He is our God, and because truth is of the essence of His nature and acts, His minister may not dare to despise it, or handle it or alter it as though it were his own. Recently I listened to the pithy observation that "a man who is willing to sacrifice truth for the sake of expediency is a 'yes-man', and in their hearts all honest men despise him." How true! True today as when Paul withstood Peter to his face because he was to be blamed, true as when Athanasius said with the proudest humility the world has ever known, "The world against me? Then I am against the world!" True today as when the erstwhile Brother Martin, the sledgehammer of God, nailed his ninety-five theses on the church door at Wittenberg,—at one blow knocking down age-long prison walls of superstition over whose ruins the refreshing breezes of the Spirit of God could blow untrammelled and free. We have received a noble inheritance preserved to us by the courage and constancy of the fathers. Shall we give it up without a struggle?

An Appeal to Modernists for a Peaceful Separation

The characteristic plea of Modernism is, "Let us give up all that conflicts with truth!" It is a noble cry, and despite its ghastly errors, Modernism would, in the estimation of the world, gain in moral stature if it would seriously practice it. Conscientious Modernists know that the system of doctrine of the Presbyterian Church is not Modern-

ism, but its very antithesis. In their hearts they know that no honest man can be at permanent peace with himself, even if his modernism be sincere, when he has gained the right to be a teacher by giving formal assent to doctrines that he does not and cannot believe. Further, every intelligent Modernist (alas! there are many) knows that two contradictory religions,—alien in foundation, structure and objects of labor—*ought* not to be struggling with each other within the confines of a single church. Modernists and Evangelicals should be able to go their separate ways,—each to bind up the wounds and bruises of the world in his own manner—not to add to that world's hurt and confusion by a disgraceful compromising that enthrones temporary and *only temporary* tranquillity above a clear, ringing proclamation of the truth, whatever that truth may be. Even if Modernism were right and historic Christianity wrong, when will Modernists not see that, in attempting to hold to forms they can no longer believe, in attempting to crowd those who *do* believe the old faith out of the churches to which they belong by conviction, or to silence them into a doctrinal indifferentism, they are themselves sinning against the truth? There are probably relatively few here who have been

affected by Modernism, but feeling that what I say may be read by a considerable number of Modernists, I dare to make this appeal to their candour, their honesty, their sense of fairness: If you really love truth above buildings, endowments, historic seats of learning and the prestige of ancient names, then withdraw from us,—leave us at peace. Go your own way,—build up your own churches, or else join the communion of some body which has taught from the beginning what you teach. If you are right, the God of truth will bless you. Never will there be peace in the church until she is truly *one*,—one in agreeing upon her essential message and purpose. The peace which we formerly enjoyed is not of our breaking, but of yours. If it continues to be broken, the responsibility will be yours. You have intruded into our pulpits, our agencies, our seats of learning and instruction. It is *your* presence in the church that makes peace impossible,—more, disgraceful and dishonorable to you and to us unless we *all* are willing to confess that we value expediency above truth. Let us part in peace. Take with you the new light and truth you think you have, and leave to us the Church of our fathers,—those fathers whose memory we bless and whose faith we share.

The Proposed Doctrinal Basis of Union

By John Murray, M.A., Th.M.

IN the January issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY we tried to estimate from the theological point of view the creedal quality of the Confessional Statement of the United Presbyterian Church of North America. In this issue it is our purpose to deal with the confessional standing of the United Presbyterian Church as it is affected by the adoption of this Confessional Statement, and the confessional standing of the proposed Presbyterian Church of America if the union between the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. and the United Presbyterian Church is consummated, as that standing would be affected by the incorporation of the Confessional Statement in its creedal constitution.

A Shorter Creed

At the outset we should observe that, although the Confessional Statement adopted in 1925 by the United Presby-

terian Church does not profess to be a substitute for the Westminster Standards; yet the well known practical tendency of the adoption of a shorter creed which professes to contain the substance of the historic Westminster Symbols is to oust the latter from their true and honoured position. The current of the present time is towards the depreciation of well-defined and full doctrinal statement, and it is a fundamental colossal mistake to encourage and confirm that tendency by the acceptance and endorsement of a diluted confession. It is to encourage and confirm what is one of the most malignant moral and spiritual diseases of our time. We may not know enough to venture a judgment with respect to the effect it has had in this direction in these six or seven years in the United Presbyterian Church; we feel safe, however, in predicting that it would have such an effect

in the proposed united Church. Consequently, even irrespective of the explicit doctrinal divergences of this Statement from Scriptural and Reformed teaching, we believe that opposition to it is justified and demanded on the part of those who desire vigorously and consistently to maintain and defend the testimony of the historic Reformed Church.

Substance of the Westminster Symbols

But not only so. This Confessional Statement according to its preamble claims to embody the substance of the Westminster creeds. Some conservatives may be disposed to argue that this is an achievement in modern confessional formulation. Is it not wholesome in these times of doctrinal delinquency to have a reaffirmation in an up-to-date creed of what is the substance of Reformed doctrine? So far from this being so, the attempt to define the substance of the Westminster Symbols constitutes a thorough-going menace to and virtual breakdown of a truly Reformed Confession. This attitude can be validated by two considerations.

First of all, so far as confessional formulation is concerned, the very principle of substance definition is to be repudiated. "It is perfectly obvious," as Dr. Charles Hodge contended, "that there is no authoritative standard by which to determine what the substance of a doctrine is."* Neither is there any authoritative standard by which to determine the substance of the Westminster Standards. The term in this precise connection is far too vague and uncertain, and so the Confessional Statement presumes to do what ought never to be attempted.

But secondly for the sake of argument let us suppose the phrase is allowed. Then the man wholly loyal to the Westminster Symbols is shut up to one of two alternatives. Either the Confessional Statement puts into the phrase a meaning to which he will on no conditions submit for it is an interpretation compatible with the contradiction and omission of certain integral elements of the system of doctrine

contained in these Symbols, or the Confessional Statement in making the assertion that it contains the substance of the Westminster Symbols states what is a plain misstatement of fact. On the former alternative the sincerely and intelligently Reformed person is excluded from subscription because of the vicious interpretation put upon the term "substance." On the latter alternative, when the word "substance" is made to mean something acceptable, no thoughtful Reformed office-bearer can subscribe to the Statement because it contains what is not true; it does not contain the substance of the Westminster Standards. No person or Church can afford to be implicated in a plain misstatement of fact.

Deviations Which Are to Prevail

But still further the Confessional Statement affirms in its preamble that "wherever it deviates from the Westminster Standards its declarations are to prevail." These deviations were pointed out in a previous article, and it is to be remembered that they are not trivial. They cut deeply into the system of doctrine taught in our historic creeds; they really disrupt what is most precious in that system. And these deviations are to prevail! That is to say the man who faithfully and honestly signs the subscription formula commits himself definitely and unequivocally to deviations which constitute the repudiation of the system of doctrine contained in the Westminster Standards. The evidence is, then, not only presumptive but conclusive that no man who in good faith signs the formula of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. as at present maintaining can sign the Confessional Statement and that no Church that is loyal to the great heritage of Presbyterianism in America can incorporate this Statement in its constitution. Let the union be effected on the basis proposed and the consequence for Presbyterianism in America is only too apparent.

Forbearance in Love

But however serious these foregoing considerations are and however conclusive against union, we have not yet men-

tioned what raises perhaps the most serious issue of all. Suppose that the forty-five articles of the creed we are discussing were unimpeachable. Let us even suppose that for soundness and clearness they were unsurpassed, models for fulness of statement and richness of expression, opposition just as determined as ever to the Confessional Statement and to the proposed basis of union would be completely justified. This may appear anomalous, perhaps even preposterous, but nevertheless strictly true. The explanation rests in the second paragraph of the preamble. It reads: "Subscription to the foregoing Subordinate Standards is subject to the principle maintained by our fathers that the forbearance in love which is required by the law of God is to be exercised toward any brethren who may not be able fully to subscribe to the Standards of the Church, while they do not determinedly oppose them, but follow the things which make for peace and things wherewith one may edify another."

In discussing this we confine ourselves to the bearing it would have on the testimony of the proposed Presbyterian Church of America. The section in the proposed new formula of subscription to which this paragraph in the preamble has direct reference reads thus: "Do you believe and acknowledge the system of doctrine professed by this Church as contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms and the Confessional Statement, as taught in the Word of God, and do you engage to adhere to and maintain its truths?" Section 2.

According to previous arguments we cannot allow that this is a coherent and intelligible question, because certain integral elements of the system of doctrine contained in the Westminster Standards are contradicted by the teaching of the Confessional Statement. So then if we take both together, we cannot believe that there is a system of doctrine. It is a system with self-contradiction which consequently is no system.

But suppose that for the sake of argument we allow this to pass. The formula does profess to commit the subscriber very definitely to the system of doctrine contained in these Standards as taught

* The Church and Its Policy, p. 325.

in the Word of God. And in the first section the Scriptures are said to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Solemnly and definitely, then, it commits him to this system of doctrine as taught in the Word of God. And just as solemnly and definitely it does no more than this. What it does not do should be marked as well as what it actually does. The Declaratory Statement adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. in 1903 says explicitly that the "ordination vow of ministers, ruling elders and deacons, as set forth in the form of Government requires the reception and adoption of the Confession of Faith only as containing the System of Doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures," and this also incorporated in the basis of union is confirmatory of the fact that it is only as containing the system of doctrine that the symbols are Standards of the Church.

But now the paragraph quoted above from the preamble implies that the subscriber in his ordination vow need not fully subscribe to the Standards of the Church. The meaning, then, is that in one solemn act of subscription he is definitely committed to a certain system of doctrine, but according to a principle just as emphatically expressed he is not required fully to subscribe to that system of doctrine. That is to say he is not required fully to subscribe to that to which he does subscribe. Is this not absurd? But it is worse than absurdity; it is downright perversity.

By common consent the Christian ministry is the highest and most consecrated vocation upon earth. And ordination is surely one of the most solemn acts, if not the most solemn act, in connection with that vocation. The issue we are pressing now is that according to the simple logic of the situation created by the above facts the candidate for the most sacred vocation in the most solemn act he may be called upon to perform need not fully believe that to which he pledges his word and his signature. He may enter the gospel ministry with a lie in his right hand. The preacher of truth may practise dishonesty.

But it is not simply that *he* may practise dishonesty; the protection and good faith of the Church is pledged to his dishonesty. Forbearance in love is to be exercised to him. And then the responsibility for this forbearance in love is foisted upon the law of God. The law of God requires it! The Church protects and endorses a moral tragedy, and claims authority for so doing from the law of God.

But this is not all. Subscription to the formula applies to the system of doctrine professed by the Church, and this system of doctrine is said to be taught in the Word of God. If now the candidate for ordination may disbelieve part of that system of doctrine, he not only disbelieves what belongs to the system of doctrine contained in the Subordinate Standards, but he may disbelieve what the Church affirms to be taught in the Word of God. On what conceivable ground can such a position be justified? And how can it be compatible with that to which the candidate has subscribed in the first section of the formula which reads: "Do you believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of the living God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?" The logic is simply that he may disbelieve what is expressly stated to be taught in the Word of God which he himself has already professed to be "the only infallible rule of faith and practice." This principle then leads not only to the undermining of the authority of the Subordinate Standards; it really undermines the supreme and final authority, the Word of God itself.

The adoption of this principle by the Church will mean that it ceases to be a confessional Church. It gives liberty for the disbelief in the Church by ministers and officebearers of every element of the system of doctrine professed. It may be beyond reason to suppose that every element could be disbelieved by any one man, but one may disbelieve one element or more, another may disbelieve another, and so throughout the Church every element may be disbelieved and even opposed so long as not "determinedly opposed."

This latter expression is distressing. How much mischief by way of propaganda and attack could be done to the very foundations of the Church under the plea that it had not yet attained the character of "determined opposition" is too dreadful to contemplate. But it is interesting in that it goes to confirm our argument. It surely means that "forbearance in love" could justifiably cease when unbelief and opposition reached that stage. That is, an ordained person may disbelieve and in some ways oppose doctrines which if "determinedly opposed" would involve him in a just charge and a sentence of discipline.

So then however rigid a construction may be put upon the system of doctrine to which a candidate according to the formula professes to subscribe, it is completely nullified by the reservation expressed in the preamble. Subscription that is intended to mean everything comes virtually to mean nothing. Every really honest man would need to wash his hands clean of such a piece of ecclesiastical jugglery. It is a moral atrocity in which he cannot take the risk of being in any way involved. The garment of simple straightforward honesty is too precious to have it besmeared with such obliquity.

These various discussions surely establish with unmistakable conclusiveness that this proposed union if consummated by the incorporation of the Confessional Statement in its constitution means that in the said Church testimony to the Reformed system in faith and conduct will have ceased, and that testimony to the final and infallible authority of Scripture will have been subtly but effectively prejudiced. The Presbyterian Church of America will have come into being by the renunciation of the great Presbyterian and Reformed tradition. The greatest Presbyterian Church of North America will by one momentous decision have ceased to be. And who is to raise her testimony and unfurl her banner? "Thou hast given a banner to *them* that fear Thee that it may be displayed because of the truth." Let us pray that this union may not occur.