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WHY THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN?

HAVING just undertaken the editorship of THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN, as announced in the last issue, we desire to say, in the first place, that this change in the staff does not mean any change in the position taken by the paper in the great issues of the day. We regard it as a great privilege to continue to the best of our ability the unswerving defense of the Bible and of the Reformed Faith which Dr. H. McAllister Griffiths has been maintaining, and we only hope that we may be able to follow in his footsteps.

What we shall now say, therefore, is not to be interpreted as an enunciation of any new principles or aims but simply as a reiteration, in view of present conditions, of principles and aims which have determined the policy of this paper from the beginning.

WHAT IS MEANT BY "PRESBYTERIAN"?

In the first place, THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN is truly "Presbyterian."

That word "Presbyterian," etymologically considered, designates a certain form of church government. But as actually used in the course of church history during the past three hundred years it also designates a certain system of doctrine.

The system of doctrine which it designates is popularly called "Calvinism." More correctly it is called the "Reformed Faith."

The churches holding the Reformed system of doctrine on the continent of Europe came to be called the "Reformed" churches. In Scotland they came to be called the "Presbyterian" churches. When adherents of these various bodies came to America, they retained the terminology used in their native lands. So there are in America various "Presbyterian" churches and various

"Reformed" churches. The two terms designate essentially the same thing. "Presbyterian" doctrine is the same thing as "Reformed" doctrine, and "Presbyterian" church government is the same thing as "Reformed" church government.

THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN holds to that "Presbyterian" or "Reformed" system of doctrine, and to that "Presbyterian" or "Reformed" type of church government.

The reason why we hold to both of these things—which are related in the closest possible way—is that we believe them to be in accord with the Bible, which is the Word of God.

Believing as we do that the "Reformed Faith," or in other words "Presbyterian doctrine," is taught in the Bible, we are necessarily opposed to all doctrine which is contrary to Presbyterian doctrine.

Hence we differ from churches that have given up that doctrine no matter whether they are nominally "Presbyterian" or not. That is the reason why we withdrew from the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

That church said to us in effect: "If you remain with us you must support the official Boards." But the official Boards are manifestly furthering Modernist propaganda. Modernism is diametrically opposed to Presbyterianism, since Modernism is actually anti-Christian and Presbyterianism is simply consistent Christianity. Hence if we had obeyed the order and remained in the church we should have had to cease being Presbyterian. We should henceforth have been Presbyterian in name but not Presbyterian in fact.

We could not make any such decision as that. Instead we withdrew from the church organization to which we formerly belonged. *We withdrew from the Presbyterian*

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Southern Presbyterians, Dr. F. R. Beattie, while contending that the creed was still Calvinistic, stated that the Declaratory Statement had toned down the clear form of the Reformed system found in the Confession (*Union Seminary Review*, Oct.-Nov., 1902, pages 10f.).

However, Methodists hailed the changes as breaking down the barriers between them and the Presbyterians. And in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church agitation for union began in 1902, as soon as it appeared that the amendments would be adopted, although its creed and general testimony were in violent opposition to historic Calvinism. The union was consummated in 1906 in spite of the fact that, as Dr. Warfield expressed it, it involved the reception of men who "up to the very moment of their formal acceptance of our standards . . . have been in open and polemic disharmony with them" (*The Presbyterian*, March 1, 1905). In a decision of the District Court of the United States for the Western District of Missouri in 1913, which has been brought to my attention by Murray Forst Thompson, Esq., Judge Van Valkenburg declared:

"The Cumberland Presbyterian Church had its origin in 1810, through certain ministers of the Presbyterian Church who had separated themselves from the parent organization because of differences in doctrinal belief. The church grew until it embraced many churches, presbyteries, and synods, and a General Assembly. From time to time throughout the succeeding century a reunion of the two churches was considered and desired by both associations. Their form of organization and methods of administration were practically identical. They were kept apart by what seemed to be distinctive and controlling differences in faith. In 1903, the Presbyterian Church, through the authoritative voice of its General Assembly, made such an explicit revision and interpretation of its doctrinal standards as, in the opinion of the General Assembly of both churches, removed all substantial differences between them and rendered their reunion not only possible, but desirable."

Evidently the court agreed with the Cumberland majority that favored union in the belief that the Presbyterian standards had been substantially modified in 1903. So even if the

system of doctrine was in fact still essentially Calvinistic, a thoroughly unwholesome and confusing situation had been created, a situation not unlike that which was brought about in Canada. For there, you will recall, the articles of the new creed were so ambiguous that an observer declared: "The Calvinists claim they are Calvinistic, and the disciples of Arminius claim them to be Arminian."

And there can be no doubt that the

advocates of revision in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. felt that they had gained a great victory. Moreover, the history of that church since 1903 confirms their judgment. The revision of 1903 was a definite step in the direction of toning down the articles which distinguish Arminianism from Calvinism, and did much to perpetuate the peace-at-any-price attitude which has proved so disastrous in recent years. —N.B.S.

Shall We Include the Revision of 1903 in Our Creed?

A consideration of the theological character of certain amendments to the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

By JOHN MURRAY



Mr. Murray

DR. STONEHOUSE has reviewed certain phases of the history of revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The information embodied in that article is presupposed in this one. It is our purpose now to confine our attention to certain revisions and additions of the years 1902-1903, namely, the amendment of Chapter XVI, Section 7, the two additional Chapters (XXXIV and XXXV), and the Declaratory Statement as to Chapter III and Chapter X, Section 3. Our thesis is that these revisions or additions are distinctly in the path of retrogression rather than of progress, that they are very decidedly symbolic of a standpoint that would undermine the very foundations of the Reformed Faith, and that therefore they should find no place in the creed of a church that professes adherence to the system of doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession. It should be understood that the evil we discover in these revisions is often concealed under the statement of some truth. Modern creed-making that has as its purpose the breakdown of a consistent testimony is very accomplished in this art.

Works of Unregenerate Men

Chapter XVI, Section 7 of the Confession of Faith in its unrevised form reads as follows: "Works done by unregenerate men, although, for the matter of them, they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others; yet, because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to the word; nor to a right end, the glory of God; they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God. And yet their neglect of them is more sinful, and displeasing to God."

The revised form as adopted by the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. reads: "Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands, and in themselves praiseworthy and useful, and although the neglect of such things is sinful and displeasing unto God; yet, because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to His Word; nor to a right end, the glory of God; they come short of what God requires, and do not make any man meet to receive the grace of God."

The objections to this revised form of the section will immediately appear to any one imbued with the

teaching of Scripture on the depravity and inability of the natural man:

(1) There is a manifest difference between saying with the Confession that works done by unregenerate men are "of good use both to themselves and others," and saying with the revisers that they are "in themselves praiseworthy." To say the very least, the latter phrase is capable of an interpretation that places the works of unregenerate men in a category to which they do not belong. It is just this the Westminster divines were careful to avoid.

(2) The revision says that the works done by unregenerate men come short of what God requires, yet that the neglect of them is sinful and displeasing to God. But it refrains from saying what is really the central point of the indictment urged by the original Confession, namely, that they are *sinful and cannot please God*, and therefore that the neglect of them is not simply sinful, but "more sinful and displeasing unto God." The purpose and effect of this revision is to elevate the works of unregenerate men to a position not accorded them in Scripture, or at least to refrain from bringing to bear upon them the full measure of the divine condemnation. So there has been successfully eliminated from the Confession at least one emphatic assertion of the doctrine of total depravity, and to that extent the enemies of the consistent evangelicalism of the Reformed Faith may be comforted. But comfort to such at this point is fatal.

The New Chapters

Of Chapters XXXIV and XXXV the latter is, in the opinion of the present writer, by far the most objectionable. Consequently we shall devote more attention to it. It does not follow, however, that Chapter XXXIV is unobjectionable. On the great topic of the Holy Spirit it is inadequate. It appears to us destitute of that strength that characterizes the Confession as a whole and more especially so when it deals with the efficacy of the Spirit's work in the application of redemption. At least one statement, because of the unguarded manner in which it is stated, is likely to create a distinctly erroneous impression.

But even apart from such estimates of its character there is the paramount objection that it is superfluous. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is

adequately set forth in the Confession elsewhere, set forth indeed in a way that measures up to the high standards set by this the greatest of Reformed symbols. It is a pity that the addition of this chapter should be allowed to obscure that fact. In a word, it is superfluous to the extent of being distinctly misleading.

The Love of God

Chapter XXXV purports to express more fully than has been done elsewhere in the Confession the doctrine of the church on the subject "Of the Love of God and Missions." From the standpoint of the Reformed Faith the objections are principally three:

(1) There is a studied omission of the electing love of God, and therefore of the distinction between the love of God that is unto salvation and the general benevolence of God that is unto all but is not of itself saving. Such an omission is fatal. It is impossible to give creedal statement to the Reformed doctrine of the love of God without explicit enunciation of the particular love of God. This objection gathers all the more strength when it is remembered that the topic is not only "the Love of God" but "the Love of God and Missions," in other words, the love of God as it is directly related to the missionary work of the church.

It is true that the missionary who has an intelligent love of the gospel and zeal for the salvation of men does not forget the benevolence that God exhibits to all, nor does he fail to impress upon men the witness it bears to the goodness of God. But the chief message of the missionary, the message that pre-eminently constrains him to preach to the lost, is the message of that love that sent the Son of God into the world, the love that is electing and effectively redemptive. This revision, then, omits what a Reformed consciousness in the performance of its paramount duty precisely demands.

(2) But not only is definition of the particular love of God studiously omitted. When the extent of God's love is mentioned it is expressly universalized. In Section I the love of God is described as infinite and perfect love and in Section II it is said that "in the Gospel God declares His love for the world." There is, of course, a scriptural sense in which

God's love for the world is declared in the gospel. But in the context in which this is stated in this section it is calculated to teach a doctrine of God's love entirely different from, and at variance with, Scripture teaching and Reformed standards.

(3) In Section II there is careful omission of any mention of the efficacious grace of the Holy Spirit. The reply might be given that this phase of truth is sufficiently expressed in the preceding chapter and in the Confession elsewhere. This reply is not an answer to the objection. Why is the reference to the work of the Holy Spirit in Section II left on the plane of merely suasive influence? Why, we peremptorily ask, in a creedal statement that purports to set forth the official teaching of a Reformed Church on the subject of the love of God and missions should there be omission of the very thing that alone offers any real encouragement to the missionary, namely, the love of God coming to expression in the efficacious grace of the Holy Spirit?

In brief, the objection to this chapter is that it is not Reformed, indeed, that there is nothing distinctly Reformed in it. The subject treated of lies close to the very heart of the Reformed Faith. How possibly can a formulation so destitute of Reformed truth on so vital a subject be defended in Reformed Confession? There is no defense.

The Declaratory Statement

The Declaratory Statement is in three parts—an introduction and two paragraphs, the first of which deals with Chapter III of the Confession, and the second with Chapter X, Section 3. It is to the teaching of these two paragraphs that exception must be taken. We heartily concede in principle the right and even duty of a Reformed Church to declare certain aspects of revealed truth, which under certain circumstances and conditions may call for more explicit statement. Protection against heresy and preservation of integrity as well as testimony to the truth often require it. It is not, then, to the idea of declaratory statement that exception is taken, but to the kind of declaratory statement herein made.

In the first paragraph the Declaratory Statement reads: "With reference to Chapter III of the Confession of Faith: that concerning those who

are saved in Christ, the doctrine of God's eternal decree is held in harmony with the doctrine of His love to all mankind, His gift of His Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and His readiness to bestow His saving grace on all who seek it."

It is true, of course, that there is an important sense in which we may speak of God's love to all mankind. It is true also that we must speak in the language of I John 2:2 of Christ as the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. But when, as in the Declaratory Statement, it is said that "the doctrine of God's eternal decree is held in harmony with the doctrine of His love to *all mankind*, His gift of His Son to be the propitiation for the sins of *the whole world*" (italics ours), then the manifest implication is a doctrine of universal atonement, and universal atonement is in direct conflict with the teaching of the Confession. So what in view of the construction of the sentence and the collocation of the clauses is the straightforward interpretation of the Declaratory Statement cannot be held in harmony with the teaching of the Confession, and in particular with the teaching of Chapter III. The Declaratory Statement, therefore, brings contradiction into the creedal formulation of the doctrine of the Church.

Is it not apparent that here, as in Chapter XXXV, the settled policy and bias at work is the elimination or toning down of what is after all in this regard the distinctive feature of the Westminster Confession, namely, its consistent and all-pervasive particularism? It is just this that has made it both precious and offensive, precious to friends, offensive to foes. It is just precisely that that both the Declaratory Statement and Chapter XXXV would tone down or nullify.

The Salvation of Infants

The second paragraph of the Declaratory Statement deals with what the Confession says in Chapter X, Section 3, "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth." This is an adequate statement, but much misunderstood and maligned. The Declaratory Statement adds to this what is intended to remove all objection. The first sen-

tence reads: "With reference to Chapter X, Section 3, of the Confession of Faith, that it is not to be regarded as teaching that any who die in infancy are lost." This is perfectly correct. The framers of the Confession with evident intention left the question of the extent of the election of infants dying in infancy entirely open. If any believe that all infants dying in infancy are elect and therefore regenerated and saved, then, so far as the statement of the Confession is concerned, they are at liberty to do so. If any suspend judgment on this question, then the Confession leaves them at liberty to do so. If any believe that not all infants dying in infancy are elect, then they are left by the Confession at liberty to do so. It is an exceedingly careful statement that allows for diversity of position on the *extent* of infant salvation.

But when the Declaratory Statement proceeds to say, "We believe that all dying in infancy are included in the election of grace, and are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who works when and where and how he pleases," it departs from the magnificent care exhibited in the reserved statement of the Confession.*

There have been Reformed theologians of the highest repute who held to the position expressed in the Declaratory Statement. Dr. Charles Hodge for example (Systematic Theology I, pp. 26, 27) is unambiguous in his argument for the salvation of all infants dying in infancy. Other Reformed theologians of equal distinction scrupulously refrained from taking any such position. It is apparent, therefore, that there is surely room for difference of judgment in this matter. Our objection to the Declaratory Statement is that it incorporates into the creed of the church what is, to say the least, a highly debatable position, and therefore a position that should never be made part of creedal confession.

The Declaratory Statement epitomizes the entire difference of spirit and genius between the most distinguished of Reformed creed-makers, the Westminster divines, and modern

*It should be noted that the subject with which the Confession is dealing in this chapter is not the topic of infant salvation, but that of "Effectual Calling."

ecclesiastics. The former were insistent upon dogmatic definiteness on questions that belong to the integrity of the Reformed Faith and therefore lie close to the heart of the Christian religion. In modern times the trend is in the opposite direction. The doctrines that lie at the very heart of our Faith are by vague, cryptic, ambiguous statement thrown into indefiniteness and obscurity. The purpose of the Westminster Confession was to state truth precisely to the exclusion of error; the genius of modern creed-making appears to be the power to devise enough elasticity to include error.

It is just such an indictment that bears against all the revisions we have considered, and therefore makes repudiation of them mandatory upon those who wish to bear an untarnished testimony to the truth.

A Word to the Scattered

By the REV. EDWIN H. RIAN

WHAT should individuals do who wish to unite with The Presbyterian Church of America, and cannot because no congregation exists in their locality?

The first General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church of America determined that "elders, deacons, and laymen who unite with particular churches of The Presbyterian Church of America before the next General Assembly, be enrolled as charter members of The Presbyterian Church of America."

This resolution plainly implies that everyone who unites with The Presbyterian Church of America should do so through a particular congregation. Scores of individuals have written into the office of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, requesting that they be enrolled as charter members of the church. We have enrolled these laymen as charter members with the distinct understanding that they would join a local congregation. Where there has been no local congregation, we have recommended that the person unite with the church nearest at hand, and support the work of that church even though unable to attend.

This procedure accomplishes three things:

First, it maintains the Presbyterian idea of membership in the Christian