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## The Princeton That Was

By the REV. JOHN MACLEOD, D.D.

Principal of the Free Church College, Edinburgh, Scotland

THE name of Princeton Theology is associated in the Reformed churches all the world over with the seminary in which Hodge and Warfield taught. But before that institution was founded, what is now Princeton University was, in its earlier days, a school in which the orthodox Calvinistic faith found a home. In Colonial days it was known in the old world as the place associated with the names of Dickinson and Davies, where the great Edwards died and John Witherspoon taught. In those days, the believing evangelical character of its message and teaching was not in doubt.

With this earlier tradition that preceded its founding, the record of the seminary was in full harmony when, under the hands of Archibald Alexander, Samuel Miller, and even more of their eminent pupil, Charles Hodge, it took the foremost place in the defense and exposition of the Reformed Faith. Such was the place that it came to hold that the pure strain of historic Calvinism came to be spoken of as Princeton Theology. A century ago, when the Presbyterian Church was rent in two, Princeton stood by the Old School body whose witness to the system of the Reformed Faith, or to pure Calvinism, was beyond suspicion. The infiltration of a modified Calvinism from New England sources precipitated the division of 1837. "The Gentlemen of Princeton," as the conductors of the *Princeton Review*

were called, did not favor a policy that would, of set purpose, break the unity of the fellowship of the church, for by its avowed profession it was bound to the system of doctrine set forth in the Westminster Confession. They did not, however, come under the suspicion of teaching anything else than the genuine doctrine of that Confession, and when the break took place there was no question as to where they stood. It is not even a travesty of the truth, it is a sheer trifling with it, to suggest or to insinuate, as has been done in recent years, that the original teaching staff of the seminary was so moderate that it would throw the mantle of its charity over anything that was inconsistent with an intelligent and unmistakable avowal of the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and the entire truth of the witness of the Gospels to the spotless Incarnation of the Son of God.

The utmost that could be said in regard to the comprehensiveness of doctrinal fellowship of the Princeton leaders was that they regarded as coming within the ambit of historic Calvinism the New Methodism of the mediating school of French Huguenots in the 17th century. This, in substance, was what was reproduced in the teaching of the New School men of their day. These had their quarrel in particular with the doctrine of Imputation, and the magnificent defense of standard

# Proposed Confessional Revision in The Presbyterian Church in the United States

By the REV. PROFESSOR JOHN MURRAY



Mr. Murray

IN 1935 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Southern) appointed an "Ad Interim Committee on Proposed Changes in the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms." This committee was continued in 1936 and 1937. The 1937 General Assembly authorized that the report of the committee "be submitted to the Presbyteries with the request that they consider the same at their fall meetings and advise the Ad Interim Committee regarding any desirable changes or additions." This year the committee again presented the result of its work to the General Assembly meeting at Meridian, Mississippi, in May. The General Assembly gave its approval to certain sections of the report and ordered them sent down to the presbyteries for their advice and consent. If three-fourths of the presbyteries approve of these proposed changes then they may be enacted into law by the next General Assembly.

The changes approved by the 1938 General Assembly affect the following chapters and paragraphs in the Confession of Faith: Chap. I, para. 8; Chap. III, paras. 3, 4, 5, and 7; Chap. V, para. 6; Chap. VI, paras. 2 and 4; Chap. X, paras. 3 and 4; Chap. XXI, para. 4; Chap. XXII, para. 7; Chap. XXIV, para. 3; Chap. XXV, paras. 2, 5 and 6; Chap. XXIX, paras. 2 and 8. The changes approved in the Larger Catechism affect Questions 13, 25 and 156, with the addition of a new question, relating to the duty of the visible church, to be called Question 63. The General Assembly also approved certain additions to the Shorter Catechism. These additions affect Question 88 and also include two new questions, relating to the nature and duty of the visible church, to be called Questions 89 and 90.

On examination it will be seen that not all of these proposed changes are of equal importance. From the theological standpoint some of them are unobjectionable. From the literary

standpoint these same changes may or may not be regarded as improvements according to the taste of each individual. But it will also be seen that some of these changes have serious theological implications. That the commissioners to the 78th General Assembly regarded them as such appears from the fact that rather heated debate and division were provoked by the committee's report.

In this article we shall confine our attention to the proposed omissions and revisions in Chapter III of the Confession of Faith and the revision of Q. 13 of the Larger Catechism. It is proposed that paragraphs 3 and 4 of Chapter III be omitted, and that paragraphs 5 and 7 along with Q. 13 of the Larger Catechism be revised.

The proposed revision of paragraph 5 is minor. It simply substitutes the phrase "free grace and love alone" for the phrase "mere free grace and love." We are disposed to think that the original phrase serves more adequately and precisely to express the thought intended. But we may allow that, at least for the present, to pass.

To the proposed omission of paragraphs 3 and 4 of Chapter III and to the revision of paragraph 7 and Question 13 of the Larger Catechism we find ourselves under the necessity of expressing emphatic opposition.

## The Unity of Chapter III

First of all the omission of paragraphs 3 and 4 destroys the grand unity and comprehensiveness, logical coherence and development, of what is probably an unexcelled creedal formulation of the doctrine of the divine decree. It needs but a little examination to show this.

Paragraphs 1 and 2 deal with God's eternal decree viewed all-inclusively, that is to say, as it bears upon all that comes to pass in God's works of *creation* and *providence*. Paragraphs 3 and 4 deal with the application of this eternal decree as it comes to bear upon the destinies of rational creatures—*men* and *angels*. Paragraphs 5 to 8 deal with the divine decree as it comes to bear upon the destinies of

*men*. It is apparent that there is progressive specification in the statement of the doctrine. Within the last division—the decree as it respects *men*—paragraph 5 deals with election to everlasting life, paragraph 6 with the means used by God for the realization of His electing purpose, paragraph 7 with the decree of reprobation, namely, with those not elected to life, paragraph 8 with the proper use of the doctrine of predestination.

The most cursory study, then, shows that the omission of paragraphs 3 and 4 mutilates, to say the least, what is a full and consistently coherent statement of the whole doctrine. Without paragraphs 3 and 4 paragraph 5 reads with an abruptness that is hardly worthy of our Presbyterian passion for fullness and clearness.

## Theological Implications

But secondly, there is a much more potent series of objections. This omission impairs the teaching of the Confession and, therefore, the witness of the church to the basically important subject of predestination and foreordination.

(a) It eliminates from the Confession all reference to the predestination to life and foreordination to death of angels. This is not mentioned in paragraphs 1 and 2 and, of course, is not in the least implied in paragraphs 5 to 8. Is it therefore, even on this ground, correct to say as Professor J. B. Green avers that "they add nothing important to knowledge, contribute nothing usable to the materials of preaching."<sup>1</sup> Surely not!

<sup>1</sup> *The Presbyterian of the South*, June 15th, 1938, p. 13. Throughout this article we shall make repeated reference to Professor J. B. Green of Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia, and to the article cited above. We do this because Professor Green is a member of the committee, presented the report to the General Assembly, and in the aforementioned article has presented what appears to reflect the sentiment of those favoring these changes. He has written four articles in *The Presbyterian of the South* and in the *Christian Observer* in defense of the proposed changes. The article of June 15th was the first of the series, the others appearing on July 13th, August 10th and September 14th.

(b) It eliminates from this chapter and therefore from the Confession that which has served to throw into unmistakable relief the absolute sovereignty of God in the discrimination He decretively makes between men and also between angels. It is true, as Professor Green affirms, that the omission of these two paragraphs does not exclude from the Confession "the great principle of predestination." No, predestination is woven in such a way into the warp and woof of the Confession that the omission of even several statements of it would not eliminate the principle. But these paragraphs now in question do more than assert the great principle of predestination. In this regard they are not repetitious or superfluous. They assert that the *diverse* destinies of men and of angels are in accordance with a divine decree that has as its end the manifestation of God's glory. The ultimate condemnation of those finally lost is in fulfillment of as absolute, particular, and irreversible a decree as is the salvation and preservation of those finally glorified, and all to the praise of the divine glory. In other words, it is the teaching of paragraphs 3 and 4 that has elevated to prominence the real source and ultimate reason for the discrimination among men. They have, no doubt, been offensive to many. But they have been offensive because many are unwilling to allow to the sovereignty of God its unmistakable rights in the discrimination that is truly His. The removal of them is a fatal concession to those whose theology is in its roots Arminian rather than consistently Biblical.

It must not be argued that these sections, as Professor Green appears to suggest, are the product of Supralapsarian influence. The Infralapsarian Calvinist is just as jealous for the truth herein enunciated as is the Supralapsarian. It appears to the present writer a serious misunderstanding of the difference between these two types of Calvinists, and a distortion of it, to insinuate that the Infralapsarian should in the least be inclined to regard paragraphs 3 and 4 as extreme. What Professor Green chooses to call generic Calvinism cannot, without undermining its Calvinism, resile from the doctrine of these two paragraphs.

(c) The omission eliminates from this chapter the express statement of

particular election and reprobation as over against what we may call "class election." The Westminster divines were composing their creed with the Socinian doctrine of election in mind, and they were guarding against that doctrine. In brief, that Socinian doctrine is that the free acts of men are in their nature uncertain and therefore cannot be foreknown as certainly future. The election of God, accordingly, consists simply in His general purpose to save all believers as a class. He does not determine beforehand who will belong to that class, and so the number of the elect is not antecedently and irreversibly established. In other words, this Socinian position did not regard election as terminating upon individuals but simply upon the *class* of believers. In contrast with this position, as well as in contrast with all other views of merely collective election, the Confession asserts particular and personal election and reprobation. Have we any less need today for asserting in the most unambiguous fashion the doctrine of election as predetermining the very particular individuals who are to be saved and their exact number? In view of the historic context in which our creed was drawn and in view of the theological situation in which we find ourselves, can we say with Professor Green that these sections "contain nothing essential to the integrity of the doctrine of predestination"?

### A Basic Distinction

The revisions of paragraph 7 consist in the *omission* of the clause, "whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth," the *substitution* of the words, "in the exercise of his sovereign right" for the words, "for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures," and the *substitution* of the words, "to leave them to the consequences of their sin" for the words, "to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin."

It is rather obvious that the intent of the clauses or phrases as they now appear in the Confession was to assert expressly the absolute sovereignty of God in the exercise of His mercy, the glory of God in the exercise of His sovereign power, and the justice of God in the ordination of the wicked to dishonour and wrath.<sup>2</sup>

The committee and General Assembly in recommending these changes

manifested, we fear, a distressing lack of appreciation for the rather unique skill and precision displayed in the composition of this section. If there is any paragraph in the Confession that formulates in few words, and in words felicitously chosen, a basic theological distinction it is just this one. That distinction is that the ground of the discrimination God makes is His sovereign good pleasure and that alone; the ground of the infliction of penalty in dishonour and wrath is sin and sin alone. That distinction, so basic and important, is magnificently drawn. Why should we interfere with it?

But the direct arguments against the revision from the standpoint of Scriptural language and conception are perhaps even more forceful. The clause, "whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth," is surely an accurate summary and reproduction of Rom. 9:15-18, "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. . . . Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." If we take umbrage at the summary statement of the Confession, can we consider ourselves as content with, and submissive to, Scripture? We verily think not.

The change from the words, "for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures," to the words, "in the exercise of his sovereign right," and particularly the argument advanced by Professor Green in support of the change, means, to say the least, as Professor W. C. Robinson points out,<sup>3</sup> that the committee, and with it the General Assembly, overlooked the fact that the Westminster Confession at this point reproduces the language of the Apostle Paul in Rom. 9:17, 22: "For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the

<sup>2</sup> It is unnecessary for us to deal separately with the proposed revision of Q. 13 of the Larger Catechism. The revision here is in line with the revisions in Chapter III of the Confession and our objections need not be repeated.

<sup>3</sup> *Christian Observer*, Aug. 31st, 1938, p. 12.

earth." "What if God willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." Professor Green asks, "Would it not be more worthy of God to signalise the exercise of His sovereign right than the exertion of His sovereign power?"<sup>4</sup> Even if we do make full allowance for the context in which this statement of his appears, is it not indulging in something that rather distinctly smacks of irreverence?

### Professor Green's Arguments

In conclusion we shall deal in some more detail with Professor Green's arguments for the omission of paragraphs 3 and 4 and the revision of paragraph 7.

He says that "the Committee proposed the omissions of paragraphs 3 and 4, not because the Committee regarded them as essentially untrue, but because they regarded their inclusion in the Confession as unnecessary and unwise. They are formulations of human logic which might well be omitted." In view of Professor Green's repeated assertion of the importance of the doctrine of predestination we wonder what it can be in these two sections that the committee, and presumably also the assembly, regard as unnecessary and unwise and as a mere formulation of human logic. It cannot with any show of consistency be the first clause of paragraph 3. Can it possibly be paragraph 4, which affirms that the number of the elect and non-elect among both men and angels is unchangeably designed and their number certain and definite? In view of such express Scripture statements as, for example, that of our Lord Himself, "And this is the will of him that sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day," and of the Apostle Paul, "The Lord knoweth them that are his," we wonder how any argument in favor of omission could even have the appearance of plausibility.

We cannot but think that that to which the committee took *particular* exception on the basis of the reasons given is the latter clause of paragraph 3 — "others foreordained to everlasting death." If our surmise is correct, we simply ask: Is this clause

not in the strictest accord with Scripture? Is it not the Apostle Paul by inspiration of the Spirit who says, "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9: 22)? And does not Jude tell us that there are certain men "who were before of old ordained to this condemnation"? To consider this clause of the Confession as unnecessary, or unwise, or mere human logic is reasoning that springs from human expediency. It is true that these words in the Confession, as Professor Green says of both sections, "deter or repel some" and "trouble some" and "disturb even some preachers." But are these reasons that may be pitted against what is awfully, yet Scripturally, true? They are reasons only when we make a seeming expediency the norm, when we consult unduly with the likes and dislikes of men rather than with the final and inescapable facts and teaching of Holy Scripture.

Perhaps the most amazing argument or series of arguments for the omission of paragraphs 3 and 4 is the following. "The positive side of the divine decree we preach and pray, but the negative side of it, which is so strongly stated in the sections under discussion, we leave to be inferred. We prefer not to preach what we cannot pray. We never ask God to execute His decree of foreordination of angels and men to everlasting death, nor to visit any with dishonor and wrath for their sins, to the praise of His glorious justice. We are simply silent in our devotions about that aspect of the divine purpose. Is it fitting to emphasise in our creed points of doctrine which we cannot with propriety include in our prayers?"

Why, we may ask, should we leave what Professor Green calls the negative side of the divine decree to be inferred? Is it not part of the whole counsel of God? Even if, for the sake of the argument, we should allow that it is only by inference from Scripture that the doctrine of reprobation is to be established, are we for that reason to exclude it from our creed and from preaching? It is the Confession itself that says truly, "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by

*good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture*" (Chap. 1: 6, italics ours).

With reference to Professor Green's argument from the content of prayer, surely this is an astounding criterion by which to determine the content of preaching and of confessional formulation. Are we to include in our preaching and in our creed only those elements of truth which provide us with the material of *prayer*?

It would be quite unfair to Professor Green to hold him strictly to the principle he himself applies. But an example will serve to show how impossible and even preposterous is the principle. We include in our preaching and our creed the doctrine that the eternal Son of God became incarnate, that He offered Himself upon the cross a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, that He rose from the dead on the third day and ascended up to heaven. These facts are the cardinals of preaching and of creedal profession. But we do not pray any of these things. This, of course, Professor Green would not deny. Nevertheless it shows that the criterion he seeks to apply would give us a very attenuated creed indeed. The creed that would be constructed out of the content or material of prayer would not be a Christian creed at all.

No, the fact is that this principle on which he argues for the omission of paragraphs 3 and 4 is not in any case the principle by which we determine the contents of our *creed*. The content of our creed is what we believe, and what we believe is not determined by our prayers but by objective revelation. The decree of reprobation Scripture warrants us to believe. We include it therefore in our creed, and we also include the recognition of it in our adoration of Him whose it is. We humbly bow before Him whose justice and truth are revealed in this His holy though awful counsel. Our very prayers indeed are determined by our apprehension of the meaning of this fact. Not only does Professor Green's argument here subvert the principle of creed formation, but also, we fear, does serious prejudice to the nature of prayer.

Furthermore, if Professor Green's argument at this point is a valid one, then it is by strange inconsistency that paragraph 7, even in its revised form, should be included in the Confession. In the form proposed by the

<sup>4</sup> *Presbyterian of the South*, July 13th, 1938, p. 13.

committee and approved by the General Assembly it reads: "The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, and in the exercise of His sovereign right, to pass by, and to leave them to the consequences of their sin; to the praise of His glorious justice." If Professor Green's criterion is the proper one, and on his own premises, should not this be omitted too? For, according to the logic that is used, this cannot enter into our prayers and therefore should not be part of our creed.

Finally Professor Green says: "These sections positively affirm what the Bible leaves, for the most part, to inference. The election of some implies the non-election of the rest. The Bible declares abundantly the love of God for men, but says little about His negative purpose to allow some to perish in their sins. It even says that He is not willing that any should perish. Would it not be well for us to imitate the Scriptures in their emphases and their silences?"

It may be true that the Bible says less about the *decree* of reprobation than of election. But the point is, Professor Green apparently conceding, that it does say something. It says enough for our instruction and faith in the matter. If we are, then, to follow Professor Green's own advice in imitating Scripture, we must not omit it entirely. The Confession in this regard magnificently preserves the statement of the truth and the proper proportion of emphasis. It does not elevate the doctrine in question to a position that does not adequately represent the Scriptural emphasis. It also, as Scripture does, accords much more space to the decree of election than it does to the *decree* of reprobation. But to eliminate these sections would be to upset the balance and proportion and thus fail to give a true reproduction or transcript of Scripture teaching. The Confession deals fairly, we believe, with the emphasis of Scripture; the revision manifestly does not.

We trust we have done something to show the unreasonableness and inconsistency of the arguments used to support the plea for revision. Particularly do we hope that we have done something to show that the proposed revision signalizes a distinctly retrograde step in the direction of undermining the witness of the church to

the absolute sovereignty of God in His discriminating decree and thus in the direction of placating the enemies of what is one of the pillars of the Reformed Faith. We hope that the presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in the United States will by decisive vote avert such a calamity.

### The Princeton That Was

(Concluded from Page 202)

fellows in faith and in witness. And if in the world of theological journalism, or periodicals of the highest order, the *Princeton Review* stood pretty much in a class by itself, this was only in its own way "Athanasius against the world" over again. The ground on which the Reformed churches built their teaching was good, for they rested in the witness of the Apostles, taking their writings at their face value and so accepting the whole canon of the Old and New Testaments as the very Word of God. The Christian church shows herself recreant to her trust when she refuses to stand for the apostolic deposit in the acknowledgment of its heavenly authority and its full integrity. In like manner she is true to her calling when she does not suffer that in her teachers there should be a breath of doubt or hesitation in their acceptance and avowal of the full truth of Holy Scripture. It is only when the foundations are secure that the superstructure is safe. If Caesar's wife must be above suspicion, the tradition of sacred theology in the Reformed church calls for a strenuous and unflinching defense of a scholarship that faces the facts and will not falter in giving to the witness of the Word of God the homage of an unambiguous and undivided submission and acceptance.

A day spent at Princeton 30 years ago in Dr. Warfield's company and in his home stands out in memory. As a mere junior the writer put the question to his host how things stood at Princeton. Referring to the staff he said, "There are 17 of us; and we are all of one mind." The old citadel was standing in its strength. And it was a joy to lovers of the Reformed Faith to find how Warfield from his watchtower was in touch with the fortunes of the battle for the faith on every front over the wide world. What a prince in Israel he was! It was a double pleasure to meet on that occa-

sion the veteran John De Witt. Two finer specimens of the Christian scholar and gentleman one would need to go far to seek and further to find. They represented the highest type of cultured Christian life that the writer has come across on either side of the Atlantic or, for that of it, anywhere beside the Seven Seas.

Of the men who led the exodus of ten years ago, Wilson, at a ripe age has gone home. For his own sake and for his work's sake, the consummate Oriental and Biblical scholar will be loved and honored. A niche in the temple of memory is his; and those who knew him and valued him will prize the remembrance of such a Christian scholar and divine. In the height of his powers Machen has been called to his rest. His greater works speak for themselves and will do so. But his *ultima* shows him in a light that lets one see how the master of a rich scholarship could come down to the level of the ordinary man—the man in the street, as he is called—and make intensely interesting, attractive, and simple, the case for the faith of the gospel. This we have in his *Christian Faith in the Modern World*. And in the same way, in his *Christian View of Man*, he gave an exposition equally interesting, lucid and valuable, of what the Reformed Faith holds in regard to the race to which we belong.

### PUGH INSTALLED AS STATED CLERK IN UNIQUE CEREMONY

**B**EFORE an audience of about 800 persons the Rev. William Barrow Pugh was installed as Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. on Thursday, October 20th, at the Second Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia.

Dr. Pugh, who succeeds Dr. Lewis S. Mudge, is well known as the author of the notorious "mandate" against members of the Independent Board.

The installation ceremony was conducted by the Rev. Charles W. Welch of Louisville, Ky., moderator of the General Assembly. Dr. Charles R. Erdman of Princeton Seminary presented the charge to Dr. Pugh.

The event marked the first time that a stated clerk has been installed in a service similar to that of the installation of a pastor.