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THE





PRESBYTERIAN.



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Reaffirmation.

Shall reaffirmation of the Westminster Confession be made the rallying cry of our Church for the new century? The answer rests with our Presbyteries. If they would so express their mind to the Assembly's Committee of Inquiry, what a stirring report could be made to that body next spring, and what enthusiasm it would awaken on the occasion of our celebrating the inauguration of the twentieth century! Followed by a suitable Assembly address on the subject, to our churches, the effect would be most happy, stimulating and unifying. Attacks upon our Standards would cease. Many who now criticise would praise them. When fault-finding is popular, many naturally take to it. When the tide turns, they are just as quick to laud and admire. Just now, it is the rage in various quarters to raise Confessional objections. The changes are being rung on its more unpopular features. The idea is to adapt it to the demands of the age. Numbers who have no personal desire to alter it, yet find so many who think it is not quite up to the times that they do not wish to be out of the fashion, and so fall into the revision ranks, with the smallest possible modifications. But were the supposed tidal wave to move in the opposite direction, they would be found crying up the venerable document with even greater gusto.

Now, it is possible to create a sentiment in favor of our old doctrinal flag by demanding a fresh and united crusade against sin and Satan under it, and by talking up its excellencies and utilities. Its logic is strong and convincing. Its statements are comprehensive, clear, positive and discriminating. It is grand and massive, both in its foundations and in its superstructure. It has long endured as a witness-bearer to distinctive truth. Its staying power has been wonderful. It has the love and confidence of myriads. It has developed noble and enduring Christian characters. It has exerted an extensive and beneficent influence. Many victories have been won under it for God and for humanity. God has put signal honor upon it, and our Church has, under it, achieved an influential and commanding history. Its teachings have developed men and women, who have been great lights in social, national and ecclesiastical affairs since our Republic was formed. It is a connecting link with the Calvinists of all lands. It has been one of the strongest bulwarks of Protestantism. Under it, philanthropic and missionary agencies have been fostered and multiplied. In the light of what it is, and has been, and may be, why not reaffirm it? This would be a very becoming act. Revision will spoil the venerable and useful document. It is almost impossible to change it so as to do it justice and yet satisfy all parties. A new substitute creed would supercede it, and in time revolutionize our entire ecclesiastical spirit and history. An explanatory statement would weaken its force and tend to create doctrinal confusion.

On the other hand, reaffirmation would give it fresh standing and renewed force. What our Church needs is not less, but more, of it; not an obscuring of it, but a

greater enlightenment in regard to it; not a remanding it to a dark corner, but the bringing it out into the full blaze of day; not a sanctioning of attacks on it, but its increased recognition and honor; not subjecting it to a subordinate place, but its elevation to the dominating position which it has always maintained in our ecclesiasticism.

It would be a good thing for the cause of Christ if Presbyterians, who really hold it in esteem, would stand firm, and let the world know that they have a creed worth preserving. Under revision and creed agitation, we have been weakening our forces, and are in danger of divided counsel and action. We are encouraging those who are not of us to direct their guns against us. Everybody feels at liberty to advise us. Some mock us; some make sport of us; some are pleased with the signs of demoralization among us; and some are doing all they can to break down our distinctive tenets and principles. Why allow this sad condition of things to continue? Why not show a manly independence as well as a decided doctrinal loyalty by closing our ranks against all divisive tendencies, and rally around the old Confessional flag that has stood us in good stead in many a trying period in days gone by?

The special point of attack, in our survey of the contending forces of the hour, is the Presbyterian Church. She has always stood for the Bible and sound doctrine. She has been uncompromising in her beliefs and positions. If she can be weakened in her doctrinal affirmations, or in her deliverances on vital and essential questions, liberalism will rejoice, and the enemy will feel encouraged to try his hand in other directions. Presbyterians have been making a stubborn and successful fight for an infallible Bible, and now the attack is shifted to our Confession of Faith. Some persons may not be able to see the drift along this line, but numbers do, and many more will before the contest is over. What else mean the assaults upon distinctive Presbyterianism in both secular and semi-religious journalism? How else are we to construe the patting of radical revisionists and new creedists in our ranks on the back, and the berating of our Church as behind the times? Outsiders care not for slight verbal amendments to our Confession. What they want, under the plea of liberality, is to minimize or nullify our witness-bearing power as a religious organization. If an entering wedge can be effected through radical doctrinal changes, or a non-committal or less uncompromising creed, they see, as the result, the introduction of other disintegrating and divisive elements, and finally rationalism installed in the seat of authority. Some persons may think this cannot be, but it is wise to avoid its possibility by reaffirming our Westminster creed and holding on to it with increased love and devotion. If we thus inaugurate the incoming century, liberals, rationalists, new lights and no-lights will awake to the stern reality that the Presbyterian Church is impregnable, and means to preserve intact her formulated truths and to fight the battles of the Lord with her blue banner still unfurled to the breeze.

"Inner Light." He believes this to be a delusion and a Will o' the Wisp, which morally he is bound to oppose for the welfare of others. The man who trusts himself to an objective, reckoned, accounted, imputed righteousness outside of himself is not going to give way before an imparted righteousness which he is unable to find either in himself or in anyone else. As well ask a man clinging to an overhanging branch or root, for rescue from the rushing torrent, to let go and trust the ability in himself to contend with the mad current. He would count you his enemy and credit you as a mocker and deceiver. Any attempt to insist on your opinion would be resented to the utmost. There never has, and never will be, a well thought out creed without controversy, and such controversy as generally leads to serious and permanent division. It is presumptuous to think that a committee of judicious and wise men could in the quiet of a commission draw a creed which would find any general acceptance with the Church. Such a thing would be a phenomenon in the history of religion. If the Church attempts to enter upon the production of a new creed let her count upon a strong, bitter and intense controversy, and let her prepare to take the consequences. Controversy is sometimes necessary. If the cause of truth or right demands it, let it come. But be it remembered it is ever a trying ordeal, and he who would bring it about, without due cause, is at once wicked and reckless. Does the cause of truth and right in the Presbyterian Church now require this? If not, then let everything be avoided which leads to it.

Moreover, we have not the ability for creed-making; such has been the distraction in recent years, that we have not the men possessed of sufficient theological, metaphysical and exegetical skill to do the work. Many of the discussions upon the subject to-day can be ranked but little higher than harangue. Again, we are not in a creed-making age. There is no instrument of any power, whether civil or religious, but grew out of its times and environments. They were not made. They grew. There is no combination in this day making the new creed a necessity. We dislike fine distinctions. We hate controversy. We cannot sustain it. We do not like creeds. After all, the most ardent advocates of the new creed do not desire more lucid statements of truth; they desire the obscure. The object is to form a meeting place in the dark, for those who oppose each other in the light. Short creed, one sentence creed or no creed, is a common cry. Doctrine is nothing; practice is everything. This is a poor environment, and atmosphere out of which to look for a clear, well-defined creed. With such difficulties for the new creed, we ask:

III. What is the Wisest Action in the Case?

We answer, Reply to the Assembly "No action." This will arrest the effort to supplant our present System of Truth with that which is antagonistic. It requires those talking new creed to come out of the woods and show just what they want. It will throw us back upon the form and spirit of the Chapter upon Amendments, so that anyone desiring certain changes will be required to so define his desires that there can be clearness and defensiveness of discussion, and fair promptness of decision. This will also free the Church from prolonged agitation and permit her to throw herself with unity and

weight to the discharge of the duty and performance of the work to which Providence in this age is so loudly calling her.

Reaffirmation, Not Revision.

By Rev. Dr. R. M. Patterson.

Is the revision sentiment as strong as it was ten years ago? A reminiscence of 1890 may throw some light on the question. If the writer obtrudes himself, it is because he was in it.

The Assembly of 1890 seemed to be overwhelmingly revisional, so decidedly so that President Patton thought it prudent to move the appointment of a committee to revise, and he did the writer the honor to ask him to second the motion. The writer, however, could not see the force of the President's reasons, but said that if he should stand alone on the platform of the Assembly, he would resist the motion. And he did, as he recollects, in the debate that followed, make the only speech that was made against it. He may say here that in this he was obeying what was practically the instruction of his Presbytery; for when Professor B. T. Jones, of Lincoln University, nominated him for commissioner, he said that Chester Presbytery should have in the Assembly a member who would have the courage to resist revision to the end, and ever to stand up against Dr. Crosby; a remark that turned out to be a germinant prophecy, for the writer had, in that Assembly, with Dr. Crosby, one of the pleasant collisions of his life.

Elected on such an understanding he took the platform in opposition to President Patton's motion. There were others in the Assembly who agreed with him, but they thought resistance useless, and therefore kept quiet. In his speech the writer made a prediction, that no committee which could be appointed would agree, or, if there should be such agreement, that the Presbyteries would not adopt its recommendations. He was good-naturedly laughed at as strongly wedded to his own view, but hopelessly astray as to what would be accomplished. The result, however, turned the laugh.

Then there was a comic exhibition in the Assembly of 1892. The writer resisted the adoption of the revision report and the submission of its changes in the Confession to the Presbyteries, asserting that it would be a waste of time, for all the changes would be rejected. A good western friend, a member of the committee, took the floor against him and predicted the triumph of the amendments, declaring that the writer himself would be lashed to the revision wheel, which would go round, and round, and round, carrying everything before it; and as he stalked on the platform, the large and heavy orator with his arms imitated a wind-mill, almost catching the writer up to whirl him around, and convulsing the members of the Assembly with a whirlwind of uproarious laughter—but failing after all to catch the writer on any revision whirl of the Church. The movement failed.

Is the revision feeling really as strong as it was then? Then, it seemed so irresistible that others of our most prominent men and leaders, besides President Patton, who were opposed to the movement in itself, favored as a matter of expediency in the Saratoga Assembly of 1890 the appointment of the Revision Committee, but now they are unqualifiedly opposed to any revision attempt;

and in this they represent a large number of the silent men of the Church, who do not appear in the papers, but will yet be heard from. Then, every church paper but one, either favored, or had abandoned opposition to, the movement; now, those which favor the action of the late Assembly do not agree as to what they want. One or two favor a re-submission by the next Assembly to the Presbyteries of the overtures, or some of the overtures, of 1892—a thing which cannot constitutionally be done. But abandoning revision, a new creed seems to be on the crest of the wave. May the writer again predict the eventual collapse of revision?

If those who are at heart opposed to all tinkering of the venerable Confession, will take a decided stand, and not be quiescent or yielding because some seem to want a change of some kind; if they will take from Prof. Warfield, reaffirmation as their watchword; if they do not keep on the defensive, but assume the aggressive; if they cease to apologize for some expressions in the Book and manfully advocate them all—their courage in this will win the wavering and turn the tide.

Not revision, but bold reaffirmation; let that be the watchword.

Dr. Duffield on Ambiguity in the Confession.

By Prof John DeWitt, D.D., LL.D.

In The Presbyterian of August 22nd, Dr. Duffield refers to me in the following language: "In the Evangelist of August 9th, a respected Professor in one of our Theological Seminaries, mentions among other reasons for opposing revision, that the substitute for the ambiguous Confessional Form of Statement of the doctrine of Preterition, proposed by the revisers of '92, 'had narrowed it into a distinctively infra-lapsarian statement;' also that the ambiguous expression 'elect infants,' 'which admitted the greatest freedom of opinion on the subject,' was narrowed 'so that it should permit only a single opinion.'"

I wish to make it perfectly clear to the readers of Dr. Duffield's article that the word "ambiguous," used twice in this extract, is Dr. Duffield's word. It is not mine. I have not upheld any ambiguous expression or statement. So far as I know, the Confession contains no ambiguous expression or statement. Certainly, neither of the sentences, referred to by Dr. Duffield and characterized by him as ambiguous, is ambiguous at all. Both are clear; and (to use Dr. Warfield's admirable phrase) both are "specially precise." Each has a single meaning, which is obvious to the intelligent reader who reads the sentence with attention.

An ambiguous expression is one, which expresses two distinct and different notions. An ambiguous statement is a proposition, which expresses two distinct and mutually exclusive judgments. You cannot properly affirm ambiguity of an expression or statement simply because it does not express something. If that were ambiguity, then every sentence in literature would be ambiguous; for every sentence leaves some things about its subject unsaid. The expression "light-wood" is truly ambiguous. For it expresses the two notions, "not dark wood" and "not heavy wood." But the statement, "This wood is oak," is not at all ambiguous; although it leaves unsaid, whether the oak is "white," "black," "red," or "live" oak.

Now, in respect to ambiguity, the sentences in the Confession, which Dr. Duffield calls ambiguous, are precisely like the sentence, "This wood is oak." They are absolutely unambiguous. They are "specially precise." They simply leave unsaid some things about their respective subjects. The sentence about Preterition simply leaves unsaid whether those not elected, were or were not contemplated as created and fallen. The sentence about elect infants simply leaves unsaid, whether or not all infants dying in infancy are saved by Christ.

The question at issue between Dr. Duffield and myself is not the question of the ambiguity or non-ambiguity of the Confession. The question about which we differ is whether the Confession shall remain as broad as it is, or whether it shall be narrowed. Dr. Duffield thinks that the Confession should positively exclude supra-lapsarianism; and should positively exclude the belief that the Scriptures are silent on the subject of the salvation of all infants dying in infancy. I think that these subjects should be left, as they are left now, to the freedom of individual opinion. Dr. Duffield and the "revisers of '92" would like at this point to narrow the area of freedom. I should like to have it remain as broad as it was left by the Westminster Divines.

As to Dr. Warfield's phrase, "specially precise," on which Dr. Duffield remarks in a part of the same paragraph from which I have quoted—let me say, that I am very glad that our Confession is "specially precise." Every creed ought to be, whether the creed is as brief and undetailed as the Apostles' Creed, or as long and detailed as the Westminster Confession. What Dr. Duffield hoped to gain by intimating that there is a difference of opinion on this subject between Dr. Warfield and myself—when there could not possibly be any between any two persons who have thought for a moment about it—it is impossible for me to imagine.

Rights of Children.

Much is said about the duties of children, but little is thought of their rights. Their duties are often strictly enforced upon them, but their rights are frequently ignored. Sometimes this takes place because of ignorance, but chiefly for want of thought. Many parents who desire the highest good of their children, and are willing to make any reasonable sacrifice for them, pay but little attention to their highest rights. Perhaps they do not recognize them as rights at all.

That children have a right to the support and education which their parents are able to give them few will deny. If children should be religious, it must be the duty of parents to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. If this be so, it must be the duty of parents to take the time necessary for this important work. Can the pressure of business excuse any father from spending sufficient time at home with his children to teach them the Word of the Lord and train them up in the fear of God? Will the social demands of the age justify a mother in neglecting her children? Can parents turn the religious education and training of their children over to Sunday-school teachers and be prepared to answer for them in the last day?

If it is the duty of parents to train their children for the Kingdom of God, is it not their duty also to see to it that they shall not be burdened with lessons in school