

The Presbyterian and Reformed Review.

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third class. It declares that such "elect infants" as die in infancy "are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit," without the outward call and conviction of sin. This distinguishes them (and also, incidentally, the second class, who also are regenerated in infancy but do not die in infancy) from the third class of "elect infants," who come to years of discretion and, not having been regenerated in infancy, are then "regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit," in connection with the outward call and conviction of sin by the law, written or unwritten. The true antithesis, consequently, to "elect infants dying in infancy" is "elect infants not dying in infancy," and not "non-elect infants dying in infancy."

That this is the correct interpretation of the phrase, "elect infants," is corroborated by the fact that the original draft of the tenth chapter of the Confession did not contain this third section, being wholly silent concerning dying elect infants and elect heathen; and the Assembly instructed its committee to insert a section relating (a) to the manner of regeneration when there can be no outward call by the ministry of the Word and no conviction of sin, as in the case of elect infants dying in infancy; and (b) to the manner of regeneration in the case of "all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the [written] Word," but who are capable of conviction of sin through the instrumentality of the unwritten. These latter belong to the third class of "elect infants." An adult heathen who was elected in infancy but not regenerated in infancy, is "regenerated by Christ through the Spirit who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth." The regeneration in this instance occurs in adult years, and is effected in connection with conviction of sin; but the instrument employed by the divine Spirit in this conviction is not the written law, but the unwritten, spoken of by St. Paul in Rom. ii. 14, 15.

NEW YORK.

W. G. T. SHEDD.

THE FINAL REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON REVISION OF THE CONFESSION.

By the early publication of the final revision of their report on the Revision of the *Confession of Faith*, the Committee has forced the formation, and invited the expression, of opinion on its work, before the meeting of the Assembly. The matter is too important for any one to feel justified in maintaining silence.

Probably no one will fail to observe with pleasure the very great improvement in many points which the year of further consideration has enabled the Committee to make in its previous report. This is particularly noticeable in its reconstruction of the recommendations for the third chapter, "Of God's Eternal Decree." We cannot profess to prefer the chapter as revised to the noble original chapter in the

Confession, which is a model of the treatment of these high mysteries in its unquestioning subjection to Scripture-teaching, its dogmatic clearness, its straightforward and courageous honesty of thought and expression, and its beautiful simplicity and restraint of language. But we recognize with gratitude to Almighty God, that in the final form which it has given its revision, the Committee, while still approaching the great themes of this chapter with a certain timidity which can scarcely be taken as the natural expression of clear or firm doctrinal conceptions, yet does embody the essential truths relative to God's decree in unambiguous language. This is a very great improvement upon the confused obscurities of the former report. The same improvement, though in a less degree, is apparent in the new form in which the two new chapters, "Of the Work of the Holy Spirit" and "Of the Gospel," appear. Something of the old infelicity of language still clings to them, especially to that "Of the Gospel." Something of the old lack of precision in doctrinal statement still characterizes them. They are still, in language and thought, obviously unworthy of a place in the elevated context of the *Confession*. But no one will doubt that by their reworking they have been made much more concise, clearer, truer and more acceptable statements of doctrine than they were in the form in which they were originally proposed. It is to be regretted that the Committee did not carry the process of pruning them still further. For example, why should we be asked to insert into the *Confession* both the third section of the one of these chapters and the third section of the other? They are repetitions of one another. Above all, why should the Committee, even at the expense of the grammar, have deserted its wise policy of pruning to insert in this new recasting another repetition of ix, 3, into the second section of (xi): "*And [in the Gospel, God] by his Spirit accompanying the word, pleads with men to accept his gracious invitations?*"

It is clear, then, that there has been deterioration in some points, as well as improvement in some points, in the revision of the old report. This deterioration is most markedly apparent in the very unhappy series of changes which the Church is asked to make in the tenth chapter, "Of Effectual Calling." In this final report every section of this chapter appears with suggested alterations, and every one of the alterations—those now made for the first time even more than those brought over from the first report—is distinctly an injury to the *Confession*. The chapter, as a whole, comes out of the Committee's hands a fair model of what a Confessional statement ought not to be—obscure and ambiguous where certainty and clearness are not only attainable but had already been attained in the original statement, dogmatic where the Scriptures are silent or even opposed, and not without both omissions and insertions which can be made to play into the hands of error. In saying this our mind is not especially on the much discussed "elect infant" clause. We think the Committee unnecessarily dogmatic in its dealing with that clause, especially when so satisfactory

a form of statement had been suggested to it as this: "Those that die in infancy, and others who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word, are not thereby shut out from the electing grace of God and from being regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when and where and how he pleaseth." But this is comparatively a small matter; if the chapter needs revision at all, this is where it needs it—in order to render the perverse misrepresentation which has been foisted upon this section henceforth impossible; and though we may greatly prefer the humble path of confining ourselves even here to statements which have explicit Scriptural warrant, we do not believe that what is so dogmatically stated as to infants and imbeciles is other than true. But what shall we say to asking the Church to commit herself with equal dogmatism to the assertion that, besides infants dying such and "all other persons who are not guilty of actual transgression" (a phrase, by the way, to which we seriously object as a substitute for the perfectly unambiguous one of the *Confession*: "All other persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word"), there is a body of "elect persons" of undefined extent, not dying as infants and not guiltless of actual transgression, yet "who are not outwardly called by the Word?" This is not revision, it is revolution—rebellion not from strict Calvinistic orthodoxy but from universal Confessional Christianity. "It is the common faith of the Christian world," says Dr. Charles Hodge (*Syst. Theol.*, i, 25–30) most truly, "that, so far as adults are concerned, there is no salvation without the knowledge of Christ and faith in Him. This has ever been regarded as the ground of the obligation which rests upon the Church to preach the gospel to every creature." Similarly Dr. F. L. Patton says with equal justice: "The common belief of the Christian church and the fair inference from the Scripture is that the heathen perish" (*The Forum* iii, 4, June, 1887, p. 334). Or, if we are to go behind our common faith, it is the Apostle Paul who argues that a preached gospel is necessary for salvation (Rom. x. 13 sq.); it is an apostle whose piercing assertion of truth does not wait on argument, who declares that "He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life" (1 John v. 12); and it is the Way, the Truth and the Life Himself, who announces, that "No one cometh unto the Father but through Me," and that it is by knowing Him that men come to know the Father (Jno. xiv. 6). We had thought it bad enough, and we had protested against it, that already in the first form of the revision report (retained in this) the fourth section of this chapter was so altered as to remove its strong assertion that no adult can be saved in any other way than by professing the Christian religion, and to substitute for it a phrase ("Neither is there salvation in any other way than by *Christ through the Spirit*:" the Holy Ghost says, "Neither is there *any other name* under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we

must be saved," which is essentially different), which means nothing unless it means to commit the Church to the doctrine of what is called the "essential Christ." But this new change is far worse. Not content with leaving the way open for salvation of adults of good mind without the knowledge of Christ (itself un-Scriptural), it proposes that the Church shall dogmatically affirm that there are men so saved, and that in sufficient numbers to justify this sweeping assertion!

In the presence of this revolt against common Christian doctrine, it may seem too small a matter to object to the transmutation of the precise and technically exact expression of the *Confession* in x (xii), 2, that "man is altogether passive" in effectual calling "until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call," into the ambiguous, figurative assertion that he "is dead in sins until," etc. Of course, the Committee cannot be ignorant of the facts: (1) that the phraseology of the *Confession* is the distinctive phraseology of the whole Reformed theology, adopted as a safeguard to the doctrine of regeneration against the synergists of all schools, whether Papist, semi-Pelagian or Arminian; * and (2) that the phraseology which is now proposed would be acceptable to all those synergists who admit prevenient and exciting grace, with whom the controversy is not whether man can convert himself without grace, but whether he is an actor or merely the recipient in the first moment of conversion.† The suggested change removes thus a distinctively Calvinistic or Reformed doctrine and impinges on the integrity of the system. The proposed omission of the words, "and those only," out of the first section of this same chapter is of similar seriousness; to which we are not to be blinded because the change will leave us declaring that "all those predestinated unto life" are effectually called. The significance of refusing to say that the effectual call comes *only* to these, may be taught us by the earliest commentary on the *Confession*—that commentary which George Sinclar stole from David Dickson and published in 1684. After affirming the truth of section 1, Dickson asks further: "Well, then, do not the *Papists, Arminians* and *Lutherians* err, who maintain, *That* men not Elected are sometimes effectually Called?" and refutes them by the following reasons: (1) Because *Faith* belongs to the *Elect* only (Titus i. 1); (2) Because whom he did *predestinate*, these only and no other hath he called (Rom. viii. 30); (3) Because, though many hear the *Gospel*, yet none believe but such as are ordained for everlasting life (Acts xiii. 48); (4) Because, the apostle testifies, that the *Elect* have obtained it, and the rest were blinded (Rom. xi. 7); (5) Because, Christ manifested his *Father's name* to those only whom he choised out of the world, and gave to him (Joh. xvii. 6)."‡ These two alterations of sections 1 and 2 are, indeed, only two of a series of related changes, including

* HEPPE'S *Dis Dogmatic d. ev.-ref. Kirche*, p. 371.

† Cf. e. g. TURRETINE, LOCUS. XV, QUÆST. V.

‡ *Truth's Victory over Error*, etc., Edinburgh, 1684, p. 69.

the insertion into vii, 3, and certain parts of the phraseology of the new chapter on the Holy Spirit (mostly removed in the last revision), the effect of which, if adopted, would be to wipe out the distinction between efficacious and common grace, the effectual and the universal call, and thus to wound the Calvinistic system in its very vitals.

When we take the several changes introduced into the chapter together, it stands forth in a bad preëminence amid the better work of the Committee. We sincerely hope that the Assembly will see its way clear to refuse to send down to the Presbyteries any of the amendments proposed to chapter x (xii), and will content itself here with a simple proposition to remove the grounds of misrepresentation from section 3.

It will be impossible, however, to dwell on the numerous recommendations of the report in detail. Let us content ourselves with a rapid classification of them.

1. First, then, there are a number of them which seem to us to be improvements upon the *Confession*, and which, therefore, we think ought to be adopted. These are: the omissions from chapter vii (but not the insertion into vii, 3); from xi (xiii), 1; from **xxi** (**xxiii**), 4; from **xxii** (**xxiv**), 3; the changes in **xxii** (**xxiv**), 7; **xxv** (**xxvii**), 6; **xxix** (**xxx**), 8; **xxx** (**xxxii**), 2.

2. There are, in addition, a number of changes which, while they are hardly improvements, may yet be easily acquiesced in as suitable enough. As to the acceptance or rejection of these we are indifferent. These are such as: the insertion of the clause, "*the truthfulness of the history, the faithful witness of prophecy and miracle,*" into the second clause of i, 5; the insertion of the words, "*that is spiritually,*" before the word, "good," in vi, 4; the addition of a sentence declarative of man's continued responsibility to ix (x), 1; the change of the word "damnation" into "*condemnation*" (twice) in xv (xvii), 1; the changes (which we think in themselves poorly done) in **xxiv** (**xxvi**), 3, and **xxix** (**xxx**), 2 (former change), concerning Romish errors.

3. There are still others which we think of no special importance, and which, therefore, could be accepted without great loss, but which we find unacceptable on various grounds. Here we would place: the reconstruction of the statement of creation in iv, 1, which, while an improvement on the former report, remains exceedingly clumsy; the addendum proposed to vi, 1, which conveys a truth, but is out of place here and breaks most undesirably into the logical flow of thought in the chapter; * the substitution of "divine justice" for "the justice of his Father" in viii, 5, and the similar change in xi (xiii), 3, for which there can be no reason assigned except taste, † and the taste that desires the change seems to us bad; the numerous changes proposed

* If such a statement is needed at all, the proper place for it is in xvi, 7.

† Not *doctrine*, for the old phrase is in explicit harmony with the Cov-

for xvi (xviii), 7, the grounds of which are inscrutable but the effect of which is not serious.

4. There remains a number of changes the whole effect of which is either to lower or lessen the testimony of the Church to the truth, either in its strength, or its precision, or its frequency. Most of these do not themselves assert error. But all of them, so far as they have any effect, impinge on the barriers against error, and some of them open the way to it. These ought all to be rejected firmly and without parley.

Some of these impinge on the doctrine of the sovereignty of God in the distribution of His grace, and the acceptance of them by the Church would argue a certain timidity before, or dislike of, not merely the doctrine of predestination, but, more central to our system still, to the doctrine of the sovereign effectual call. Thus we are invited, as we have already noted, no longer to confess (x (xii), 1) that God effectually calls "those only" whom He has predestinated to life, but to confine ourselves to confessing that He does call "all those whom He has predestinated;" although the former statement is absolutely necessary to exclude error here. So we are invited no longer to say (xiv (xvi), 1) that "the grace of faith whereby *the elect* are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the gift of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts;" although it is certain that this saving faith is wrought in the hearts of no sinners but elect sinners, as 'all Calvinists of every school must agree; and to deny this is not to deny predestination alone but also the sovereignty of effectual calling. In the same direction we are asked to insert the words "by His word and Spirit," taken from x (xii), 1, where effectual calling is spoken of, into the universal side of the Covenant of grace, in vii, 3: although it overburdens the clause into which it is introduced and cannot help confusing the mind of the reader with the double reference to the Spirit without discrimination, in vii, 3, itself; and must operate both on that account and on account of the assimilation to x (xii), 1 to obscure the distinction between efficacious and common grace. Similarly the exclusion of the precise and true declaration (xxix (xxx), 2, end) that Christ's one only sacrifice is "the alone propitiation for all the sins of the elect" in favor of the statement that it is "for sin," impinges on the Calvinistic doctrine of particular redemption, one of the "five points." The omission of iii, 3, is another case in point, an omission which cannot be justified on Scriptural grounds or on logical grounds for any one who has already accepted the statement in iii. 1 that "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass"—an omis-

enent point of view of the whole *Confession*; and not *Scripture*, as such passages as John v. 36, 37, vi. 57, viii. 18: Luke xxiii. 34; John xiv. 16; Luke v. 45; Matt. x. 32, 33; Rev. iii. 5: John xiv. 6; Eph. ii. 18: Matt. xxvi. 39; Luke xxii. 42; John xii. 27; Heb. v. 7, 8, ix. 7. *sq.* show.

sion, then, which argues only an unwillingness unambiguously to confess the Calvinism in detail which we are asserting in general.

Another series of changes impinges on the related doctrine of the sinner's inability. A certain shyness in treating of the subjective effects of sin is already traceable in the modifications proposed for vi, 4 and xvi (xxiii), 7, as if the Committee were afraid the evil effects of sin might be overstated. This culminates in the removal from the *Confession* of the two technical terms by which, in the one case all Reformed theologians, and in the other the whole of Confessional Protestantism, have expressed their belief in the destructive effects of sin on man's power to good. We have already spoken of the proposal to cast out our confession that man is *passive* in the first moment of conversion, from x (xii), 2, and of its effects. Of similar import is the proposal to cast out our confession that "man by his fall into a state of sin hath wholly lost all *ability* of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation," from ix (x), 3. The place of these two technical terms cannot be supplied by any others; no others can convey the whole truth for which they precisely stand, as accurately fixed in centuries of controversy and use. Least of all can "indisposition" take the place of "inability of will;" indisposition to good lies at the root of inability, but is not inability; and the theological connections of the use of the two terms are historically quite different. The question which the Church is asked to face by the proposition to make these two changes, when stripped of all confusing side-issues, is simply and nothing less than this: whether she is prepared to remove her testimony to the essential Reformed doctrine that man is *passive* in the first moment of conversion, and whether she is willing to desert common Confessional Protestantism in its assertion of the *inability* of will of the sinner to all spiritual good.

That there remain still a few changes which either assert or may be interpreted as asserting error, namely, those made in x (xii), 3 and 4, we have already pointed out.

All these proposed changes, we trust, the Assembly, as guardian of the truth of one and all of the essential elements which enter into that Calvinistic system, which every minister and elder in the Church has professed to be the truth of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, will firmly refuse to transmit to the Presbyteries, viz.: the omission of iii, 3; the alterations proposed in vii, 3; ix (x), 3; x (xii), 1, 2, 3, 4; xiv (xvi), 1; and xxix (xxx), 2 (end).

If after such a survey of their work we seek to gain a true conception of the character of the proposed revision as a whole, we find ourselves struck, first of all, with the unaccountable lack of feeling for language which it exhibits. This is apparent even in small things, as, for example, the proposal to omit the word "it" from ix (x), 3, to the ruin of the sense—making "natural liberty" the inappropriate subject of

the succeeding portion of the sentence, instead of "the will of man," as it logically must be. It has already been pointed out that the Committee's unmeasured zeal to assert and reassert and overassert "common grace" has led it to intrude it, not only against reason but also against grammar, into the new chapter (xi.) 2, giving us the remarkable statement that "in the Gospel God, . . . by His Spirit accompanying the Word, pleads with men to accept His gracious invitations." These are but extreme instances of the lack of feeling for language which characterizes the whole report.

Theologically, the report as a whole exhibits a decided tendency to lessen the sharpness and precision of the doctrinal statement of distinctive Calvinism. Whether this is due to want of clarity in dogmatic thought, want of firmness in doctrinal belief, or simple timidity before the attacks of the non-Calvinistic world, an outsider may hesitate to decide. Meanwhile it does not seem to be as fully understood as it ought to be, that in estimating the theological character of a revision of this kind, it must be looked upon from three separate points of view. We may ask: (1) When the proposed revisions are incorporated into the *Confession*, shall we still have a *Confession* which is Calvinistic and can be accepted? (2) When they are thus incorporated into the *Confession*, shall we have a *Confession* which is preferable to the unrevised *Confession*? And (3), What are the dogmatic conceptions and attitude which must underlie the proposition to make just this series of changes in the *Confession*? The answer to the first question will determine whether, if all these revisions were forced upon us, the situation would be tolerable. It is a question which, we trust, the good sense of the Church will never require us to answer. The answer to the second question will determine whether we should seek to substitute the *Confession* as proposed to be revised for the unrevised *Confession*. We reply to it with a most decided negative. The answer to the third, it is, however, which furnishes us with an estimate of the doctrinal character of the proposed revision. And, looking over the series of proposed changes, we are bound to confess that we see no doctrinal gain, no evidence of doctrinal progress, in them; but rather distinct doctrinal loss, decided doctrinal retrogression. In an attempt at general revision like this we might have expected a wide-minded and instructed Committee to take its stand firmly on the truth to which the Church had already attained, and build up the structure of its *Confession* one story at least higher. If there is call for revision at all it is obviously for even clearer and more precise definition, for even higher and more finished construction, than the Westminster divines have given us in their noble formulation of the truth. New heresies have arisen; old heresies have won unexpected following. A sentence here and there, a section here and there, applying the old truth to the new conditions; bringing out the essential outlines of the eternal truth as over against the new heresies, so as to protect the Church

from their insidious inroads; developing the structure of the old Reformed theology along its own essential and formative lines in the face of the new systems of error and in conquest over them—this might have been a revision worth making. What an opportunity to save the Church of the future from further internal distraction from forms of thought really subversive of her foundations—subtle new rationalisms in the doctrines of the Scriptures, of the Person of Christ, of the Atonement, of Vocation, of Justification, of Retribution! But the opportunity has been missed. To all the clamorous proclamation of false doctrine about us—yes, and in our midst—against which the Church needs protection, the Committee has been deaf. To all the demands thus made on it for progress in the doctrinal statement of our orthodox truth in relation to present-day needs, it has been blind. Turning its back on it all, its whole doctrinal work is comprised in requesting the Church to lower its voice in telling the world the truth! Let us face the situation frankly. These doctrines, our expression of which the Committee wishes us to modify and moderate, are true in their unmodified and unmoderated form. Their proclamation is for the health of the world. We shall never pacify the whale of error by throwing it this tub; or, as Mr. Spurgeon put it in even sharper figure, we shall never satisfy the pursuing wolves that seek to destroy our whole system by flinging them our children to devour. The Church would be more at her proper business in whetting her weapons than in dulling them. It is not a time in which to whisper the truth in doubtful phrases, but to shout it from the housetops in the clearest and sharpest language in which it can be framed. Distinctive Calvinism must be upheld against both Arminianism and the subtler Arminianism which the German mediating theology is giving such vogue among us; distinctive Augustinianism, against semi-Pelagianism and the subtler semi-Pelagianism of Thomism and Tridentinism the barriers against which the suggested alterations in our expression of the doctrine of sin break down. Let him that is fearful and trembling, indeed, return and depart. But though there be but a Gideon's hundred left, if they will take but their lights in their hands, and break their pitchers that the lights may shine, and blow with their trumpets and shout THE SWORD OF THE LORD! the sword of the Lord will get them the victory.

PRINCETON.

BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD.