

MEMORIAL VOLUME

OF THE

WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY.

1647-1897.

CONTAINING ELEVEN ADDRESSES DELIVERED BEFORE THE GENERAL
ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED
STATES, AT CHARLOTTE, N. C., IN MAY, 1897.

IN COMMEMORATION OF

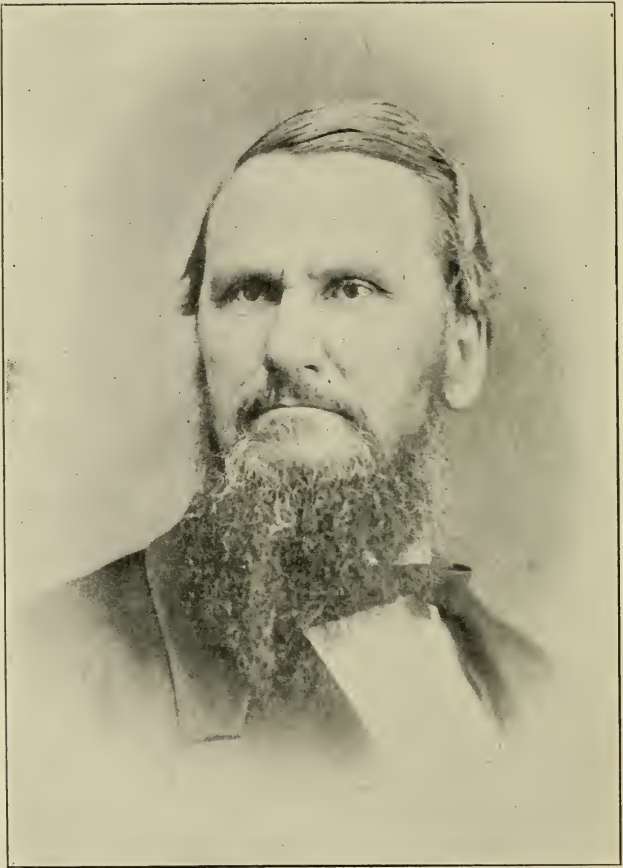
THE TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE WESTMINSTER
ASSEMBLY, AND OF THE FORMATION
OF THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS.

SECOND EDITION.

Published by the direction of the General Assembly of 1897.

Richmond, Va.:

THE PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION.



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IV.

THE DOCTRINAL CONTENTS OF THE CONFES-
SION—ITS FUNDAMENTAL AND REGULATIVE
IDEAS, AND THE NECESSITY AND VALUE
OF CREEDS.

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IV.

THE DOCTRINAL CONTENTS OF THE CONFESSION : ITS FUNDAMENTAL AND REGULATIVE IDEAS, AND THE NECESSITY AND VALUE OF CREEDS.

FIRST there is assigned to me the consideration of the doctrinal contents of the Confession, with its fundamental and regulative ideas. Should I attempt an examination of these heads of doctrine in the limited time allowed for these addresses, the result could be little more than a table of contents, dry and uninteresting to educated Christians. The Shorter Catechism already gives us such a summary of most of the heads treated in the Confession, and superior to anything which one man could now produce. All admit that the Confession embodies that system of revealed theology sometimes termed the Pauline, sometimes the Augustinian, and popularly the Calvinistic. Should we question prevalent public opinion as to the peculiar and dominant features of that system, it would point us to what are popularly termed the five points of Calvinism. But these propositions are themselves consequences or conclusions drawn from more ultimate principles. It is among these, then, that the fundamental and regulative ideas of the Confession are to be sought. These I conceive to be two: the supreme end of God's dispensations revealed in Scripture, and the constitution and attributes of the Godhead.

The first principle is settled for us in the first question

of the Catechism. If "man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever," then God's chief end in creating and governing him must correspond; it must be the promotion of God's own glory in the holiness, service, and blessedness of his rational creatures. And the same conclusion must follow, from the definition of God, as a Spirit, eternal and unchangeable in all his perfections. He who is before all other things, who is the Creator of all things, the absolute owner of all things, the sustainer of all being, must have found his intended end in himself alone; and being unchangeable, his supreme thought and purpose must ever remain what they were from eternity. But as the end must shape the means, it is thus made certain *a priori* that every procedure of God in providence and redemption will be shaped with controlling reference to its tendency to promote his glory. The covenant of works, the preceptive and penal law, the covenant of grace, the method of man's justification and sanctification, the agent and instrument therefor, with all God's temporal and final judgments upon men and angels, must be so selected as best to correspond with the divine perfections.

It has been debated among theologians whether the controlling point of view for the science of redemption is anthropocentric, Christocentric, or theocentric. Those who assert the first point of view seem to rest upon the maxim that the nature of the disease determines the nature of the remedy. This is the plan upon which Principal Hill constructed his excellent book upon divinity. The covenant of grace is God's remedy for man's breach of the covenant of works. Therefore the moral and legal state into which man reduced himself by his fall must dictate the nature of the gospel remedy. When the doctrine of original sin is settled, it must logically determine

our views of the gospel. The history of doctrine teaches us that there is a profound, though not ultimate, truth in this proposition. If the Pauline view of man's death in sin and condemnation is held, then the Pauline view of sovereign, supernatural regeneration will be adopted. If the Pelagian view of man's state since the fall is held, the Pelagian scheme of redemption will follow. Enfeebled conceptions of the office work of the Son and the Spirit, in and for man, will naturally introduce lower conceptions of the persons and nature of these gospel agents, until the fatal logical stress brings the theology down to mere Socinianism. All this is true, and it is most instructive. But it is not the ultimate truth of revelation. The prior question lies behind it: why must man needs be redeemed when fallen? As to the sinning angels, no such "needs be" operated. It does not seem that the Westminster Assembly adopted the anthropocentric as their dominant point of view.

As to the second scheme, the Messiah is unquestionably the Alpha and Omega of our salvation, "the way, the truth, and the life," without whom no man can come to God, our prophet, priest, and king, in whom our redemption is complete, because all the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth in him bodily, and he is "the head of all principality and power." He is also the revealer to men of the invisible God, so that no man knoweth the Father except as he knoweth the Son. But these truths are not to be so pressed as to exclude from our view the parts of the Father and the Spirit in the work of redemption. And this work, while all-important to us sinners, and while the crown and glory of all God's other works, is not the whole of his providence towards his creatures.

The ruling point of view, therefore, assumed by the Westminster divines is the theocentric. It is the con-

stitution of the Godhead as a trinity in unity, and the august circle of the divine attributes which regulate everything in their system of revealed theology. And hence again it results, that every head in their system of doctrine must converge to God's glory as its ultimate end. Why must the law be for reasonable creatures a rule of perfect righteousness? Because God is perfectly righteous. Why must he who breaks it be inexorably condemned? Because God is unchangeably just. Why are sinners, so justly condemned, redeemed at such cost? Because God's love and mercy are infinite. Why must violated law be completely satisfied before this infinite mercy can flow forth to the miserable? Because God's retributive justice is essential and immutable. [How comes it that a daysman can be found who has "a right to lay down his life for sinners, and take it again"? Because Messiah is as truly Son of God as Son of man. Why must sanctification invariably follow justification? Because God is holy. How can man, dead in sin, live again unto God? Because the Holy Spirit, the quickener, is an almighty agent. Such are a few of the instances which display the method which has regulated the construction of revealed theology in our Confession.

Dr. Archibald Alexander once made this statement: that the Reformed Protestant theology reached its zenith in the seventeenth century. The Westminster Assembly was convened near the middle of that age, and in the midday light of its learning and genius. Had we no histories of its members, and no record of its discussions, the contents of the Confession itself are enough to teach us that those profound and illustrious scholars were enriched with all the stores of sacred learning gathered from previous ages, and culminating in their glorious epoch. They knew the past history of the church, and

of doctrine, and of philosophy, and had before them all the great symbols of the previous ages, from the Council of Nice to the Synod of Dort. Providence thus qualified them for their important task to the most eminent degree, and set them in that historic epoch most favorable to success. In speaking of their work, I propose to signalize in the remainder of this address two of its remarkable traits. One I may describe as its scripturalness, the other as its moderation.

It is impossible to question the full acquaintance of the Westminster divines with the history of doctrine and philosophy. We find the treatises of the Middle Ages colored and almost shaped by the Peripatetic philosophy. Their authors justified this result by pointing to the intimate, and, as they claim, unavoidable connections of philosophy with theology. Our divines knew all this perfectly well. They knew the tenor of the Platonic, the Aristotelian, the Sophistic, the Stoic, the Academic philosophies of the ancients. They understood the contests of Scotists and Thomists, of Realists and Normalists. Bacon had written a few years before, and the debates between Gassendi and Des Cartes were then agitating the scholars of the continent. The new physics and astronomy of Copernicus and Galileo were eagerly supplanting the scholastic, so that Rome supposed her theology was invaded, and was in need of the thunders of the church for its defence. And even a Turretin, a generation later than our Assembly, deemed it necessary for the integrity of Scripture to contest the heliocentric theory of the universe. But the Westminster divines more wisely left this physical debate alone, and in their whole system of doctrine not even a tinge of any human philosophy is apparent. Of course, since human philosophy had been so audacious as to attempt the decision of

everything, secular and divine, sacred truths mooted by it had to be settled by the Assembly; but they are determined never on dialectical, but always and exclusively upon biblical grounds. For instance, the Assembly was bound to contradict the materialism of Gassendi and Hobbs, by asserting that the soul of man has a distinct and immortal subsistence. The Bible doctrine of original sin and effectual calling must conflict with Scotism and Pelagianism by teaching the determination of man's fallen will to ungodliness. But the Assembly relies upon Holy Scripture, not upon metaphysics, to support its positions. Nor does it borrow for the moulding of its system the shape of any human school of theology. It is acquainted with all; it is subservient to none. When defining the hypostatic union in the Messiah, it translated into English the material part of the very words of the creed of Chalcedon. Yet it chooses these very terms, not on the authority of an Athanasius, a Basil, an Augustine, an Anselm, a Luther, a Calvin, or an Owen, but because they express the mind of the Holy Ghost in Scripture. So thorough and exclusive is this biblical trait of their propositions, that one might suppose they had bound themselves by the same preliminary rule which had been adopted by the Synod of Dort, when it forbade its members to argue from any human philosophy or ecclesiastical authority. And herein appears the wisdom of this Assembly. Church synods have ever erred, and may always err. Human philosophies are ever changing; consequently a system which builds itself upon these supports must soon appear to totter, and to require amendment or reconstruction. "But the word of God liveth and abideth forever;" the structure which is built exclusively upon this is, like it, permanent. In this we find the chief glory and value of our

Standards. It is for this reason they remain as well adapted to the eighteenth and nineteenth as to the seventeenth century, to America as to Britain, to a popular as well as to a regal commonwealth. It is for this reason that the Confession will need no amendment until the Bible needs to be amended.

The second marked trait of the Confession, its doctrinal moderation, presents the other reason for its permanent adaptation. Divines so learned and able as those of the Westminster Assembly knew well that the body of doctrine which they taught is a *system* of truth. That is to say, the several parts must stand together, in order that the body may have stability. They are logically inter-dependent. The system is an arch, whose strength is perfect as long as each stone holds its proper place; but the removal of any one loosens all the rest and endangers the fall of the whole. Or, to use another similitude, our creed is like an organized living body in this, that the presence and healthy action of each part is essential to the safety of the body.

The Assembly, therefore, was too wise to attempt the conciliating of opposites by the surrender of any essential member of the system of revealed truth. They present us the Pauline, Augustinian, or Calvinistic creed in its integrity. But, on the other hand, they avoid every excess, and every extreme statement. They refrained, with a wise moderation, from committing the church of God on either side of those "isms" which agitated and perplexed the professors of the Reformed theology. Let the following instances be considered.

The Confession firmly asserts the doctrine of a trinity in the Godhead, substantially as it had been taught in the Nicene and Athanasian creeds. It teaches that while God is one infinite, single, spiritual substance, there have

been from eternity three modes of subsistence, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, whose distinctions are real, permanent and personal. It avows that this is a divine fact, presenting a mystery, insoluble for man's limited mind; and it attempts no solution. It contents itself with proving the august fact simply by God's testimony. Now, they well knew that there were attempted *rationales* current throughout the patristic, mediæval and Reformation ages, upon which many theologians had labored, and with which the grandest human intellects, as that of Aquinas, had supposed themselves satisfied. Taking the contents of the human consciousness as their pattern, they theorized that the infinite intelligence must have eternally and necessarily evolved the word from itself in the very exercise of its function of thought; and the Spirit, or practical subsistence, from the continuous exercise of its functions of appetency and will. They said that the unitary Godhead is *actus purus*: its essential functions of thought, emotion, and free choice are identical with and constitute its substance. Hence, its subsistence in the trinitarian mode, said they, is obvious, natural and necessary. The Father is the eternal power of thought and choice. The Son or Word is but the eternal, continuous stream of thought-activity which the central power forever and necessarily emits, and the Spirit is the active emotion and free choice which the infinite thought cannot but evoke, as it is objectified in the divine consciousness. Now, does this metaphysic give us objects which satisfy the meaning of Scripture, where it testifies to us that the three subsistencies, while each divine, are distinct and personal? Or does it give us mere abstractions in the place of persons? Does this theory, or does it not, destroy the fundamental distinction of the reason between substance and its powers? Is it

not virtually that Heraclitic idealism revived in our age by Hegel? Does not the theory involve the monstrous assumption that to think is to create, so that God gives to the second and third persons, as well as to his created works, no other substantive entity than that which a human mind gives to its ideas by thinking them? And does not all this set us on the high road to pantheism? The Assembly knew that popes and archbishops had sanctioned this attempted *rationalé* of the Trinity (as they continue to do to our age). But the Assembly says not one word about it; it passes it all by in dead silence, neither approving it nor deigning to refute it. Why? Because it is wholly extra-scriptural. Were it of true value, the Assembly would have done the same, because its mission did not lead it a single step beyond God's word.

The issue between the supra and sublapsarian theories of the decree had been fully joined and debated before the days of the Assembly. Its prolocutor, Dr. Twisse, was a known supralapsarian. He and his party claimed that their theory was the only one which secured for the decree logical symmetry. Their opponents charged that it came too near making God the author of sin. Again the Assembly refuses to recognize the debate. It will not commit itself to this ultraism of the hyper-Calvinists. It asserts, indeed, that the decree is sovereign, and God's election of his redeemed unconditioned; but further it will not go. Without naming or sanctioning the sublapsarians it adopts the mildness of their theory, while it refuses to raise or to approve the proposition that the several parts of God's infinite and eternal thought have or can have any real order of sequence in his own consciousness; for this is a proposition extra-scriptural, yet asserted in one form or the other with equal rashness by

both parties. Therefore the Assembly will have nothing to do with it, but stops precisely where the word stops.

No divines have taught the doctrine of a sovereign, universal, and particular providence more firmly than they did. But again they refuse to press its *rationalé* a single step beyond the Scriptures. They well knew that in human theologies there were burning questions just here. Does creative omnipotence confer any intrinsic being upon dependent existence, or is their apparent continuous subsistence merely God's perpetual recreative act? Do dependent beings possess any inherent power, or make any active emission thereof? Can even a created spirit emit any specific action except as enabled and determined thereto by a particular *præcursus* of the divine power? Is not this extreme doctrine necessary to sustain the certainty and sovereignty of God's providence? Or does it not virtually make God the author of sin and supersede the creature's responsibility, and thus set us upon the awful verge of pantheism? Or, if we refuse it, how shall we define the method of God's control over second causes? Again our Assembly takes the moderate ground. The Scriptures, while asserting God's power and providence, do not define its method, neither will the Assembly. These divines knew perfectly well that the Aquinist school of popish theologians always asserted this extreme doctrine of the divine *præcursus* with its attendant positions. They knew that a powerful wing of the Reformed (still supported by the great Turretin a generation later) asserted these positions as essential to the doctrine of providence. But again the Assembly will have nothing to do with them; it will teach that blessed doctrine just so far as Scripture teaches it, *and there it stops.*

All Augustinians, Romanists and Protestants taught

that the race fell in Adam, and that this fall constitutes a permanent and decisive moral revolution, leaving man "dead in trespasses and sins." But what is this revolution? Is it a change of *attributum* or *accidens* in man? Is his inability for the spiritual service of God physical or moral? Some Lutheran Augustinians, in their zeal, taught that the fall had extinguished a part of man's *essentia*. The semi-Pelagians replied that if this were true, then it would be unrighteous in God to hold fallen man longer to his moral responsibility. The Pelagians continued to assert their old maxim, "*If I ought I can,*" as a necessary intuition. Many of the Reformed felt it necessary (as Jonathan Edwards, a century later) to resort to the distinction between natural and moral ability, notwithstanding its perilous ambiguities. Behold here again the wise moderation of our Confession! It will not employ or countenance the extra-scriptural distinction. It carefully avoids the ultraism of teaching that the fall destroyed anything in man's *essentia*. It firmly asserts our intuitive consciousness that we are always free agents while we are responsible, while rejecting the Scotist dream of the contingency of the will. It avoids, on the other hand, the Stoical extravagance of condemning all the social virtues of the unregenerate as merely spurious, because short of godliness. But it teaches just the Bible concept of the sinner's state of spiritual deadness with admirable moderation and accuracy, saying, "By this fall men have wholly lost all *ability of will* unto any spiritual good accompanying salvation." Sinners are dependent on sovereign grace for the new life of godliness. Still they are free agents, else they would not be accountable. The fall has not extinguished faculty, else responsibility would be extinguished to the same extent. The unrenewed have social virtues, but

they have no ability of will to begin of themselves those actions of spiritual godliness which constitute the new life. There is the sad but authentic fact, as proved by experience and Scripture, stated with the utmost moderation, charity and precision at once.

Again, is the imputation of the guilt of Adam's first sin to his seed immediate and precedaneous? Or is it mediate and consequent in the logical order upon men's subjective depravity inherited by race-connection? This thorny debate was troubling the French, Holland and Swiss Reformed at the very time our Assembly was sitting. Joshua De La Place was asserting mediate imputation, and Garrissoles was denouncing him as a betrayer of the whole doctrine. The "Reformed National Synod" of France was admonishing De La Place, and he was explaining and disclaiming. Again our wise divines refused to follow this debate beyond the limits of express Scripture. They assert, as Scripture compels us to do, that the guilt of Adam's first sin is imputed and his corruption conveyed to all the race except the divine Son of Mary; for this sad and stubborn fact is taught by Moses and the prophets, by Christ and Paul. But further the Confession will not go. The race sinned in Adam, and fell with him. But the Assembly will give no metaphysics, nominalistic or realistic, to explain the awful fact, because Scripture gives none.

Again, the Confession asserts with most positive precision the penal substitution of Christ, the imputation of our guilt to him, his punitive sufferings and sacrifice therefor, and the imputation of this satisfaction to all believers for their justification. It holds fast to the truth of particular redemption. Yet it carefully avoids implying any limitation upon the infinite value and merit of Christ's sacrifice. It carefully avoids confusing the two

concepts of legal satisfaction for guilt with the consequent at-one-ment, or reconciliation, of the believing sinner. And it gives no countenance to the *quid-pro-quo* theory of expiation, which affects, with a mischievous over-refinement, to affix a commercial ratio between the sins of the elect and the one indivisible and infinite merit of the divine sacrifice. It asserts, with the strictest Reformed, that saving faith is a divine grace, and establishes in the renewed soul a full assurance of gospel truth. But the Confession refuses to say, along with Luther and Calvin, that a divine and perfect assurance of one's state of grace and salvation is of the essence of saving faith.

Last, we note the caution of the Assembly concerning the millennium. They were well aware of the movement of the early Millennarians, and of the persistence of their romantic and exciting speculations among several sects. Our divines find in the Scriptures the clearest assertions of Christ's second advent, and so they teach it most positively. They find Paul describing with equal clearness one resurrection of the saved and lost just before this glorious second advent and general judgment. So they refuse to sanction a pre-millennial advent. But what is the nature, and what the duration, of that millennial glory predicted in the Apocalypse? Here the Assembly will not dogmatize, because these unfulfilled prophecies are obscure to our feeble minds. It is too modest to dictate a belief amidst so many different opinions.

Such are some of the instances of the prudent moderation of our Standards. Because of this trait our Confession is worthy to be the creed of all gospel churches. And this quality shows us that it is a work which cannot be revised and amended without a breach in its organic integrity. Many are professing to say: Let us have a

creed which shall teach the Reformed system in its substance, but let us retrench its ultraisms and excrescences. The history of doctrine shows us that the Confession has no excrescences. The Westminster Assembly has already pruned them off. The real effect of change will be an amputation of some essential member, endangering the life of the whole structure, not a cleansing away of useless accretions. Let us, then, be wise and hold fast this priceless possession of which a gracious Providence has made us heirs. Our supreme wisdom will be "to let well enough alone," and humbly teach our scriptural creed, instead of attempting vainly to tinker it.

The second branch of the subject leads to the consideration of the necessity and value of creeds. The word "creed" comes to us from the Latin *credo*. According to an old custom, the fathers and Canonists named a religious document from the first word of its text. Thus the papal-bull "*Unigenitus*" is so named because that adjective is the first word of its first sentence: "*Unigenitus filius dei*," etc. In the Apostles' Creed, for instance, *credo* is the first word (I believe in God the Father Almighty, etc.), whence the whole document came to be called the "Credo." We thus learn very simply what a creed means: it is a summary statement of what some religious teacher or teachers believe concerning the Christian system, stated in their own uninspired words. But they claim that these words fairly and briefly express the true sense of the inspired words. The church records several creeds of individual Christian teachers; but the creeds of the modern Protestant world are documents carefully constructed by some church courts of supreme authority in their several denominations, or by some learned committee appointed by them, and then formally adopted by them as their doctrinal standard.

The proper conditions for a just creed should be understood. In order to the reasonable defence of creeds, the conditions for which Presbyterians make themselves responsible should be clearly stated and considered. The Southern Presbyterian Church wholly disclaims everything except the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as either an infallible or authoritative rule of faith and practice. It claims, therefore, for its Standards no rightful influence whatever over the consciences of either clergy or laity except so far as their propositions are sustained by holy writ. We hold, as did the Synod of Dort, that in constructing our Standards we are bound to build exclusively upon the sacred Scriptures, teaching nothing except what is expressly set down therein or what follows therefrom by good and necessary consequence, and asserting nothing upon the authority of any human philosophy, ethics, or of any uninspired theologians. Again, we utterly reject the right of any human authority, whether secular or ecclesiastical, whether orthodox or heterodox, to enforce by civil pains or penalties a profession of belief by any one, lay or clerical, in any creed whatever, whether true or false, or even in the word of God itself. We declare that God alone is the Lord of the conscience. While we hold that all rational beings are morally responsible for erroneous religious and moral opinions, we teach that this responsibility binds to God alone, and not to any earthly authority or ruler, spiritual or political. While we disapprove and lament the holding of false and injurious opinions by our fellowmen, we declare that the only means proper to us whereby to amend them are charity, teaching, faithful admonition and holy example. God alone is the proper avenger of unbelief. Therefore, we have nothing to do with any persecutions or oppres-

sions, or any invasions of men's just liberty of thought, of which some human creeds in the past have been made the pretext. We declare that our responsibility for all such abuses and injustice is utterly dissolved by our reasonable and scriptural position concerning the proper use of human creeds; inasmuch as our doctrine thereon, if faithfully followed, absolutely forbids and renders impossible all persecution for opinion's sake. We also hold that, inasmuch as Holy Scripture commands us "to receive them that are weak, but not to doubtful disputations," we are not to require of penitent believers asking admission to Christ's church any of the heads of our creed, except such as are fundamental to Christian redemption and holy living; but, upon their sincere adoption of the latter, the laity are to be admitted to all the privileges of the visible church. It is only of the pastors and the doctors of the church, and of such other officers as exercise spiritual rule therein, that we rightfully require the adoption of our whole creed, as containing the system of doctrine set forth in the Holy Scriptures. And such requirement of these is reasonable and lawful and absolutely necessary to the faithful testimony of any church unto that system of truth for which her Lord has made her a witness. But, once more, we expressly repudiate the claim of right or authority to dismiss, exclude or expel any person, lay or clerical, from the catholic or universal church of Christ on the mere ground of his dissent from or rejection of parts of our creed. All we claim is the right to separate him therefor from among the teachers of our branch or denomination of the catholic church, leaving him free to join any other denomination whose creed he can heartily adopt. Should any dissentient from our doctrine refuse to us this method of self-protection, he would be invad-

ing our spiritual liberty and not defending his own. For when we have freely associated ourselves unto what we conscientiously believe to be a faithful witness-bearing to the testimony of Jesus, he who should claim to impugn our doctrinal testimony by our own authority would be only perpetrating a gross outrage upon our equal rights and liberty of conscience, and we accordingly declare that we do not limit the being and rights of "the holy catholic church" to that company of believers holding with us our Standards and scripturally denominated by the term Presbyterian. But we recognize as other denominations in the sacramental host all who teach the fundamental doctrines and uphold the morals of Christ's gospel. We believe that the visible unity whereby God is to be glorified is to be found in the faithful recognition of each other's sacraments, orders and church discipline (limited to admonition and spiritual penalties), by each denomination in the church catholic; and not in a fusion and amalgamation of all into one visible ecclesiastical body; a result only made feasible by one or the other criminal alternative, popery or broad churchism.

Objections to creeds remain to be discussed. After the above statement of the use we claim for them, and our repudiation of all right of persecution for opinion's sake, there remain but two objections which have even a seeming show of force. One is, that Christ in Holy Scripture has not commanded or authorized any visible church or church court to set up any Standards, or bonds of communion, of human and uninspired authority. We are challenged to show the place containing such a command from God. We are reminded of our own declaration that "the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants," and of our own strict protests against all such as "teach

for dogmas the commandments of men." The other objection is, that the addition of a creed of human composition implies the arrogant assumption that the language of the church doctors or church courts who formulate such creeds is better, more just, and more perspicuous than the words of the Holy Spirit. But this claim is untrue, vain-glorious, and near to impiety.

The Presbyterian Church retracts no word of her testimony against will-worship and the intrusion of human authority into Christ's church. But she unavoidably holds that "there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed." (Conf., Ch. I., Sec. 6.) No visible church could exist without acting upon this qualification, and adopting, under the guidance of revealed principles, those practical rules of detail imperatively taught her by experience and historical facts. The reply to the first objection is, that such use of human creeds as is defined above comes, like all other human expositions of Scripture, under this class. The same principles which justify these also justify creeds.

All Protestants believe that Holy Scripture should be translated into the vernacular tongues of the nations. Only the Greek and Hebrew are immediately inspired; the translators must be uninspired. Therefore these versions are uninspired human expositions of the divine originals. Wycliffe's version, Luther's, Tyndal's, are but their human beliefs of what the Hebrew and Greek words are meant by the Holy Spirit to signify. These translators might have said with perfect truth, each one, "These renderings into English or German are my

credo." The church which uses such a translation for the instruction of her people and the settlement of even her most cardinal doctrines is using a creed of human composition; and those who exclaim, "The Holy Scriptures themselves are our only and our sufficient creed," put themselves in a ridiculous attitude whenever they use a vernacular translation of the Scriptures, for that which they profess to hold as their creed is still but an uninspired human exposition.

Beyond question, God has ordained, as a means of grace and indoctrination, the oral explanation and enforcement of divine truths by all preachers. Thus Ezra (Nehemiah viii. 8) causes the priests to "read in the book the law of God distinctly, and give the sense, and cause them to understand the reading." Paul commanded Timothy (2 Tim. iv. 2) to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." He, as an apostle of Christ, not only permits, but commands, each uninspired pastor and doctor to give to his charge his human and uninspired expositions of what he believes to be divine truth, that is to say, his creed. If such human creeds, when composed by a single teacher and delivered orally, *extempore*, are proper means of instruction for the church, by the stronger reason must those be proper and scriptural which are the careful, mature, and joint productions of learned and godly pastors, delivered with all the accuracy of written documents. He who would consistently banish creeds must silence all preaching and reduce the teaching of the church to the recital of the exact words of Holy Scripture without note or comment.

Another revealed precept is equally plain: that God appointed his church to be a witnessing body, "the pillar and ground of the truth." This must mean that the

church is to testify constantly to the whole body of revealed precepts and doctrines, and not to parts or fragments only. The direction of this witness-bearing is expressly committed to the presbyters of the church. They are commanded (2 Tim. i. 13) "to hold fast the form of sound words, which they heard" from the apostles, and (Jude 3) "earnestly to contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Again, the presbyters are expressly commanded to provide a succession of teachers of those divine doctrines, and, in doing so, to provide for the fidelity of their successors to this code of truths. 2 Tim. ii. 2: "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able (*ikanoi*, qualified) to teach others." Indisputably this precept involves the use of some adequate standard of the revealed system of truth for the testing of the sufficient intelligence and orthodoxy of belief in the new men to be entrusted with this divine charge. It is equally clear that when the presbyters admit these to take part in their ministry, the new men virtually covenant to be faithful to that system of truths to which their ordainers are also solemnly bound. The function to which these admit them is the witnessing function. But witnessing to what? Should the new men claim, and the older presbyters bestow, the prerogative of rejecting and disputing the very system of truths to which they are solemnly covenanted, we know not which would be greater, the faithlessness of the ordainers to their trust or the impudent dishonesty of the candidates in seeking the trust that they may betray it. Now, what shall this standard of fitness be? Some reply, it should be the word of God alone. Our previous discussion has shown, in the first place, that if this is to be the standard it

must be the original Greek and Hebrew Scriptures alone, for every translation is but the uninspired translator's *credo*. Thus this claim, made by parties who require of their preachers no knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew tongues, appears little short of ridiculous.

In the second place, experience has taught that, since the death of the inspired men, the Scriptures alone are no longer a sufficient test of fidelity to divine truth, and here we rebut the second objection which has been so insolently obtruded. We do not rest our assertion upon the arrogant assumption of an accuracy and perspicuity of language and style superior to those of the inspired men; we base it upon a set of stubborn historical facts which have emerged, since the inspired men went to heaven, out of the infirmity, spiritual darkness, vain-glory and indwelling sin of unsanctified or partially sanctified men in the visible church. The necessity of a further test in form of a subsequent creed results not from any lack of proper selection or infallible accuracy in the words of the languages of inspiration, but from the human nature and infirmity of mankind in their use of language. Nothing should be more familiar to scholars than the fact so well described by Horace, that they are like the foliage of an evergreen tree. It never, like a deciduous tree, changes all its leaves at one season; but there is a perpetual slow change in the individual leaves, of which a few continually change color, and a few drop off. Such being the nature of human language, it may follow that the word which, at the time the inspired men wrote, was the best and most exact possible symbol of his intended thought will have ceased to be such, after the lapse of generations. Then the subsequent definition becomes proper and necessary, not because of any defect in the inspired words, but because of the fickle infirmity of

men. Thus, when the Authorized Version was issued, "to let" meant "to hinder"; in popular English it now means "to allow" or "permit," almost the opposite idea. "To prevent" signified "to precede"; it now means "to hinder" or "obstruct." But why multiply instances? A more imperative need of subsequent definition has arisen out of the infirmity of human intellect, and the blindness of the human heart which prompted professed believers in Scripture to frame new and discordant concepts of the leading terms of holy writ. Here we are face to face with a large group of stubborn facts, which it is simply childish to attempt to disregard. Let us suppose a court of scriptural presbyters, invested with the duty and responsibility of selecting and ordaining successors. Let us suppose this court professing to employ no other test or standard of fidelity to God's truth than the Scripture itself. Let us suppose a cluster of candidates before them, of whom each and all declare that they believe the Holy Scriptures, and hold all their *ipsissima verba* as their sincere creed. The court points to these express words of Christ in John's Gospel: "I and my Father are one." The court declares for itself that it can honestly see in these words this meaning only—the consubstantial unity and equal divinity of the two persons. But one of the candidates is a Sabellian, and he exclaims, "No, it means that Father and Son are neither of them consubstantial with deity, but two parallel emanations from a central incognoscible divine unit." Another is an Arian; he declares, "No; the Son is but a creature, the earliest and most exalted of creatures, and divine Son of God, only by an act of adoption." The third is a Socinian, and he cries, "No; Christ is only a human being, favored by God, more than any other prophet, with a species of adoption, because of his sanctity and loyalty." Now,

we need not claim that a court of presbyters is the only party which construes the inspired words aright, or that it alone is honest. The court and the Sabellian, the Arian and the Socinian, each declares the same sincere belief in the Holy Scripture. Allow them all to be equally honest, yet this obstinate fact remains, *that they all contradict each other*. Must they yet be all ordained as authorized witnesses to one vital truth, and that by this court, which honestly believes each of the others in fatal error? Where, then, could be the church's testimony for truth?

Again, the court of presbyters points to the term *metanoia*, and asks each candidate what it means. They all declare the Holy Scripture, including this term, is their honest creed. But one is a Pelagian, and he says *metanoia* means simply an outward reform of manners and morals, wrought by the human will. Another is a papist, and he translates *metanoia* "doing penance." Another is an evangelical believer, who asserts that *metanoia* is conversion, a fundamental revolution of the soul as to God, sin, and duty. Yet all say their creed is the Bible! Again, we say, why multiply instances? There is not a cardinal doctrine, nor sacrament of the gospel, concerning which parties claiming to be Christians do not advance explanations discordant with, and destructive of, each other. What is it, then, except a puerile fraud, for men to cry, "The Scripture is the only creed needed"? If a church is to have any honest testimony, something else is needed as a test of harmony in beliefs, a candid explanation in other terms, which, though human, have not been misconstrued.

This view has, in fact, a force so resistless that it is unavoidably obeyed by all the parties which profess to discard it. There is not, and there never has been, a

body possessing any organic consistency, as a church or denomination of Christians, which has not had a virtual creed, if unwritten, additional to the mere words of Scripture. And every one of them practically applies its creed for the preservation of its testimony by the exclusion of dissentients. The only real difference between these professedly creedless bodies and the Presbyterian Church is, that their unwritten creeds are less manly, less honest and distinct, and, therefore, more fruitful of discord among themselves, than our candid, published and permanent declaration. And here is one of the legitimate uses of our creed: when we invite men to share with us our responsibility as witnesses to God's truth, they have a right to ask us what the tenor of that witnessing is to be. It is but dishonest child's play to say, "Holy Scripture is the creed to which we witness," when the inquirer knows that every party of heretics and enemies of God's truth is ready to give the same answer. We give a clear and honest reply. We say to the inquirer, Here is our printed creed, which expresses the propositions we believe the Scriptures to teach in carefully chosen words, whose meaning is as unambiguous and as recognized at this time with those who dispute our views as with ourselves. "If these words express your views of the Holy Scripture, you can come and witness with us, happily, honestly, and usefully. If they do not, we neither persecute nor unchurch you, but leave you, under your responsibility to your own God, to select the affiliation which suits you." Such a creed, instead of being a cause of schism, is an *Irenicum*, a source of mutual respect, brotherly love and substantial agreement, amidst minor differences, between the several branches of the church catholic.

Our Confession of Faith is among the fullest and

most detailed creeds of the Protestant world. In many places there is a current tendency towards shorter or very brief creeds. It has been already avowed by us that the creed required of penitent believers seeking our fold should be short, the shortest possible, provided it includes the necessary fundamentals of redemption. But the doctrinal covenant required of teachers and rulers in Christ's church ought to be full and detailed. No man who is still a "babe in the faith," "and such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat," should dare to assume these sacred offices. Our Lord requires of those who fill them a full and thorough knowledge of all the heads of doctrine which make up the system of gospel truth, for two commanding reasons. One is this, he knows that those truths constitute *a system*. In order that they may stand *they must stand together*. Each head must support and be reciprocally supported by the other heads, else none of them stand securely; because there is such logical interconnection between all the parts that the rejection of one head introduces logical doubt and difficulty concerning the other heads. If any stone in the arch be loosened, every other stone and the whole structure will become insecure.

The members of this venerable body are too familiar with Christian theology to need any illustration of this result. Now, a babe in Christ may be supposed to hold sincerely a few fundamental truths of redemption, though he doubt or reject other connected heads of doctrine because he is a babe. He does but little connected thinking upon the system. He sees a few things clearly, but the rest dimly. Hence, we may credit him with being both sincere and illogical. But such a one is unfit to direct others in spiritual things. The Christian who is qualified for this is one who has thought widely,

clearly, and consistently. Such a man, if honest, cannot uphold the arch of truth after dropping out any one of its essential stones; he must uphold each and all, or he is not fully trustworthy for upholding the sacred arch. The other reason is that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine." Therefore, the faithful and competent teacher must employ all the parts of revelation. It is only by declaring to his charge the whole counsel of God that he can stand clear of their blood in the great day of accounts.